



# NEXT STEPS

---

## Career Services

Most post-secondary institutions have a Career Services Centre. Career Services staff help students and graduates (alumni) find co-op and internship placements, part-time, full-time and summer jobs.

**Here are some of the other services they may offer:**

- Career fairs, employer information sessions, on-campus interviews, industry panels and networking events
- Assistance to build and review resumes and cover letters
- Career-related employment workshops
- Job searches
- Referrals to study-specific advisors or mentors for career development advice

---

## Internships, Co-op's, Practicum

There are a number of employment programs and opportunities targeted specifically towards post-secondary students. Some of these programs are paid, while others are more like unpaid volunteer experiences. The main value of these programs is to gain relevant job experience in a field you might want to work in after graduation.

The programs can help you expand your resume (or Curriculum Vitae), acquire letters of reference, and explore whether working in a particular field might be a good fit for you.

Internships, Co-op's and Practicum programs may be offered by your post-secondary institution or in partnership with employers. Completing some form of work experience while you are in school may be required for you to graduate from your program.

**The main types of work experience program include:**

### INTERNSHIPS

Internships are often offered by companies and employers without the involvement of the university. Internships usually pay a small amount to interns, but not always and they can vary in length from one month, to one semester to one year.

### WORK-STUDY

Work-study programs are administered as financial aid through universities and colleges. If you qualify for financial aid, you can apply for work-study hours. Once you are approved with hours, you will generally still have to find a suitable on-campus or off-campus employer by applying for jobs that are eligible for work-study hours under your institution's rules. Work-study positions usually involve a fairly small number of hours, making them relatively easy to manage alongside classes.

### CO-OPS

Co-op programs are administered through universities and colleges. In some majors and programs (e.g., engineering), you may be required to complete several semesters



## AUTISM CAMPUS PREP

of co-op work experience. In other fields, co-ops may be optional, but they can still provide a useful form of work experience for your resume or CV. Your college should offer some formal guidance to students enrolled in its co-op program, but the program is likely to have been designed for non-disabled students and it may skip important information. To participate in a co-op, you will likely have to both register through the university (which may require a certain academic standing) and find a job from a participating private or non-profit employer. Depending on how your institution organizes its co-op program, you may receive some tuition support or actual wages.

### PRACTICUM

A practicum is similar to a co-op program, but instead of simply going to gain work experience at an organization in the community, you will be gaining work experience under a supervisor who is a professional within your own field. This supervisor is then supposed to provide you with practical training in the field and evaluate your performance.

---

### Summer Jobs



Summer jobs are designed for students who want to work in the summer, while post-secondary schools are not in session. Some of these positions may provide you with experience that is directly relevant to your field of study. Sometimes students just need to earn money in the summer and apply for seasonal jobs or customer service jobs which may be socially stressful but can provide opportunities for extra money (e.g., through tips).

The Canada Summer Jobs program provides federal funding to help small public and private employers hire youth who are Canadian citizens or permanent residents. Depending on the competitiveness of the labour market, employers may start recruiting for summer jobs before summer technically starts so make sure to register well in advance if you are interested.

**It's important to know that most employers, as well as graduate schools, will expect applicants to have some job/volunteer experience in addition to an educational credential.** The nature of the job or volunteer experience varies from field to field, just like the required educational credentials.

Instead of getting a summer job, some students prefer to take summer classes. These summer classes are often more fast-paced than regular classes, but some students find that intensely focusing on one or two of these fast-paced classes makes it easier for them to succeed academically. Some students alternate year to year between taking summer classes and gaining work experience and income from summer jobs.



### Volunteering

#### Volunteering can:

- Help you gain experience that can add to your resume or CV
- Provide you with references and letters of recommendation
- Allow you to explore whether a career in a particular field would work well for you
- Be less competitive than paid positions and easier to find
- Require less time commitment which allows you to focus more time on your studies

If you don't need a paid job in order to cover the costs of your rent, tuition and living expenses then volunteering might be a good option for you. It's important to be strategic about what volunteer positions you apply for and to choose positions that are close to your passions and interests. This will ensure that the time you spend is helpful to both you and the organization you are volunteering for.



