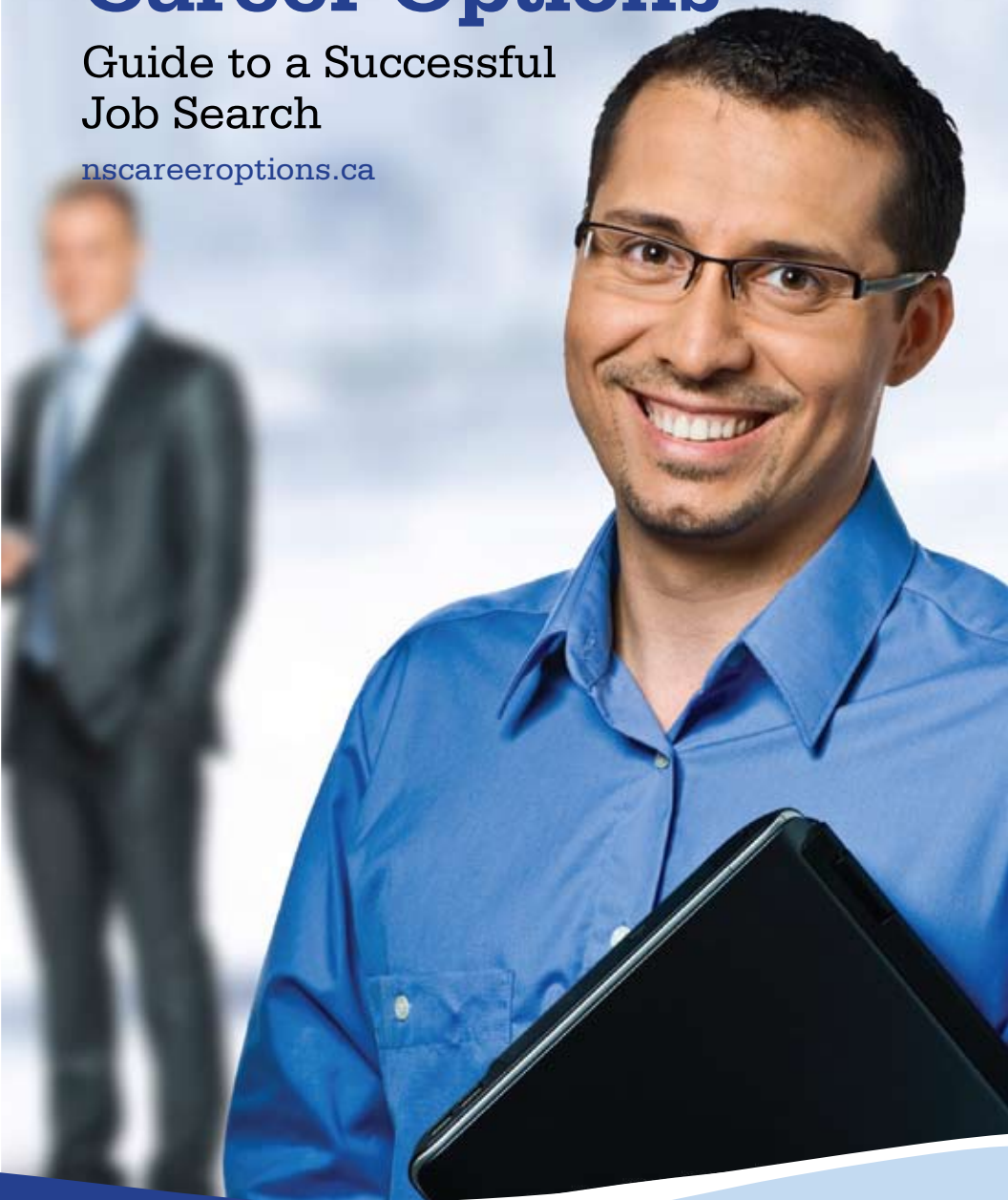


Career Options

Guide to a Successful
Job Search

nscareeroptions.ca



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Labour market and employment requirements are subject to change, and it is recommended that the reader verify the information before making any career decisions.

Please visit www.nscareeroptions.ca for the most current and detailed information. To order additional copies of this publication please contact careeroptions@gov.ns.ca.

Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Advanced Education

An initiative of JobsHere



LOOKING FOR WORK?

Job hunting can be a full-time job. Whether you are a student, a recent graduate, have been out of the workforce for some time, or simply looking for a change; this guide is designed to help make your search more rewarding. Whatever stage of life you are in, remember that looking for work is not rocket science – it is about effort and intention.

Your current job search may be one step along your bigger journey to your dream career. Career planning is a lifelong process that includes the following steps:

- Step 1:** Knowing Yourself
- Step 2:** Knowing What's Out There
- Step 3:** Making an Informed Decision
- Step 4:** Creating and Executing an Action Plan



Visit nscareeroptions.ca/careerplanning for further information on the steps to developing a career path.

