Plan Your Career
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Table of contents

A Five-Step Approach ......................................................... 5

Step 1. Get to know yourself ................................................ 7

Step 2. Find job openings ...................................................... 9

Step 3. Design your plan of action ........................................ 11
Sample Plan of Action ......................................................... 11

Step 4. Get the right tools .................................................... 13

Step 5 - Prepare: résumé, profile, letter and interview ............. 15

Parts of a Résumé .............................................................. 17

Comparative Profile ............................................................ 19

Cover Letter Content ........................................................... 21
A Five-Step Approach

The University encourages you to take your career into your own hands. You know best what makes you feel fulfilled. There are many options open to you: updating your skills, preparing yourself for a promotion, or redirecting your career within the University are some of the opportunities you have. After all, it is to the University’s advantage to be able to draw on people who feel fulfilled and motivated.

This career guide aims to help by walking you through five steps:

1. Get to know yourself
2. Find job openings
3. Design your plan of action
4. Get the right tools
5. Prepare: résumé, profile, letter and interview

The Centre for Organizational Development and Learning (CODL) is at your disposal to accompany you in this exercise. Contact us for information or to set up an appointment with a career development advisor.
Step 1. Get to know yourself

Take stock of your experience and accomplishments:

- Positions held, including volunteer work
- Accomplishments
- Aspects you liked the most
- Aspects you liked the least

Take a test! Some external websites offer the opportunity for self-assessment. While they may not be official psychometric tests, these questionnaires can fuel your thought process.

1. Aptitudes and skills: The Government of Canada’s Job Bank offers several questionnaires, including the employability skills questionnaire, which assesses skills related to communicating, managing information, and teamwork.

2. Personality: This personality test will reveal if you're introverted or extroverted, if you gather information intuitively or with your senses, if you rely on thought processes or on emotion to make decisions and if you prefer a structured or spontaneous lifestyle.

3. Interests: Take this work preference quiz to uncover your interests and preferred work methods.

4. Values and sources of motivation: This work values questionnaire can help you determine what motivates you at work.

5. Learning Style: You can determine your learning style with the help of these two quizzes:
   - questionnaire on the multiple forms of intelligence
   - questionnaire on learning by sight, hearing and doing
Step 2. Find job openings

Choose the job category you prefer; support-staff positions fall into three major categories:

- regular permanent positions
- contract or term positions
- casual positions at an hourly rate

Consult job openings: each Thursday morning, an electronic list of positions available at the University is posted. The posting includes instructions on how to apply for each job. You may also browse the archives to learn more about the positions that might interest you.

Contact key people

Ask to meet the incumbent of the position you're interested in, or a colleague or the supervisor, by consulting the Employee Directory. You could also browse the online professional network LinkedIn. Thousands of University employees are members. Meeting these people will allow you to ask questions about the work environment, the qualifications for the job, inherent challenges and what a typical day or week looks like.

Be proactive

Be on the lookout for jobs that might interest you in the longer term, not just those that appeal to you now. Take note of the qualifications needed to apply. If there's a gap between your current qualifications and those that are needed for the job, draw up your plan of action to close the gap.
Step 3. Design your plan of action

Set your objective
Set an objective that is clear and realistic - a specific job to land or new challenges to tackle.

Break down your objective
Your plan of action should itemize all the actions you’ll take to reach your objective and the time frame for each action.