---

### Searching + Applying for Roles

When searching for roles online, it is important to fill out all the required search fields on a job query. Make sure to select search terms so that are related to your career field. Use of the option of email alerts so you will be notified when new job postings that match your interests and skills are added to a online job posting site.

Some online job posting sites, such as Indeed and Monster, also provide users with the option of uploading their resume which can help employers find you.

Online job posting sites that I have found to be helpful in the past include the following:

- [Indeed](#)
- [Workopolis](#)
- [WowJobs](#)
- [Monster](#)

Most company websites also list job postings for their company in the Careers section of their website.

- When applying for a job, make sure your application is filled out thoroughly and carefully, with all required fields answered
- Required fields include such information as the applicant's name, contact information, and where the applicant heard about the job posting
- Pay close attention to any deadlines listed on the job posting
- You may be asked to upload their resume and a cover letter before submitting an online application.
- Applicants are usually notified by email that their application has been received. This email may also include information about next steps such as the timeline for reviewing of applications and when applicants will be notified if they are selected for an interview.



## AUTISM CAMPUS PREP

Finding employment usually requires applying for several roles with different companies before you are contacted for an interview. It can also take several interviews before you are successful, so it's important not to get discouraged. If you don't hear back from the first company or the first job posting that you applied for – don't give up!!

Employers may send emails to unsuccessful applicants to inform them of when a job posting has been closed or to say they have hired someone for the role.

### Cover Letters

It is important that the content of the cover letter matches the skills that the employer is looking for in a successful candidate, as well as the overall job posting.

#### Cover letters should typically include:

- The applicant's name and full address
- The full address of the company to which the applicant is applying for a role
- The date that the application was submitted
- The role that the applicant is applying for
- The greeting, written as "Dear ..." when the person's name is known, and "To Whom It May Concern" when the person's name is not known

#### Your cover letter should include:

- A statement about what role you are applying for
- The date the job was posted
- The online site where you found the job listing
- A brief description of the skills that the applicant feels makes them a competitive candidate
- Any other relevant skills that the applicant possesses, such as computer skills
- A brief description of the applicant's educational credentials
- A brief description of the experience the applicant has that matches the requirements for the position
- A sentence that says you look forward to personally meeting with and discussing their qualifications for the position
- Your contact information should the employer have any questions
- A statement that thanks the employer for considering your application and the potential opportunity to be an employee of the company
- A final closing of "Sincerely," followed by your name
- Encl. – if you are enclosing or attaching your resume

#### When you are asked to interview for a job here are some helpful tips:

- Make and maintain eye contact with the people conducting the interview if you can
- Good eye contact shows that you are interested in the position and paying attention to the person that is conducting the interview
- Smile and show a positive attitude



## AUTISM CAMPUS PREP

- A positive attitude can make all the difference when it comes to whether or not a candidate has a successful interview and is hired for the position
- Dress conservatively and professionally. That means no jeans or cut-offs, and take out your nose ring and cover up any tattoos
- Do your research. Visit the company's online site prior to the interview, and learn everything you can about the company, from the company's corporate mission to customers and clients' opinions about the company's products and services. Then, make use of this information during the interview when you're answering questions
- In addition to answering questions from the interviewers, ask the interviewers questions. This is another way to show that you are interested in and hoping to work with the company that offers the position you've applied to
- Shake hands firmly with the interviewers at the beginning and end of the interview
- Follow up with a thank-you email that includes further indication of your interest in the position and the company offering the position

---

### Building your Resume

As is the case with a cover letter, there are certain components that an effective resume should include. These components consist of the following, and are listed in the order in which they appear:

- The applicant's name, full address, and e-mail address
- The applicant's professional profile, which includes such aspects as the type of position the applicant is seeking, a description of their work experience, the abilities and skills that the applicant has demonstrated in their past work experience, and any awards or honours that the applicant has received
- The applicant's full work experience history, which consists of both paid and unpaid work experience, and volunteer experience, with separate headings for each type of experience and position held; the years spent in each position; and a description of the tasks that the applicant was responsible for in each position
- The applicant's educational background, which consists of the post-secondary institutions the applicant has attended; the years the applicant spent at each post-secondary institution; and the core courses studied at those institutions
- A summary of the applicant's skills in their chosen field, with separate headings for each group of skills the applicant possesses
- Any awards or honours that the applicant has received
- Any interests or hobbies that the applicant has

Career Services Centres on your campus can be a great place to get help creating and formatting your resume.

#### Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- Keep the length of your resume to 2 or 3 three pages maximum



- Use different size fonts and font styles for different components. For example, use bold font style for all headings in a resume, and use bold font style - and a bigger font size than in any other component of your resume - for your name
- Make adjustments to the resume each time you apply for a role so that the skills listed match the skills that are needed in the type of company that the role is being offered by, and the skills that the potential employer is looking for in a successful candidate for the role
- Include your most recent and most relevant job experience

---

### Building your CV

The CV (short for curriculum vitae) is similar to a resume, but it has a slightly different focus. A resume is more oriented towards work, whereas a CV is more oriented to an academic setting. In general, you would usually provide a resume for a job in the community, but you would use a CV if you are applying to graduate school or to work in a university research lab.

#### A CV should contain:

1. **Your name and contact information** - this part is basically similar to a resume.
2. **Your educational history** - this is more important in a CV than a resume, so it should go closer to the top. List the postsecondary institution(s) you have attended, the years you spent at each institution, and the degree(s) you received.
3. **Honours and awards** - list any scholarships or academic awards you received based on your academic performance (do not include financial aid). If you haven't received scholarships or awards, don't feel embarrassed - just don't include the section.
4. **Research experience** - here, list any experience that you have in research labs, volunteer or paid. What labs have you worked in? When did you work there? What did you do? You can use action verbs ("Collected data", "scheduled participant visits", "processed data", etc.).
5. **Work experience** - list any work experience you want to showcase that is not research-oriented. Similarly to a resume, include years, position titles, and information about your responsibilities.
6. **Volunteer experience/community service** - list any volunteer experience relevant to your field that is not research experience, if applicable. For example, have you helped deliver a program through a non-profit organization, or served on a non-profit board?
7. **Publications and presentations** - if applicable, list any published or accepted academic articles (i.e., articles in peer-reviewed journals or chapters in edited academic books) and any posters or talks presented at academic



## AUTISM CAMPUS PREP

conferences/society meetings. Use whatever citation style is standard in your field (e.g., APA if you study psychology).

8. **Computer skills** - list programs or programming languages you are proficient in
9. **If you have other experience or qualifications** you want to showcase, you can include a specific section to address them. For example, if you speak multiple languages, you should include a section on languages

### Additional Information:

- Feel free to rearrange the order of sections 3 through 9 to highlight whichever aspects of your experience and qualifications you think show you in the best light
- One other important thing to know about CVs is that they can be virtually any length. Don't make your CV unnecessarily long, but don't remove important information in order to keep the length down in the same way that you might for a resume
- When you start out in academia, your CV will likely be fairly short, but the longer you progress in your academic career, the longer your CV will become.
- If you volunteer in a lab, you could ask graduate students for help with preparing a CV
- There are also online resources about creating CVs
- Sometimes, if you are applying for fellowship funding, you will be asked to provide a CV that follows a specialized, standardized format, like the Canadian Common CV or the American NIH Biosketch. The websites of these organizations give details about their CV format requirements

---

## Further Education

Many people, after they graduate with a bachelor's degree from a university, will go on to graduate school. Going to graduate school might mean completing a two-year master's program, or it might mean enrolling in a doctoral program that could take up to seven years in some fields.



