



# Ontario Public Service

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## Writing a Cover Letter and Résumé: Tips, Tools and Resources

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## What's New

Effective **December 1, 2011** the Ontario Public Service (OPS) will request that all applications (cover letter and résumé combined) should not exceed **five pages** in length (or less).

The Cover Letter and Résumé Writing Guide has been updated to provide you with the tips and tools you will need to write a cover letter and résumé **within** the requested **five page** limit. These include:

- Tips on how to write a concise cover letter and résumé which focus on information that is most relevant to the qualifications of the job you are applying to.
- New links to provide you with additional tips and tools to help you write your résumé and cover letter.
- New sample cover letter and résumé to help guide you in your cover letter and résumé writing.
- Summary of common cover letter and résumé errors and tips to help you avoid making those errors in your cover letter and résumé.

Remember, the tools and tips provided in "Writing a Cover Letter and Résumé: Tips, Tools and Resources" have been developed to help you prepare your cover letter and résumé to apply to positions within the Ontario Public Service.

**While this guide will not guarantee you an OPS interview, it will allow you to market yourself more effectively for an OPS competition. The resources within this guide will help you in developing the foundation to write your cover letter and résumé.**

**GOOD LUCK** in your future endeavours!

## Preparing Your Application

Your cover letter and résumé are the most important documents you can use to demonstrate your skills, experience and knowledge in relation to job advertisements. Overall, your cover letter and résumé are your opportunity to clearly convey to the employer how you meet the job requirements.

Before you decide to apply, ask yourself these key questions:

- **Can you do the job?**
  - Do you meet the requirements described in the job advertisement?
    - Consider some of the strengths you have that would be relevant and transferable to the new position.
    - Remember, developing your cover letter and résumé for positions for which you are a good match is much easier than trying to apply your skills and experience for a job that is not a match. Spending time applying to jobs that you are not really interested in which do not utilize your skills and experiences will only reduce your chances of success.
- **Are you really interested?**
  - Success comes from doing something you like to do. Are you interested in the work and business of the ministry you are applying to?
    - It is strongly recommended that you research the ministry, the branch and the specific position that has been posted to determine your interest.
- **What's in it for you?**
  - Does the job potentially contribute to the goals you have set for your career and life?
    - Look for the jobs that match your values and will help you develop as a person or professional.
- **What is the work environment like?**
  - Does it look like the environment of the job will fit with your personal situation and expectations?
    - Do your research and define your requirements related to your commute, work schedule, team and business goals.

When you find the ideal job to apply to, begin to strategize how you will write your cover letter and résumé. As you prepare your application consider the following:

- How have you demonstrated the skills, knowledge and qualifications required for the position you are applying for?
- What relevant training, experience, accomplishments and/or education do you have to substantiate the skills, knowledge and qualifications you outline?
- What makes you stand out from all of the other applicants?
- What type of crucial information should you include and what can you leave out?
- Have you communicated the necessary information concisely within **five** pages (or less)?

Remember, when you submit your cover letter and résumé, it will be carefully screened and evaluated against the qualifications **outlined in the job advertisement**.

## Research the Job First

### Analyzing the Job Advertisement

When applying to a job advertisement, it is important to recognize the needs of the organization and then match your qualifications and experience to those needs. Research can help you identify if the job is right for you.

### Researching the Job

- 1) Carefully read through the job advertisement to get a good understanding of what the job is about. The “What We Are Looking For” section of the job advertisement provides you with a list of the required qualifications.
- 2) Additional information about the job requirements is also located under the “View Job Spec” icon.



**View  
Job Spec**

- 3) If there is a “View More Info” icon, this will provide you with additional information about the work environment or vital information about the job.



**View  
More Info**

- 4) You can gather valuable information about the ministry you are considering applying to from a variety of sources, including:
  - o Internet sites for the specific ministry, which will allow you to research ministry priorities, programs and news items.
  - o Ministry publications at [ServiceOntario Publications](#)
  - o Current newspaper articles relating to a specific ministry and its core businesses and initiatives.
  - o [INFO-GO](#) provides insight into the services and organizational structure of the branch and/or division that you are applying for.
- 5) Think of all the positions you’ve held and the skills that you have that are transferable and relevant to the job you are applying to. List those skills with indicators of how you obtained them.
- 6) Include extracurricular activities (volunteer work, memberships, hobbies) if they highlight skills that you have not used in the workplace, but are relevant to the position.

## Writing a Good Cover Letter

Your cover letter provides prospective employers with their first impression of you. Everyone who sends a résumé should submit it with a cover letter. Although in the OPS a cover letter is not mandatory, your cover letter is the ideal tool to display how you meet the qualifications of the specific job you are applying to.

A cover letter allows you to:

- Supplement the information included in your résumé.
- Emphasize the knowledge and skills you have in relation to the qualifications of the position.
- Convey in a narrative format what unique qualities you can bring to the position.
- Enhance your résumé by adding a more personal touch to the package.

The OPS is requesting that applications for OPS positions should not exceed **five** pages. When considering the ideal length of your cover letter, the length and content should be appropriate for the position to which you are applying. Aim for a cover letter that is **one to two** page(s) in length.