Identify obstacles
To be well prepared, identify any obstacles you may encounter as you move forward. Think of ways of overcoming them. Obstacles can be linked to your personality, the job criteria or other specific circumstances. The following are a few examples:
- fear of inadequacy
- fear of the unknown
- fierce competition for the job
- unilingualism

Sample Plan of Action

Objective: Move into a management position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Deadline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Check available positions, as well as management job descriptions, to note the essential qualifications.</td>
<td>3 Months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Consult the competency profiles in the description of job families.</td>
<td>3 Months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Consult the Directory of Competencies to note those required for management</td>
<td>3 Months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Deadline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Consult the Competency Development Guide for advice on how to acquire or strengthen the competencies I need (e.g. team leadership).</td>
<td>4 Months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Find team leadership workshops and register.</td>
<td>4 Months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Find a manager in a position similar to the one I want and arrange a meeting to learn about the position itself and its required qualifications.</td>
<td>5 Months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Check for available positions, prepare my résumé and apply for any jobs that interest me.</td>
<td>6 Months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step 4. Get the right tools

Consider learning activities
The Centre for Organizational Development and Learning (CODL) organizes a variety of activities designed to help you increase your knowledge or acquire new skills.

You can also discuss your individual needs with an advisor and obtain information on career development, customized training and individual coaching. Contact the CODL.

Consult relevant resources
The CODL has prepared a list of learning and career development resources, such as books, videocassettes and DVDs, and also training activities on and off campus.

Investigate all means of assistance
The University offers assistance to enable you to hone your skills or gain a new work experience.

The Career Development Fund provides financial aid to help cover the cost of a specific training activity or program of study.

The Refresher Leave Program releases you from your home position for as much as eight months at a time while allowing you to maintain all or part of your salary.

The Leave Without Pay Program, with or without a guarantee of reinstatement, allows you to pursue an activity outside the University for a set time without receiving any pay.

The Tuition Assistance Program provides tuition-fee exemptions when you register for University of Ottawa courses and programs.

Incidentally, by using My professional portfolio, you can consolidate all the information pertaining to your professional development.

Consider other paths of development
There are many other ways of developing your skills. Temporary assignments, volunteer activities, special projects and committee involvement, for example, are all potentially useful for your career.
Step 5 - Prepare: résumé, profile, letter and interview

Résumé
There are three types of résumés:

• The chronological résumé lists positions from the most recent to the oldest.
• The competency-centred résumé highlights skills rather than positions.
• The blended résumé combines the features of both the chronological and competency-centred résumés.

Comparative profile
The comparative profile, in table format, lets you match your background with the qualifications of the job you want. Intended for your use only, it brings to light the qualities you should be emphasizing.

Cover letter
The cover letter showcases your skills as they relate to the job you're applying for.

1. Take your time writing the letter to ensure it’s clear and error-free.
2. Focus on how your profile matches the criteria of the position.
3. Use action verbs.
4. Keep the letter to a single page.

Consult Cover letter content for more information.

Interview
The interview is your opportunity to drive home the relevance of your experience and skills as well as your interest in the position. Thorough preparation is essential to success.

1. Go over the job description and the list of essential qualifications. Prepare questions on these qualifications and practise answering them.
2. Find out about the department by visiting the University’s website.
3. Assemble the documents you’ll bring to the interview: résumé, comparative profile, examples of relevant work experience, references.
4. Be well groomed

5. Draft questions you want to ask at the end of the interview. Otherwise, you can conclude by saying why you’re best suited for the job, to end on a positive note.
Parts of a Resumé

Personal Information

1. Name
2. Employee Number
3. Mailing Address
4. Email
5. Phone Number

Career Objective

1. Use this section to target a specific position or to describe what direction you'd like your career to take.
2. Keep your objective down to two sentences in length.

Education

Start with your most recent degree or diploma and provide these details:

1. Program Title
2. Name of the University
3. Year of Graduation

Deciding which comes first: education or experience? Usually, you start with the items that best illustrate your qualifications for the position. If your education or training is a pre-requisite for the job or is directly linked to it, then your résumé should present your training first; if not, start with your experience or employment background.

Summary of qualifications (optional)

Use point-form style to list key points of your profile you want to highlight (for instance, number of years of experience, languages spoken and written, computer knowledge, knowledge of University of Ottawa policies and procedures).