Inside this guide you will find tips on how to:

- Start your job search and where to look for jobs PAGE 4
- Build a network of people to support your job search PAGE 6
- Make your resume and cover letter stand out PAGE 8
- Prepare to sell yourself in an interview PAGE 12
- Remain positive during your job search PAGE 16

Visit nscareeroptions.ca/searchjobprofiles for detailed profiles of over 300 occupational groups and potential employers



KNOW WHERE THE JOBS ARE

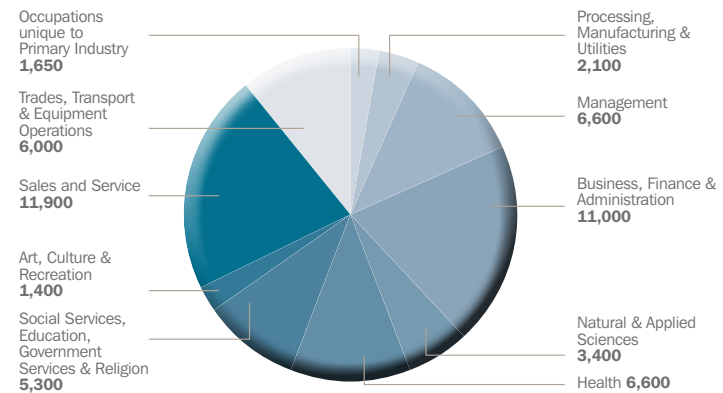
There are always opportunities for employment but you need to know where to look and how to prepare yourself. The point is, the right job is out there for you. It is important to understand what employers are looking for in today's labour market and be willing to adapt as conditions change.

Knowing and growing what you have to offer an employer is a great place to start. Take stock of your knowledge, experiences and transferable skills. If you do not have a lot of experience, consider getting involved in co-op or internship programs, volunteer work, or extra-curricular activities.

Take some time to learn about where the opportunities are in Nova Scotia's labour market.

TIP: Many jobs are not formally advertised. If this is your only method of job searching, you are missing most of the employment opportunities that are out there!

What kind of work are people getting hired to do?



Source: COPS, Service Canada and the Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Advanced Education. Estimated openings due to growth and retirements, 2008-13.

Visit brightcareerfutures.com to find out more about high opportunity occupations in Nova Scotia.

There are a number of different paths you can take on the road to finding employment:

- you can respond to positions that are posted
- you can contact someone you are interested in working for
- you can be referred to an employer through someone else

Employers may post vacant positions in newspaper, magazine, or periodical ads, through professional associations, or right in their shop window. Other employers use placement agencies or dip into filing cabinets filled with the resumes of previous applicants when a position comes up. There are also a number of job search websites such as jobbank.gc.ca or careerbeacon.com.

As you search job postings, it is important to keep in mind how the job fits with your qualifications and interests. Keep your options open and take the time to explore further jobs that you may not be familiar with.

Having an understanding of where the opportunities are will help you in targeting your job search and networking effectively.

Visit nscareeroptions.ca/lookingforwork for a list of job search sites for Nova Scotia as well as tips for identifying jobs that have not been advertised.

BUILD A NETWORK

“Networking” is just a fancy way of saying “talking to people.” The best way to start is with people you know and the people who know them. Take a few minutes to build your own network right now. Begin with names of your immediate family and your closest friends and spread out from there, making sure to include neighbours, former colleagues, classmates, club members, and casual acquaintances. Everyone is important – you never know who is going to give you the lead that allows your job search or career to take off.

TIP: Some employers may check out the social networking sites, like Facebook and Myspace, of potential employees. Make sure you clean up your contacts and your content.



Visit nscareeroptions.ca/lookingforwork for additional tips on conducting an information interview.

People who take the time and initiative to contact those who are currently working in an occupation of interest - otherwise known as an information interview – get first-hand information about the job and open the door to future opportunities. Keep in mind that most people enjoy talking about their work to someone who is genuinely interested.

Top Tips for conducting an information interview:

- ✓ E-mail can be a good first step, followed-up by a phone call, but try to arrange for a face-to-face meeting.
- ✓ Have questions prepared and a specific goal in mind for your discussion.
- ✓ Describe your interests to help guide the discussion, but remember it is not a job interview - the point is to gather information, not to sell yourself.
- ✓ Get and save the business cards of those you meet. Consider printing a few of your own cards – sometimes called “job cards” when people are seeking work.
- ✓ Ask for names of other people you could contact.

Remember, stay in touch with the network you create – these people can be an invaluable resource throughout your career.





HAVE A STAND OUT RESUME AND COVER LETTER

Now that you know what Nova Scotia employers are looking for, have a list of potential jobs, and made valuable contacts; it is time to perfect your resume and cover letter. Resumes and cover letters usually provide the first impression of you to a potential employer – make sure they are up to the task.