To help you write a cover letter, consider the following tips:

1. **Be concise.** The ideal length for a cover letter is between **one to two page(s)**. Be sure to emphasize the Job ID and position you are applying for as well as your key skills and accomplishments that fit the role.
  - Avoid repeating information.
  - Avoid including irrelevant information, remember your cover letter is a career marketing tool, not an autobiography.
  - Edit unnecessary words.
2. **Tailor your cover letter** to the qualifications of the job advertisement.
  - Focus on the duties that are relevant to the position you are applying for.
  - Focus on your most recent experience and accomplishments.
3. **Write your cover letter in your own words** so that it sounds like you and not like something out of a book.
  - Avoid directly copying material from the job description and placing it in your cover letter.
4. **Proofread your cover letter to ensure there are no spelling, typing or grammatical errors.**
  - If you need a little help with grammar, review Strunk & White's [Elements of Style](#).
    - A good place to begin is "[Chapter 5: Words and Expressions Commonly Misused](#)."
5. **Show that you know something about the ministry or the organization.**
  - This is where your research comes in. Briefly demonstrate why *you* match the skills and knowledge that they are looking for and what value *you* can bring to the organization.

## What's in a Good Cover Letter

**The Header:** Your header should include the following information:

- Your full name,
- Your address,
- Your e-mail address(es),
- All your telephone numbers (work, home and cell),

Including current contact information will make it easier for Recruitment Services Staff to contact you if you are selected for an interview.

**Addressing Your Cover Letter:** As recruitment in the OPS is centralized, there is no need to personalize the cover letter with the hiring manager's name. Addressing the letter to "**The Hiring Manager**" or "**To Whom it May Concern**" is sufficient. Make sure to put the current date on your cover letter above the address.

**The Subject Line:** It is a good practice to reference the file number (Job ID) and job title. It is also a good practice to include the name of the ministry in the subject line as well.

**Opening Paragraph:** This is the introductory section of your cover letter.

- The objective is to get the reader's attention immediately.
- Briefly identify what you have to offer the organization.
- Identify the main reason why you would be the ideal candidate for the position.

**Note:** Some employers may want additional information in your cover letter such as outlining how you learned about the job opening and why you are interested in the position. However, in the OPS this information is not used as part of the screening criteria.

**Mid-Section:** Explain the particular benefits you offer in relation to the required qualifications.

- Emphasize your relevant skills, competencies, experience and knowledge.
- Cite specific and relevant experiences or examples where you gained and demonstrated those skills, knowledge, abilities and accomplishments.
  - If you have a particular area of expertise, or an educational background that has helped you gain relevant qualifications, outline this in your cover letter.
- You may wish to highlight some transferable skills, such as problem-solving or organizational skills.
- List any required certifications (i.e. valid driver's license) that you have that relate to the qualifications.

**The Closing Paragraph:** Before concluding your letter, explain in one sentence how you can add value to the organization. Also state the best method for them to contact you and thank the hiring manager in advance for considering you for the position.

Review [the sample cover letter and résumé](#) for ideas on how to prepare your cover letter.

## Writing a Good Résumé

Your résumé is your opportunity to present your experience, skills, knowledge and accomplishments. Remember, just like your cover letter, you will want to **ensure that your résumé is clear, concise and relevant** and highlights your skills based on the qualifications required in the job advertisement.

The OPS is requesting that applications for OPS positions should not exceed **five** pages. When considering the ideal length of your résumé, the length and content should be appropriate for the position to which you are applying. Aim for a résumé that is **two to three** pages in length.

To help you write a concise résumé, consider the following tips:

### 1. Be concise

- Your résumé should be a concise and factual presentation of your accomplishments, strengths, employment history and education.
- Avoid repeating information that has been included in your cover letter.
- Edit unnecessary words.

### 2. Tailor your resume to the qualifications outlined in the job advertisement

- Emphasize your most significant skills and experience in well defined sections.
- Avoid adding other details and facts that may be irrelevant to the position you are applying for. This will take up valuable space or divert attention from what you want to highlight.
- Do not include personal information (such as Date of Birth, Social Insurance Number).

### 3. Proofread your résumé to make sure there are no spelling, typing or grammatical errors.

- If you need a little help with grammar, review Strunk & White's [Elements of Style](#).
  - A good place to begin is "[Chapter 5: Words and Expressions Commonly Misused](#)."

When deciding on which style to use, **chronological résumés** are the most common résumé style. With this style, work experience is listed with the most current information first and then in descending order based on employment dates. There are other styles that you may want to explore, for example a **functional résumé**, to better represent your skills and qualifications.

[The sample cover letter and résumé](#) provides an example of a **chronological résumé**.

The OPS does not have preference for one style above another, but for the purpose of this guide only the chronological résumé will be highlighted. Chronological résumés include **four main sections**:

- 1) Current name and contact information.
- 2) Summary of qualifications/accomplishments.
  - This is a snapshot of your key skills & accomplishments that can be substantiated by your work experiences. This information can also be presented in a profile.
- 3) Work history described with key duties, knowledge and accomplishments.
  - This information is listed per employment experience, with most recent experience first, along with the company names and locations.
- 4) Education and/or additional development/training (i.e. professional development courses).



## What's in a Good Résumé

### Know Yourself First – Conduct a Pre-Application Self-Assessment

The key to a confident and focused application is knowing:

- **Who you are.**
  - What do you enjoy doing?
  - What do you do well?
- **What skills, knowledge and experience you have to offer the new employer.**
  - What are you good at?
  - What are your transferable skills?
- **What makes you an ideal fit for the position and the organization.**
  - What value will you add to the organization?
  - What type of people do I want to work with or have as a customer?