### Why would you go to graduate school?

Graduate degrees are helpful, and sometimes even necessary, in many fields of employment. In a society where people are becoming increasingly well-educated, job applicants may need more educational qualifications to remain competitive.

### Does this mean you have to go to graduate school?

Not necessarily! The answer depends on your goals, including your career goals. What field are you in, and what sort of work do you want to do in the future? It's possible to succeed in many careers without a graduate degree. For example, people graduating with a bachelor's degree in growing fields like computer science can earn high incomes without any graduate credentials.



## AUTISM CAMPUS PREP

It also depends on your preferred lifestyle. Would you rather face extra stress and demands now so that you might be able to make more money in the future, or would you prefer to follow a simpler and easier path that could still allow you to make a liveable wage?

Many people don't need a bachelor's degree, let alone a graduate degree, but might be able to reach their life and career goals with a credential like an associate's degree or a diploma from a two-year community college.

You'll need to research the degree requirements in any careers that might interest you. Even if you see that a career that interests you requires a graduate degree, don't jump to conclusions. There might be assistant or support positions that would allow you to work in the same general area without a graduate degree.

It can be helpful to speak to people who are already working in the field to get their advice about whether graduate school is worthwhile or not.

One important thing to think about when you weigh the career and income advantages or disadvantages of graduate school is disability. As autistic and neurodivergent students, we often face barriers when we seek employment - for example, we can face discrimination as a result of appearing awkward in job interviews. This can result in underemployment: we might not derive the usual income benefits from our education.

Thus, you might attend graduate school and not end up with the same job and income as neurotypical students in your field. However, you might still have a more successful career than you would have if you had not attended graduate school.

Now, let's say you decide that you do want to go to graduate school. When should you start? Should you apply in the last year of your undergraduate studies, so you can start grad school immediately the next fall? Some students do this, but not all. Many if not most graduate students seem to take some time off first, get job experience, and then return for graduate school.

Why not go straight to graduate school? For one thing, not everyone knows exactly what they want to do with their life when they finish their undergraduate degree! Some time off can give you more time to figure out exactly what sort of field and career you want to have. It only makes sense to apply for graduate school immediately if you're confident that you know what you want to do.

Another consideration is the experience needed to be a competitive graduate school applicant. You will likely be expected to have certain forms of job or volunteer experience, like experience with research, clinical practice, and so on. The exact form of the experience depends on your field. Getting more of this experience after you finish your undergraduate degree could help make you a more competitive applicant for graduate school.





### Important differences between graduate programs

A Master's degree doesn't take as long as a Doctoral degree, however, for some career goals (like becoming a college professor) you'll definitely need a doctorate. In this case, why go to the extra trouble of completing a Master's program first?

In some fields, it's possible to apply directly to doctoral programs, and you can get your Master's degree as a stepping stone as you go about completing the doctoral degree program. There is often more funding support available in doctoral programs than in Master's programs.

Another crucial distinction is that between **Professional** and **Research** programs. In professional programs, you learn by taking classes, completing practicums, and so forth. While you might do some of these things in research programs, you'll also be paired with a specific faculty researcher. Under that faculty member's supervision, you'll work on research projects, and probably also work as a teaching assistant (unless you can get other funding).

Research Assistant and Teaching Assistant positions help keep university departments running by providing assistance to research projects and to undergraduate students. Research programs have more of an obligation to ensure that their graduate students are financially well-supported. A decent research graduate program should waive/cover your tuition and provide a stipend besides. Professional programs usually have less financial support available to support graduate students.

There are also **Research-Practitioner** programs, like clinical psychology PhD programs or MD-PhD programs. Because they combine research and professional training, these are some of the most time-consuming and intensive graduate degrees.

