

# Tips for writing résumés and cover letters

by Heidi Riley

Tips for writing résumés and cover letters were provided at the **Canadian Skills Competitions 2009**. The members of the **National Technical Committee (NTC)** for the job interview category provided their expertise.

They said frequently as little as a minute is spent screening each résumé and cover letter. You need to make it easy for them to see that you are a good candidate for the job.

They said to think of your résumé and cover letter as your advertisement about yourself. The interview is like an infomercial, where you have more time to go into detail.

## General tips

- When sending a résumé and cover letter by e-mail, the formatting can become corrupted or changed from the original. This is especially true if pasting it into an e-mail. To ensure that the format remains unchanged, send your documents in PDF format, which is created using Adobe software. This format will remain stable when it is opened.
- It is very important to check spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Make sure you get the right spelling of the person you are addressing the letter to. Mistakes really stand out. It shows a lack of attention to detail.
- When including your e-mail address on your documents, make sure the name is appropriate. The e-mail address should show that you are a serious candidate for the job.

## Cover letter tips

- Follow a business letter format. Include your contact information and the company you are applying for.
- The cover letter should not be more than one page and should have three paragraphs:

**Paragraph #1** should state the job you are applying for.

**Paragraph #2** is where you sell yourself. Match your skills to the qualifications listed in the job posting. Make it easy for the recruiter to see that you could do the job.

**Paragraph #3** is where you thank the interviewer for their time and ask for an interview. Repeat your phone number to make it more convenient to locate.

## Résumé tips

- Have a very clear idea of what skills are necessary for the job you are applying for. Tailor your résumé to show how your skills match the qualifications required.
- Include a job objective, and tailor it to make it relevant to the job applied for.
- A student with limited job experience can list courses that are relevant to the job.
- Highlight your skills: draw from your job, volunteering, babysitting or any other experiences.
- The résumé should be no more than two pages. Busy HR managers do not have time to read more. Save the details for the job interview.
- When listing work experience, use action words to describe your duties and accomplishments. e.g. "Assembled sandwiches to exacting quality standards."
- List your awards and highlight the skills you displayed to win the award.
- When listing your previous jobs, make sure the job titles accurately describe the job. Show how you can apply the skills learned in your previous jobs to the job you are applying for.
- If you are having trouble describing your previous jobs, check websites such as [www.pei.jobfutures.org](http://www.pei.jobfutures.org) to get a detailed description of the duties and skills needed.
- Make sure the formatting is consistent throughout the résumé.

## References

Take a printed list of three references to your job interview. Make sure your references include employers or supervisors from your previous jobs.

Before you give out your references, contact each person on the list to let them know they may be contacted by a recruiter.

## Job interview competitor enjoys the challenge

**Katie Gallant** is a grade 12 student from **Westisle Composite High School**. She decided to enter the Job Interview Skills Competition after hearing about it in Career Futures Class.

"After I won gold for PEI, the judges from the provincial skills competition helped me prepare for the nationals. They went over my performance with me and offered tips on how to improve."

"Being interviewed feels really natural to me," she says. "I like being interviewed and answering questions. I usually find myself listening to others more than talking, so this competition gives me a chance to offer input."



**Katie Gallant has worked at part-time jobs throughout high school. She plans to go to UPEI next year and study English and History.**

## Job interview advice from Katie

- Many people stress out when they are in a job interview. Don't worry. If you don't get this job, it's not the end of the world. There are more jobs out there. Remain calm.
- Be yourself. The interviewers will know if you are faking it.
- Dress appropriately. Shorts and a T-shirt won't cut it. You should dress up, but don't overdress. You need to be comfortable.

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