

FAQ'S - JOB SEARCH & EMPLOYER EXPECTATIONS

1. What is more important when trying to get a job, your resume (i.e. your education and experience) or your performance during an interview?

It is a combination of the two. Keep in mind that the resume and the interview serve different purposes. The resume is designed to demonstrate your technical experience and how your skills have been applied in a variety of practical situations (demonstrating to the employer that you have the skills necessary to do the job effectively). The interview is your opportunity to elaborate on your skills/experience but also an opportunity for the employer to get to know you better. They will be evaluating your ability to listen and communicate in the interview, along with your ability to draw on past experiences and formulate professional and thought-out responses to their questions. They will also be looking to better understand your personality and what motivates you to determine if you will be a good fit for their company (which is different than just being technically able to do the job). The short answer is that both the resume (i.e. your education and experience) and how you conduct yourself in an interview have a role to play in this process. Sometimes a candidate can have all the right experience and skill, but ultimately won't be a good fit with the company and therefore may not get the job as a result.

2. How aggressive/ persistent with following up would you like a prospective candidate to be, before you find them overly aggressive and intrusive?

If this question is referring to after a job interview, I would recommend sending a follow up e-mail (or handwritten note) within 24 hours. Hopefully, you will know the recruitment timelines before you leave the interview...so that you have an idea about when they will be making decisions about the next steps. If you have been provided with a follow up date and have not heard anything, it would be acceptable to contact the interviewer by phone or e-mail and politely ask if they can provide information as to the current situation for that position. Keep in mind that businesses often have competing priorities for their time - filling a job vacancy may not be the top priority for the company even if they are actively going through the recruitment process. Be mindful (and respectful) of holidays and vacation days that may occur within the recruitment timelines - these days tend to slow the process down. I recommend asking the employer/interviewer when the best time to reconnect with them would be and follow up accordingly. Do not become overly aggressive in demanding a response (even if you just want an answer either way) - the interviewer/employer will remember you, but not in positive light.

3. What makes an applicant's cover letter and resume stand out among the rest for within the accounting profession? What kinds of things do employers look for when selecting candidates for an interview?

CA firms are very specific in what they look for. They want to see a good balance of strong academics AND experience from paid employment, volunteer experiences, and extra-curricular activities (this is one of the most important). CA firms will review transcripts because there has proven to be a strong co-relation between good grades in accounting courses and a student's ability to successfully pass the CKE, School of Accountancy, and the UFE. With that said, they also want people who have excellent communication skills (both written and verbal), problem solving skills, relationship-building skills, initiative/drive, and leadership skills.

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4. What if you did not participate in any extra-curricular activities such as club involvement, competitions, events, service learning projects, etc. during your university career? What else could you do after your 4 years to enhance your resume?

It's never too late to get involved. While you are job searching, I strongly recommend getting involved within your local community - in some capacity - to not only develop your skills but also your network (which will be instrumental in a successful job search).

1. Research potential volunteer opportunities. Many non-profit organizations would be eager to work with business/accounting students in their offices. Search for opportunities linked to your interest area, however, don't stop there. If there is a particular skill that you would like to apply in a workplace, contact the organization and ask if they could use someone with your skill set. In other words, create your own volunteer opportunity in collaboration with the non-profit organization. One place to search for opportunities within Niagara is [Information Niagara](#). You can also find additional resources on the [BCDO](#) website that will provide information on volunteer opportunities.
2. If you are working part time, although not in a job to your field, seek out opportunities to gain relevant experience. Mention to your supervisor that you are eager to apply your business knowledge in any capacity, should the opportunity be available. Be specific about what you would like to do. Ask to see the operations side of the business if possible when your daily job tasks have been completed. Review a financial report or inquire about the possibility of creating a marketing strategy for the company. Be resourceful and leverage the positions that you are in, even if not directly relevant to your career goal.

5. Do employers rely heavily on your grades (transcript) coming out of university? How much are university marks weighed into an applicant's chance of getting a job?

This depends on the industry. In the accounting and finance sectors, transcripts often play a role in the application process. Also, some larger companies will incorporate transcripts into their applications (regardless of role) - GE is an example of this. Keep in mind though that transcripts are only one part of the application - employers still want to see that you have experience and relevant skills. A student with a 90% average with limited to no work/extracurricular/volunteer experience is less likely to secure a job against a student with a 75% average and a great balance of work/extracurricular/volunteer experience. For employers, it's about finding a balance and finding the right candidate who can not only do the job, but who is also a good fit with the company.