Graduate applications themselves are highly complex and vary a lot from field to field, so we're not going to be able to cover all the details here. Make sure you talk to other people in your own field to figure out what is expected in the applications process! Networking and gathering information from your network is probably **the most important** way you can prepare for graduate school applications.

### However, here are some general things to think about:

- **STANDARDIZED TESTING.** In North America, getting into graduate school has often required taking tests like the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), as well as specialized tests from specific fields like the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT). These can be difficult for some disabled students, as we often have uneven profiles with areas of great strength coexisting alongside some weaknesses. This makes it harder for some of us to excel in all portions of the tests, even if we can get accommodations. Today, many graduate schools are dispensing with the GREs, but you should check if programs in your field require any of these tests. There are many study guides and practice tests to help students prepare for these exams.
- **CONTACTING PROGRAM COORDINATORS.** Most graduate programs should have a staff member - not a professor - with a title like Graduate Program



Coordinator (not to be confused with the graduate advisor, who is a professor). The coordinator is an important person to email or speak to when you are gathering information about graduate programs you might be interested in. The coordinator will often be able to provide further information about the program beyond what is listed on the program website.

- **CONTACTING FACULTY MENTORS.** In research graduate programs (not professional ones), you will be paired with a specific faculty mentor. You might be expected to identify a prospective mentor and apply to work with them as part of your application itself, or you might spend your first year of the program rotating between several labs before you find one that has a good fit. **Either way, the match between you and your mentor is crucial to your success in a research graduate program.** You want to find someone whose interests overlap with yours, and also someone whose working style is compatible with yours (who will provide just the right amount of direction and support without being too restrictive for your needs). Emailing prospective mentors to ask them if they are interested in taking students, and to get more information about what working in their lab would be like, is expected.
- **CASTING A BROAD NET.** Usually, it makes sense to apply for more than one program. You might even want to apply for programs in slightly different fields, if you're not quite sure what you want to do yet and if you think interviewing with some programs would help. However, the extent of the net you can cast depends on how far you are willing to move away from home. *Those of us with close ties to family, and those of us who dislike changes in our environments, may prefer to limit ourselves to a narrow geographic region. If you plan to attend a research program, this might make it harder to find a mentor who exactly matches your interests.*
- **INTERVIEWS.** If the graduate program is interested in your application, you might be invited for a tour and interview. Before COVID, this often took place in person, although winter travel disruptions could sometimes force a virtual interview. These interviews can be fast, overwhelming, and stressful, even for a neurotypical person. Ask others in your field what you can expect in an interview in your field, and prepare accordingly.

---

### Asking for Adjustments at Work

A workplace accommodation is modifying your work environment or tasks in a way which assists you in successfully completing your work. Asking for workplace accommodation may be something you need to do in order to properly do your job.

#### Accommodations may look like:

- Physical changes to your work space (either relocating your workspace or making changes to it)
- Flexible work hours
- Time off for medical appointments



## AUTISM CAMPUS PREP

- Work-from-home options
- Sharing or trading tasks with co-workers

According to the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Employment Equity Act, your employer has a legal obligation to accommodate your medical condition by identifying and removing barriers to your ability to complete your work successfully. Your employer may request medical information supporting your limitations and the prognosis of any condition. Any medical information you provide to your employer must be kept confidential. Note that they are not allowed to ask for your actual diagnosis paperwork or any details on your treatment.

### **When asking for an accommodation, kept the following in mind:**

- Be specific when requesting changes to your responsibilities or workspace changes
- Note what obstacles you are currently facing and how you think they can be resolved
- Your employer has to do all they can to accommodate your disability up until they reach undue hardship. That is your employer has attempted to put accommodations in place but they pose a health risk to others or the cost of the accommodation would be financially unsustainable for the company
- Accommodations can vary in length. Some may be temporary while others may be required for the long term
- Understand that your preferred accommodation may not be possible, so work with your employer to find ones that work for both you and the organization
- Be flexible and open-minded when speaking with your employer about designing an accommodations plan, it may take some time to reach an agreement