By asking yourself these questions, you can begin to develop an inventory of skills, experiences, accomplishments and job-related attributes that you can use to market yourself in your résumé.

It is important to think about yourself in the position that you are applying to and to reflect on how your experiences and skills have prepared you for work in that setting. As you prepare your application consider:

- Any relevant past experiences that you would like to highlight and what you have learned from that experience.
- How you gained the skills that you have today and information about any transferable skills.
- Your previous performance. Talk to your manager and co-workers about your work results to help you in this exercise.

As you think about your past experiences, write them down. Use the [résumé writing activity sheet](#) on page 10 to jot down your skills and work accomplishments. This self-assessment technique can be modified to multiple job advertisements and will help you to update your accomplishments for **each position you apply for**. This will help to ensure the information remains relevant.

Finally, look at [the sample cover letter and résumé](#) for ideas, but be creative in your own formatting.

## Résumé Writing Activity Sheet

*Review the job advertisement of the position to identify the qualifications that you currently possess. Explain below how you learned and/or accomplished these qualifications (skills and knowledge) and also list any key transferable skills you have that would be an asset to the position.*

| <b>Required Qualifications</b><br>(List one qualification, knowledge or skill per line that is highlighted in the qualifications / "What we are looking for" section of the job advertisement) | <b>My Skills and Experience</b><br>(List your skills that match those in the job advertisement and where you may have obtained those skills)<br><i>Key skills can be added to your cover letter</i>  | <b>Work Accomplishments – Demonstration of Skills</b><br>(Write down specific accomplishments from your recent work experience(s) using action verbs and the results achieved – see <b>results in bold</b> )   |
|--|--|--|
| <b>EXAMPLE:</b><br>Proven interpersonal communication skills including tact and diplomacy  | ➤ Exceptional oral and written communication skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer service support role in the OPS for a number of years</li> <li>• Currently in a client consulting role</li> <li>• Interact with senior managers daily</li> <li>• Communicate sensitive information</li> <li>• Certified toastmasters member</li> </ul> | ➤ Communicated key IT process changes to clients <b>to ensure the success of a sensitive change management initiative</b><br>➤ Advised senior managers on customer service protocols, <b>which resulted in a more streamlined quality service process and improved productivity by 20%</b> |
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## Work Accomplishment Statements

Written statements of your results, achievements and successes are an important component of your application. Your accomplishments are made up of activities that you did well and had a positive impact on your organization, employer, colleagues or team. Providing accomplishments in your résumé tells the employer that you have added value to your organization. This adds quality to your résumé and lets employers know what you are capable of. As you prepare your accomplishment statements, consider the following:

- What was the **situation or problem**?
- What **action** did you take to address the situation and what was the achievement?
- What were your **results**? Did you:
  - Improve a process?
  - Achieve more with fewer resources?
  - Save money, time or solve a longstanding problem?
  - Improve staff/team morale?

As you describe your accomplishments remember that duties and responsibilities refer to the general scope of your job. Accomplishments refer to specific examples of tasks you finished successfully.

It is ideal to write most of your résumé statements as work accomplishments. However, it is important to ensure that your accomplishments are **specific to the position you are applying to, relevant and factual**. Finally, where applicable, use numbers to support your accomplishments (e.g. hours, dollars, percentages, number of people, etc).

### Here are some examples of accomplishment statements:

- Coordinated all training requests for the ministry and met provincial service standards by processing 2400 training requests within a 24 hour turnaround.
- Wrote a technical manual that is currently being used in the ministry's application training program.
- Managed a \$3,000,000 procurement and supply budget on a quarterly basis to ensure that spending was appropriate and balanced.
- Coordinated all ministry-wide special events for the 2004 Federated Health Charities campaign and successfully raised \$4000.
- Designed a macro in Microsoft Excel for use in all audit reports that reduced the completion time of each report by 50% and increased accuracy by 100%. This resulted in cost savings of \$1000/week.
- Reduced a two-year backlog in licensing to less than 3 months by streamlining the business processes and taking calculated risks.

## Accomplishment Memory Jogger

As you reflect on each of your accomplishments, consider writing each work accomplishment statement with the results in mind. To help you “jog” your memory, describe your accomplishment identifying the **Problem** / situation you had to solve, the **Action** you took and the **Results** you achieved.

The following are some questions for you to consider to help you identify your accomplishments, however, tailor your questions based on the qualifications outlined in the position you are applying to as this will become the foundation of your résumé and cover letter.

1. Describe a specific situation in which you solved a problem or took charge of an emergency situation.
2. Give an example of something you created or initiated and how it was used or accepted.
3. Describe your involvement in a team effort that produced a specific result. What were the results, and what did you learn about working with others?
4. Describe how you identified a need and met it including how your solution was received.
5. What have you done to help others reach their work goals?
6. List ways that you have saved time or money or improved a business process. What actions did you take to do so?