Work Experience

1. State position titles, employer names, locations, time spent in each job.
2. List your jobs in reverse chronological order (that is, starting with the most recent).
3. Briefly describe your duties and responsibilities.
4. Don’t assume that the reader already knows your qualifications; what isn’t on paper can’t be assessed.

5. Use strong action verbs (ex. repair, design, teach, supervise).

References

- Usually, you can say "References available on request."

- Remember to always get permission to use someone as a reference, and tell each reference for which position you’re applying.

Other key points

1. Revise and proof-read your résumé, and have another style- and grammar-savvy person read through it after you, to weed out any remaining mistakes or inaccuracies.

2. Ideally, your résumé should be no more than two pages long.

3. Be sure that your contact information appears on all your job-application documents; it’s a good idea, in fact, to include them as a header or footer throughout.

4. Use good, powerful synonyms instead of repeating verbs and adjectives over and over.

5. Be sure to adapt and personalize your résumé and cover letter according to the position you’re seeking.

6. Include your University of Ottawa employee number.
Comparative Profile

This special tool, in table format, lets you match your background with the qualifications of the position you want. As such, the table brings to light a number of relevant experiences and accomplishments that might otherwise go unnoticed. To produce your comparative profile, you need these things:

1. the ad for the job you want, listing the required qualifications
2. the full job description
3. your résumé

The table has two columns:

1. in the left-hand column, enter the essential qualifications of the job you want
2. in the right-hand column, enter your skills and experiences as they apply to each essential qualification, to show that you meet the requirements.

One key reminder

Any number of positions or job categories can have the same essential qualifications. To fully grasp the depth and breadth of each essential qualification for the position you want, you have to consult the full job description, because it lists the duties and levels of responsibility in greater detail, thus shedding more light on the actual level of qualification needed.

Client-service experience

• For a department secretary: this qualification might involve the duties linked to greeting students and answering their questions.

• For a service director's assistant: client service might involve duties that revolve mostly around staff needs

• For an academic assistant: client service might imply that the incumbent has to provide students with academic assistance and advice

That's why a thorough analysis of the full job description helps you identify which skills and experience you have to put forward to establish the best possible match with the requirements of the position.
Cover Letter Content

Address and greeting

Cover letters usually go to a specific person, but at the University of Ottawa, you normally submit your application through the Human Resources Service. So, you use HR's mailing address, without naming a specific person. For the opening greeting, simply use "Ladies, Gentlemen," each on its own line.

Introduction

In the first paragraph, which states your reason for writing, you include the position title, the competition number and the date of posting in the weekly Bulletin.

Body

In the body, you establish a link between the position and your skills and experience. Show how your background and training have prepared you to take on the position. Also help the reader understand how you would bring added value to the job and the unit.

Finally, explain why you’re interested in the position and why you’re ready for a change.

Conclusion

Be sure to thank the reader for considering your application, express your keen interest in attending an interview and emphasize your willingness to provide more information and to discuss your qualifications further.

Closing phrases

Letters usually end with a courtesy phrase and, in this case, it of course has to be respectful and professional. That means avoiding more informal closings like "Cheers" and "Cordially." Closings such as "Respectfully," and "Yours very sincerely," work well as traditional sign-offs.

Some contemporary guides, however, recommend that the last line be used to greater effect with closings like "Again, thank you very much for your time and consideration." or "In the meantime, my best wishes for a productive recruitment process." The argument is that traditional stock phrases like "Yours truly" or "Sincerely yours," take up precious space while conveying an essentially empty, formulaic message no one pays much attention to. Why not use the line to again let your unique personality shine through?

Enclosures

At the bottom of the page, type the abbreviation "Encl." and then list the documents you’ve included with your letter (résumé and comparative profile, for example).
Signature

Standard University procedure calls for sending your application by e-mail, so your cover letter won’t end with a signature per se, but instead with your full name, along with your employee number and contact information. However, if you decide to mail or fax your application, you do have to sign and then type your name, contact info and your employee number underneath.