6. How important is work experience compared to other attributes on your resume?

This depends on what you are qualifying as "work experience" and what you mean by "other attributes". If work experience refers to paid employment, then certainly there are other attributes that can be included on a resume that will be seen as valuable to an employer. For example, volunteer experience, extracurricular experience, professional development workshops/training, designations/certifications. In the end, it's all about your ability to communicate relevant SKILLS and how you have used these skills on your resume. Every job has its own unique aspects and requirements - it's up to you to understand what the employer is looking for and tailor your resume and experience appropriately to showcase relevant skills.

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7. What steps should I take to gain a competitive advantage against other students and people competing for a position in the workforce?

Competing in a competitive job market is about differentiating yourself from others. You can do this with the variety of experiences on your resume and by showcasing experiences that are more unique (for example: an international exchange, an academic competition, a dual degree, a double concentration, an executive/leadership role with a student organization, leading an initiative that has benefited a local not-for-profit organization). In addition to differentiating your resume, you can differentiate yourself by establishing great professional networks and putting yourself in situations where you get to meet new people and network (i.e. attending job/career fairs, attending networking events/dinners, attending professional workshops, volunteering on a committee for a professional association).

8. Does an individual with relevant co-op experience have an advantage when applying for a job than an individual with no co-op experience?

Not necessarily. It all comes back to skills and variety of experience. Certainly a student with co-op experience will likely have some excellent professional experience and a well-established professional network, but that's not to say that a non co-op student doesn't also have great professional experience and an established network (through summer jobs, part time jobs, extracurricular involvement, etc.). The only difference here is that one student gained their experience as a part of their academic programming (co-op), where the other completed it in a different way.

9. What is the best way to submit your resume/cover letter (online applications or e-mailing directing to the human resources department)?

Online applications are used to help employers screen resumes for keywords (i.e. skills) that are relevant to a specific job. With job postings being advertised online, employers are often overwhelmed with applications. An online system allows them to more effectively track candidates, and more efficiently screen candidates.

Either way, HR is reviewing the applications. The key difference is that one approach allows them to filter through applications so that they are only manually reviewing those that meet the requirements of the job (those who are best suited from a technical standpoint).

My suggestion is to follow the instructions provided on the job posting. If an employer has instructed you to "apply online"...DO SO. Many employers get frustrated (and ultimately redirect candidates who don't follow these instructions, or simply avoid considering a candidate for the job) when candidates choose to email their application directly to HR even though the posting has specified that they apply online.

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10. What type of company would use electronic technology to screen out applicants?

Any type of company may choose to use electronic technology when collecting applications. Online applications are used to help employers screen resumes for keywords (i.e. skills) that are relevant to a specific job. With many job postings being advertised online, employers are often overwhelmed with applications. An online system allows them to more effectively track candidates, and more efficiently screen candidates. In general, if you are submitting your information to an online application system (often by cutting and pasting your material into an online form), you can make an assumption that that the company is using some sort of electronic software system for screening. In these cases, ensure that your cover letter and resume contain key words (skills, competencies, specific computer programs, etc.) listed in the posting to be sure these are recognized through their electronic system.

11. How important is it to get a job in your concentration area, rather than general business experience?

This is an individual question that would depend on your current situation and career goals. In general, remember that you are going to be new to the business world in whatever position you find yourself. Within your first few years in any post-grad position, most of your time will be spent learning the functions of that particular industry - while applying some of your business knowledge. Any position within the business world will help in developing your skills and experience...and networks. Keep an open mind about positions and apply for those that are of interest to you and seem to match your skill set.

Consider the first 2-3 years after graduating as your opportunity to learn about yourself, your career aspirations, and where your skills are best applied. At the same time, you will gain some great work and life experience that will help you make informed decisions as you advance in your career. No experience is useless...there is something to be learned and gained from each one. Until you get into a role and a company, it is difficult to truly confirm what you like and don't like. And over time, this will likely change/evolve (as will your career).

It is suggested that you seek opportunities that will align with your personal career goals (short term and long term), but don't underestimate/discount opportunities that will allow you to develop your skills in other relevant business areas. A career is not always linear...it is important to have goals and milestones...it is also important to consider new opportunities that may get presented along the way.

For co-op experiences, this is your opportunity to try out different types of jobs and types of employers to not only develop your experience, skills, and network, but also to determine the types of jobs and employers to which you are best suited.

12. If there was one tip to give a recent graduate about trying to secure a full-time job, what would it be?

Talk to people - be proactive and engage in conversations with people. Be specific when telling people about the type of work for which you are looking - do not assume that they know (even your family and friends may not know exactly the type of work you are interested in pursuing). The other side to this is to remember that networking should not just be about you asking for a job or referral. It's about identifying commonalities and helping others out as well. Networking is not a job search strategy - it is a lifetime of building relationships with others throughout your career and profession.