### Accomplishment Memory Jogger

**Job Ad Qualification:**

**Your Relevant Accomplishment:**

**Problem / Situation:**

**Action:**

**Results:**

**Job Ad Qualification:**

**Your Relevant Accomplishment:**

**Problem / Situation:**

**Action:**

**Results:**

**Job Ad Qualification:**

**Your Relevant Accomplishment:**

**Problem / Situation:**

**Action:**

**Results:**

**Résumé Language**

Now that you have decided on your style and content, you should decide on the language you are going to use to describe your experiences. When you are writing your skills, try to put yourself into the reader's shoes and think about what would keep their interest.

Use a **variety of action verbs** that describe your accomplishments and duties. Also, keep all descriptions in the same tense. The only description that should be written in present tense is your current work experience. All previous work experiences should be written in past tense.

Here are a few examples of key action verbs you can use:

| <b>Management Skills</b> | <b>Communication Skills</b> | <b>Clerical or Detail Skills</b> | <b>Creative Skills</b> | <b>Research Skills</b>  | <b>Financial Skills</b>     |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Analyzed                 | Addressed                   | Administered                     | Acted                  | Clarified               | Administered                |
| Assigned                 | Arbitrated                  | Approved                         | Conceptualized         | Collected               | Allocated                   |
| Attained                 | Arranged                    | Arranged                         | Created                | Critiqued               | Analyzed                    |
| Chaired                  | Authored                    | Catalogued                       | Customized             | Diagnosed               | Appraised                   |
| Coached                  | Collaborated                | Classified                       | Designed               | Evaluated               | Audited                     |
| Controlled               | Convinced                   | Collected                        | Devised                | Examined                | Balanced                    |
| Consolidated             | Corresponded                | Compiled                         | Developed              | Extracted               | Budgeted                    |
| Contracted               | Developed                   | Dispatched                       | Directed               | Identified              | Calculated                  |
| Coordinated              | Directed                    | Executed                         | Established            | Inspected               | Computed                    |
| Delegated                | Drafted                     | Generated                        | Fashioned              | Interpreted             | Developed                   |
| Developed                | Edited                      | Implemented                      | Founded                | Interviewed             | Forecasted                  |
| Directed                 | Enlisted                    | Inspected                        | Illustrated            | Investigated            | Managed                     |
| Evaluated                | Formulated                  | Monitored                        | Improved               | Organized               | Marketed                    |
| Executed                 | Influenced                  | Operated                         | Initiated              | Reviewed                | Planned                     |
| Facilitated              | Interpreted                 | Organized                        | Instituted             | Summarized              | Projected                   |
| Improved                 | Lectured                    | Prepared                         | Integrated             | Surveyed                | Reconciled                  |
| Increased                | Mediated                    | Prioritized                      | Introduced             |                         | Researched                  |
| Led                      | Moderated                   | Processed                        | Invented               |                         |                             |
| Managed                  | Negotiated                  | Purchased                        | Originated             | <b>Technical Skills</b> | <b>Accomplishment Verbs</b> |
| Organized                | Persuaded                   | Recorded                         | Performed              | Assembled               | Achieved                    |
| Oversaw                  | Promoted                    | Retrieved                        | Procured               | Computed                | Expanded                    |
| Planned                  | Published                   | Screened                         | Produced               | Designed                | Launched                    |
| Produced                 | Reconciled                  | Specified                        | Proposed               | Engineered              | Improved                    |
| Recommended              | Recruited                   | Systematized                     | Planned                | Operated                | Pioneered                   |
| Reviewed                 | Spoke                       | Streamlined                      | Revitalized            | Overhauled              | Reduced                     |
| Scheduled                | Translated                  | Tabulated                        | Refined                | Programmed              | Resolved                    |
| Strengthened             | Wrote                       | Validated                        | Redesigned             | Remodeled               | Restored                    |
| Supervised               |                             |                                  | Reorganized            | Repaired                | Spearheaded                 |
| Validated                |                             |                                  | Shaped                 | Solved                  | Transformed                 |
|                          |                             |                                  |                        | Upgraded                |                             |

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What should my résumé length be?

The ideal length of your application (cover letter and/or résumé) is **five pages (or less)** in length (approximately one to two pages for your cover letter and two to three pages for your résumé). When writing your cover letter and résumé ensure that you include only relevant information that outlines how you demonstrate the qualifications outlined in the job advertisement. Your cover letter and résumé should be concise and provide only the most relevant information. Add your name at the top of any additional pages in case the pages get separated.

### Why should my application be five (5) pages (or less)?

It is important to keep your cover letter and résumé focused. This includes tailoring your cover letter and résumé to include your experience, skills and knowledge that are relevant to the qualifications identified in the job advertisement. By leaving out unnecessary experience that is not relevant to the job, by being concise and by tailoring your cover letter and résumé to the specific job qualification, you will be able to write your application within **five (5) pages (or less)**.

### Which font should I use?

For cover letters and résumés in electronic format that will be emailed, select a font that is standard on most computer systems. Good choices include **Arial, Book Antiqua, Century Schoolbook, Garamond, Tahoma, Times New Roman** and **Verdana**. Choose a font size no less than 10 and no greater than 12.

### What tense should I write my résumé in?

Write about previous jobs in past tense. For your current job, write accomplishments/results in past tense only if they have already happened. Current job responsibilities are always written in present tense.

### Do I need to send a cover letter with my résumé?

Although in the OPS a cover letter is not mandatory, a well-written cover letter is a chance to market your credentials and demonstrate professionalism. It is a useful supplement to your résumé.

### How do I write work accomplishments when I don't feel I have any?

You may think you just do your job, but consider what makes your work performance valuable to a potential employer. Ask your coworkers or supervisors about your current performance, and review your written performance evaluations. Also think of other areas where you have accomplished results in volunteer work or as a member of boards or professional associations.

### Do I need a career objective section?

There is no consensus among résumé experts about objectives. In the OPS, it is not used as part of the screening criteria. It is a personal choice whether you include an objective or not, but if you do, be sure to tailor it to the position that you are applying to. Try to incorporate your objective into your cover letter instead of putting it on the résumé. Another option is to incorporate your goal into a narrative qualifications/skills summary or profile.

### What if I have gaps in my work history? How should I address that in my résumé?

The focus of your cover letter and résumé should be on what you have to offer. As part of the OPS commitment to **Barrier-Free** recruitment, applications are not screened based on gaps in work history. Very few job seekers offer a perfectly steady work history. If you participated in activities such as volunteer work, self-study, formal training or education while you were out of the workforce, include them on your cover letter and résumé (if this experience is relevant to the qualification of the position you are applying to). If long-term gaps are a concern to you, consider a functional résumé style, which emphasizes relevant skills rather than focusing on work chronology.

**How do I write a cover letter and résumé to change careers?**

Your career-change cover letter and résumé should highlight your qualifications that are most relevant to your new career goal. You may have **transferable skills**, education and training, volunteer work or other important credentials that will interest hiring managers. A good starting point is to research job advertisements in the career category you are interested in and look for frequently mentioned qualifications. Write down your matching qualifications, and work them into your résumé. You can also consider different types of résumé formats (e.g. functional).

**Why am I not screening in for an interview for a job that I feel I am qualified for?**

It is important to remember that the person who is reviewing your cover letter and résumé does not necessarily know you and can't make assumptions. If you have applied for several positions and have not yet been successful, remember that there are many qualified candidates applying for a limited number of positions. Applicants whose cover letters and résumés best demonstrate how they meet the qualifications to do the job will be invited to continue in the hiring process. It is recommended that you provide detail about your skills and qualifications that are directly linked to the qualifications in the job advertisement, and that you provide information to show how you have demonstrated or applied these skills. Also, you should review and update your cover letter and résumé for every competition in order to demonstrate that your skills and qualifications are closely associated to the qualifications of the positions which interest you.

**I have applied to multiple competitions for the same position and I was interviewed for some and not others, why?**

The pool of applicants differs for each competition. All applications received on or before the posted closing date, that meet the area of search identified in the job advertisement are reviewed and rated against the qualifications outlined in the job advertisement. Candidates whose qualifications are rated highest against the advertised job requirements will be invited to continue to the next stage of the hiring process.

**How do I apply to French designated positions?**

When you are applying to positions that are bilingual and require you to have proficiency in both English and French, it is a good practice to emphasize your level of French proficiency (e.g. advanced, superior) in your skills summary/profile on the first page of your résumé, as well as in your cover letter. It is not necessary to submit your application in French.

**What formats should I submit my résumé in?**

Save your résumé file as a MS Word (.doc), PDF (.pdf), Rich Text (.rtf) or Plain Text (.txt) format, and less than 1MB in size.

## Lasting Impressions – Top 10 Résumé Tips

1. **Be concise.** Your résumé and/or cover letter combined should not exceed **five pages** total (or less). Focus your application on how your skills and experience fit the role you are applying to.
2. **Be selective.** You don't have to "tell all." Stick to what's relevant and marketable that speaks to the qualifications required for the job you are applying to. Don't simply write a list of job duties from your job description.
3. **Keep it current.** Continually update your résumé as your skills, knowledge and experience expand. It is a good idea to review and update your cover letter and résumé for every job you apply for.
4. **Construct an effective résumé.** Organize your information in a logical fashion and keep descriptions clear and to the point using plain language. Include relevant work experience to demonstrate that you are qualified for the job you are seeking.
5. **Be honest and accurate.** False statements on résumés hurt more than help.
6. **Proofread** and pay attention to detail. Take the time to make sure the information that you are using to market yourself is correct and error-free. Review your application at different times with rest periods in between readings. When your mind is fresh you will be much more effective in catching typos and other grammatical errors.
7. **Follow the application instructions.** If the ad has asked for you to provide a reference or Job ID or other specific information (such as writing samples or references), ensure that you include them. Be sure that you apply by **the closing date.**
8. **Format your application.**
  - o Prepare your application within the **five page** suggested limit.
  - o Use a simple, easy-to-read font such as **Arial** or **Times New Roman** in size **10 - 12**.
  - o Set your margins to **1 inch** (2.54cm) for 'Top' and 'Bottom' and **1.25 inches** (3.17cm) for 'Left' and 'Right'.
  - o Avoid using the remaining part of a page of a résumé to start a cover letter and vice-versa. Always start each item on a new page.
9. **Be professional.** Use professional language in your cover letter and résumé.
10. **Use a skills summary** or profile to provide a concise overview of your qualifications as they relate to the job you applied for.



## Resources

- [University of Waterloo Résumé Writing Guide](#) –This is a great resource for job seekers at all stages of their careers.
- [Owl Online Writing Lab](#) - An online writing workshop to guide you step-by-step through developing components of your résumé.
- [Résumé Resource](#) - Cover letter and résumé samples all in one spot.
- [Monster Canada](#) - Monster's résumé centre provides résumé samples in different formats, cover letters, dos and don'ts of résumé writing and the main components of résumés. The most essential section here is the résumé builder to help you create your résumé from scratch.
- [The Elements of Style](#) - Elements of grammatical style, including commonly misused expressions.
- [Leader to Leader Institute](#) - A great article entitled "Managing Knowledge Means Managing Oneself" by Peter Drucker on the benefits of knowing your strengths and weaknesses in order to manage your career.
- [Employment Ontario/Résumé](#) and [Employment Ontario/Cover Letter](#) - Provides you with various additional tools, resources and sample résumés and cover letters to help you prepare your application. In addition, these two sites provide you with valuable resources for career planning and development.
- [McMaster University Career Services](#) - McMaster University Career Service provides you with an excellent overview of how to prepare and write a good résumé and cover letter.

## Sample Cover Letter and Résumé

### Sample Job Advertisement

**Organization:** Ministry of Government Services

**Position Title:** Regional Administrative Assistant

**Job Term:** 1 Permanent

**Category:** Administrative and Support Services

**Job ID:** 12345

Demonstrate your professional administrative and organizational skills to provide administrative and clerical support in an efficient manner, with a focus on service quality.

In this role you will:

- manage the director's calendar
- arrange travel and review travel expense claims
- schedule meetings
- coordinate agendas and meeting materials
- coordinate communications within the branch
- manage circulation of briefing notes and other decision documents for approvals
- maintain office supplies inventory, purchases and reconcile invoices
- coordinate with facilities management and building security

#### What we are looking for:

##### Administrative Expertise:

- you have proven administrative and secretarial experience

##### Analytical and Problem Solving Skills:

- you have demonstrated analytical, problem-solving and organizational skills to evaluate information, proactively resolve problems and prioritize workflow

##### Communication and Customer Service Skills:

- you have excellent communication skills, tact, resourcefulness and strong customer service skills

##### Computer Skills and Knowledge of Office Equipment:

- you are proficient using computer equipment and software packages (i.e. Microsoft Office, electronic calendars, etc.)
- you are able to use standard office equipment (i.e. photocopiers, scanners, facsimile machines and printers)

##### Judgement and Discretion:

- you have proven judgment and discretion in dealing with sensitive and confidential information

The text within the sample application has been colour coded accordingly in order to demonstrate where each skill has been identified.



As you prepare your application, consider the experience you have to determine if it matches the skill level of the position you are applying to. Tailor your cover letter and résumé based on the **skill level** of the position you are applying to. For example, the oral communication skills required for an Administrative Assistant position will not be the same as the oral communication skills required for a more senior position e.g. an Executive Assistant position.

**Sample Cover Letter for Sample Job Ad**

**Jasmine Candidate**  
 123 Résumé Way, Toronto, ON | A1B 2C4  
 Home: 905.555.6543, Business: 416.555.6789  
[Jasmine.Candidate@Ontario.ca](mailto:Jasmine.Candidate@Ontario.ca)  
**WIN # 123321**

See **page 7** for tips on addressing your cover letter.

See **page 16** for tips on formatting your application (e.g. selecting font sizes).

To Whom It May Concern:

**Re: Job ID 12345, Administrative Assistant, Ministry of Government Services**

I am very interested in the above-noted position that was advertised on the Ontario Public Service (OPS) website. I believe this position would fully utilize the administrative and clerical skills that I have developed over the past 11 years supporting various levels of management across a diversity of office settings. I believe that my current role as an Administrative Assistant within the Ministry of Government Services has prepared me for a position as a Regional Administrative Assistant. My experience, combined with my passion for the Ministry of Government Services vision of meeting or exceeding customers' expectations, would make me a valuable asset to your Division.

See **page 5** for tips on researching the ministry to determine your match.

In my current role as an Administrative Assistant with the Ministry of Government Services, I have developed the following skills that meet the qualifications you are looking for:

- I have further developed my strong administrative skills in my current role by managing the day-to-day administrative operations of the Ministry of Government Services. This includes ensuring that the operational and administrative policies, procedures and standards are consistently applied to support the achievement of the Ontario Public Service objectives.
- I have developed strong organizational skills as well as learned how to prioritize workflow when faced with various conflicting priorities. In situations where there are conflicting priorities, I will take a proactive approach to solving the problem, by drawing on my knowledge of the Ministry's priorities, goals and key initiatives. I am able to quickly identify the priorities appropriately and action them accordingly. The knowledge of Ministry and Divisional priorities also aided in organizing daily workflow to ensure deadlines are met.
- I have organized and maintained confidential personnel files. This also included the safekeeping and archiving of the files based on the OPS' retention schedule. When confidential files needed to be transferred for off-site storage, I consulted with the Ministry Freedom of Information and Privacy Act coordinator to ensure that the necessary protocols were followed to ensure the proper recording, handling and transfer of confidential documents.
- I support the communication and distribution of new corporate initiatives. As the main point of contact for new initiatives, I respond to queries from Ministry staff (including Regional Directors and front line Managers) promptly and courteously.

See **page 6** for tips on how to tailor your cover letter.

I would be pleased to have the opportunity to attend an interview to discuss how I could contribute to the success of the Ministry of Government Services. I feel confident that I would be an asset in the position of Administrative Assistant. You can reach me during the day at (416) 555-6789 or in the evenings at (905) 555-6543. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

*Jasmine Candidate*, WIN ID# 123321  
 Enclosure: résumé

See **page 7** for tips on how to write your closing paragraph.

**Sample Résumé for Sample Job Ad**

**Jasmine Candidate**  
 123 Résumé Way, Toronto, ON | A1B 2C4  
 Home: 905.555.6543, Business: 416.555.6789  
[Jasmine.Candidate@Ontario.ca](mailto:Jasmine.Candidate@Ontario.ca)  
**WIN # 123321**

See **page 8** for tips on how to write a concise résumé.

**Summary of Qualifications:**

A highly motivated and effective Administrative Assistant. Achieves business goals through skilled use of word processing, spreadsheet and database software applications. Typing speed 75 words per minute. Demonstrates excellent organizational and time management skills to consistently meet deadlines. Works well within complex and deadline-driven environments. Recognized for strong communication skills with the Regional Excellence Award.

**Work Experience:**

**Administrative Assistant: August 2008 to Present, Ministry of Government Services**

- Enhance management team productivity by organizing monthly meetings where issues, accomplishments and improvements are discussed and implemented.
- Arrange domestic travel requests for the Director and Regional Managers to attend various functions, activities and board meetings across Ontario on a monthly basis.
- Review the expense claims of 20 staff members for accuracy. If discrepancies are identified, I will work with the individual to solve them prior to forwarding the expense claims to my Regional Manager for approval.
- Prepare and distribute meeting material (such as agendas), as well as take and prepare meeting minutes for distribution for the Regional Manager bi-weekly meetings.
- Edit and proofread documents prepared by the Regional Managers for external or enterprise-wide distribution. Documents are reviewed for content, style and spelling / grammar accuracy. **Utilize Track Changes in Microsoft Word to highlight extensive changes for the Regional Manager's final review.**
- Liaison between the five regions (including managers and support staff) within our department to ensure proper communication and reporting practices are being applied consistently. **When inconsistencies are identified, I will work with the regions to identify gaps and provide the supporting material necessary to ensure that the correct practices are applied.**
- Supervised two summer students; worked with them to identify their career goals and learning outcomes and assigned tasks that would support their learning.

See **page 11** for tips on writing work accomplishment statements.

This is an example of a statement that could be removed as it does not relate to the qualifications outlined in the job advertisement

**Receptionist: February 2005 to July 2008, Dr. Smith's Medical Office**

- **Handled sensitive and confidential information such as patients' medical files, including ensuring the file room where confidential information was stored was locked at all times and only accessed by authorized personnel.**
- **Maintained a clear desk policy to ensure that patient files were secure and not left out where patient test results and information could easily be viewed by others entering the office.**
- **Demonstrated discretion, including exercising good judgement to ensure the appropriate release of medical information to authorized personnel.**
- **Devised and maintained an extensive filing system to ensure faster retrieval of patient files by authorized personnel as well as ensured that patient files are always up-to-date with the most recent information.**
- **Provided excellent, friendly customer service when greeting patients. This included ensuring all patients were comfortable while waiting for an appointment and accurately directing patients to the medical labs or the radiology department when necessary.**

- Tactfully addressed issues or complaints with demanding or upset patients, while demonstrating a high level of understanding of their medical and diverse needs.
- Handled incoming communications and responded to internal requests for information on a timely basis on behalf of Dr. Smith.
- Managed the Doctor's schedule to ensure patients were not double booked.

See page 11 for tips on how to write work accomplishment statements

**Financial Clerk: February 2005 to April 2008, ABC Manufacturing**

- Increased efficiency of ABC Manufacturing's accounting system. Through reviewing the existing practices, it became evident that the current system did not allow for timely or accurate recording of invoices. Held various consultations with the existing Financial Clerks to identify weaknesses in the current tracking system. Developed an Excel Spreadsheet based on the feedback received. The Excel Spreadsheet included instructions which clearly outlined how to track invoices received and invoice payment dates. Incorporated formulas in the spreadsheet to help support financial forecasting by clearly outlining outstanding expenditures. This spreadsheet helped to not only streamline procedures for bookkeeping, but it also increased accuracy of invoice processing and invoice reporting by 100%.
- Analyzed monthly financial and expense reports to determine discrepancies and variances. This involved verifying and reconciling the financial reports against monthly expenditure forecasting. When variances were identified, they would be quickly rectified by consulting with receipt owners, this involved verifying the expense and obtaining receipts. Once the information was obtained, the financial report would be revised accordingly.
- Demonstrated resourcefulness when faced with complex situations with the budget (such as under forecasting). This involved a comprehensive review of the budget as well as liaising with department managers to identify possible options where additional money could be diverted to address under forecasting. The outcomes of this initial research were presented to my manger to help them make an informed decision.

Action verbs alone are not enough; always outline how you demonstrate the skill.

**Secretary: February 2000 to January 2005, ABC Manufacturing**

- Prepared material for management meetings such as PowerPoint presentations from hand-written notes. Utilized various slide layouts and graphics to help highlight key points in management presentations.
- Coordinated internal meetings by sending meeting requests to participants through Outlook's Electronic Calendar on a daily basis.
- Utilized Microsoft Outlook on a daily basis for email correspondences among internal staff and external clients.
- Provided administrative support such as making photocopies, scanning documents, sending faxes, and printing material for management daily. This also involved printing, copying and scanning various documents for training manual / binder creations. This experience has made me very comfortable with using a wide variety of standard office equipment.
- Maintained office supplies weekly within the office, including re-organizing the inventory room layout to increase access to frequently used supplies.

**Education**

**Secretarial Administration Diploma**, Sheridan College, Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
 Relevant courses include: Business Administration, Business Writing, Communication Skills

**Summary:** This is one example of an application for the position of Administrative Assistant. In this example, the applicant has clearly and concisely identified the skills that they posses based on the qualifications outlined in the job advertisement. In addition, the applicant was able to demonstrate these skills in an application that is only three pages in length. The applicant has not included information that is not relevant to the job qualifications and has avoided repeating information.

## Common Cover Letter and Résumé Errors

The following examples include some common errors that have been seen in cover letters and résumés. These errors often result in lower scores as the individual has not clearly demonstrated how they possess the knowledge, skills or abilities necessary for the position. When you review your cover letter and résumé make sure that you have not accidentally included one of the following errors. This is not an exhaustive list however; it provides you with a starting point to help you to write cover letters and résumés that are concise and tailored to the qualifications outlined in the job advertisement.

### Error #1: Listing duties or copying the job advertisement or job description into your application.

**Example:**

**My Skills include:**

- Administrative and secretarial experience.
- Strong analytical and problem solving skills.
- Time management and organizational skills.
- Oral and written communication skills.
- Customer service skills.
- Computer skills (Word, Excel, Power Point, Outlook, Internet).
- Ability to use standard office equipment (photocopiers, scanners, facsimile machines and printers).
- Proven judgement to work with sensitive and confidential information.

Applicant is only listing skills and not demonstrating how they apply them in the workplace.

Wording copied from the sample job ad.



Your cover letter and résumé must clearly demonstrate how your experience, skills and knowledge are relevant to the qualifications identified in the job advertisement. Simply listing skills will not result in high scores. The items in the list are **often repeated again** within the cover letter or résumé. This takes up space and limits your ability to prepare a concise application. Focus on highlighting your accomplishments in relation to the qualifications outlined in the job advertisement. See [page 6 – 7](#) for tips on what to include in your cover letter.

### Error #2: Listing courses or training you have completed, without demonstrating how these courses have helped you develop the skills necessary for the position.

**Example:**

**College of Ontario – Secretarial Administration Diploma, Graduated June 2004**

Courses Include:

- |                                  |                       |                           |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| • Keyboarding 101                | • Office Procedures   | • Advanced MS Excel       |
| • Punctuation and Writing Skills | • Basic Bookkeeping   | • Advanced MS Word        |
| • Introduction to computers      | • Advanced MS Outlook | • Advanced MS Power Point |



Your education is a good way to demonstrate your transferable skills or skills you have not yet developed in the workforce. Avoid simply listing the courses. Focus on highlighting courses that may have helped you to develop the skills required for the position and explaining how you have demonstrated that skill, this will further allow you to tailor your application to the qualifications in the job advertisement. For example, the applicant might want to focus on the **Computer Skills** they developed in school.

**Error #3: Listing your hobbies or volunteer experience without demonstrating how they have helped to develop the knowledge, skills or abilities necessary for the position.**

**Example:**

**Hobbies**

Hiking, rock climbing, swimming and reading.



Adding extracurricular activities such as hobbies and volunteer experience to your cover letter or résumé is another useful way to highlight transferable skills. However, they should highlight skills that you have not used in the workplace, as well as highlight skills that are relevant to the position.

**Error #4: Including statements that are unclear or vague.**

**Example:**

**Highlights**

- Arranging and filing duties
- Strong communicator (oral and written)
- Ability to work independently
- Meeting various requirements
- Support functions to managers
- Preparing office documentation



Avoid adding **unclear or vague statements** and focus on including specific examples where you have demonstrated the qualifications outlined in the job advertisement. Your application is your opportunity to demonstrate how your knowledge, skills and abilities align with the qualifications outlined in the job advertisement. In order to help you demonstrate your skills, past results, achievements and successes, focus on writing “work accomplishment statements”. See **page 11 – 12** for tips on how to write work accomplishment statements.

**Error #5: Providing irrelevant information or not tailoring your application to the qualifications of the job advertisement.**

**Example:**

***Administrative Assistant***

**ABC Law Firm, 2005 – Present**

- Complete budget projections on a month to month basis.
- Provide back-up for designated responsibilities of the Regional Administrative Coordinator during absences or as requested.
- Managed day-to-day administrative operations.

***Store Clerk***

**Splash Shop, 2003 – 2005**

- Sold scuba equipment
- Inspected and repaired scuba equipment



It is important to add experiences that are relevant to the qualifications of the position you are applying to, this also includes tailoring your application to the qualifications in the job advertisement. For example, for the Sample Administrative Assistant Job Advertisement, the applicant could have expanded “Managed day-to-day administrative operations” to include examples that demonstrate their experience in **Administrative Expertise**. Or the applicant could have also used their experience at the Splash Shop to demonstrate their **Communication and Customer Service Skills**. Remember, it is important to be open and honest on your application, a false statement will hurt more than it will help. See **page 10** for tips on how to match your skills to the qualifications outlined in the job advertisement.