Resumes

The resume is the “key to the interview,” a summary of why you are the best candidate for the job. Before preparing or updating your resume, you must know what you have to offer, understand the needs of the employer, and be able to make the connection between the two.

Regardless of what type of job you are applying for, make sure your resume includes the following information:

- A personal profile that highlights your skills and attributes that make you a fit for the position
- Your education and certification
- Your employment and volunteer history
- Highlights of your accomplishments and relevant experience

TIP: Employers often get a large number of applications for each position, many of whom are not qualified for the job. They may only look at a resume for up to 30 seconds!! Make sure your half a minute counts!

Top Tips for resumes:

- ✓ Address what the employer is looking for right away. If the job posting says that they want someone with a high school diploma, is reliable and has hands-on experience in the field, make sure you draw attention to those qualifications in your personal profile. If this information is not easy to find, you may be screened out. At the same time, if you are missing some of the items from the job posting, it is not the end of the world. Often the job posting represents a wish list and employers are prepared to find the best fit based on the candidates that apply.
- ✓ Demonstrate all practical experiences that you have in the field. This could be through previous jobs, work placements, or volunteering. The employer wants to see the action that backs up the words. Focus on accomplishments, use active verbs (e.g., achieved, sold, increased, improved) and try to demonstrate the results that were achieved.
- ✓ Show them your human side. These are called “soft” skills or “employability” skills and involve who you are as a person. Employers are interested in your ability to communicate, work well with others, act responsibly, and deal with problems. Your Personal Profile is an ideal place to put the spotlight on these characteristics.
- ✓ Use keywords to pass an electronic review. These days, many employers scan and select resumes electronically, so use words that appeared in the job posting and on the company website. Also, use words that are specific to the occupation or industry.
- ✓ Structure your resume so that it highlights your strengths (education or experience).
- ✓ Consider replacing your “Employment Objective” with a “Personal Profile” or “Career Summary” that overviews your career and successes.
- ✓ Focus on your most relevant and recent work experiences, not necessarily every job you have ever held.
- ✓ Double-check for errors and typos – your computer’s spell check will not flag an incorrect word that is spelled correctly. Ask someone else to review and evaluate your resume.

Visit nscareeroptions.ca/lookingforwork for a list of skill-related action verbs, resume formats, and a list of organizations that provide resume assistance.

COVER LETTERS

A good cover letter will help ensure that an employer then looks at your resume. It is your introduction to a potential employer and you want to make a good first impression!

Top Tips for cover letters:

- ✓ Always write one - a resume that arrives unaccompanied is often dismissed.
- ✓ Customize it for the particular employer and posting. Write each letter to the attention of the person in charge of hiring and make sure you spell their name properly!
- ✓ Highlight the qualifications you have for this posting. This is a short, well-written summary of what you have to offer this particular employer in a specific capacity. The more distinct you can make it the better. Make sure it stands out.
- ✓ Always mention something about the company or organization. This shows that you took the time to research and learn about the employer, their values and their business. Keep it subtle and professional while making it clear how your skills and experience mesh with what they are looking for.



TIP: *Unlike the resume, the employer will probably read every single word of your cover letter. Make these words count! Consider the cover letter the “hook” and the resume the “complete picture” of how you are qualified for the position.*



Visit nscareeroptions.ca/lookingforwork for more information on, and samples of cover letters.

Remember!

- Your resume should be a maximum of two pages, and cover all the qualifications listed in the job posting. A cover letter should be no longer than one page.
- Make sure your resume and cover letter are both error free. Spelling mistakes and typos will take you out of the running, even if you are the most qualified person for the job.
- Always get someone you trust (and preferably someone in the field) to check your resume and cover letter.
- Do not use tired language in your cover letter – make sure it stands out above the competition.
- For both your resume and cover letter, use an easy-to-read and easy-to-scan font with no excessive formatting.



ACE THE INTERVIEW

Research shows that employers often decide if they want to hire you in the first two minutes of an interview. Do not let that scare you. There is a secret to making a good first impression. Once you have mastered it, you will be well on your way to the job of your dreams.

Getting ready for your interview

Your choice of everything from shoes to jewelry to make-up says a lot about you. Well fitting (but not too tight!) clothing, simple designs, and neutral colours are the best bet. Remember, it is always better to be over-dressed for an interview.



Top Tips for Interviews:

- ✓ Be clean and well-groomed. Dress appropriately and do not wear distracting accessories or jewelry. Do not wear cologne or perfume.
- ✓ Arrive early, walk confidently, and greet your interviewer with a solid handshake.
- ✓ Be sincere. Answer all questions honestly and do not resort to bragging.
- ✓ Take the time to collect your thoughts before answering questions.
- ✓ Never just give a “yes” or “no” answer – elaborate and provide specific examples.
- ✓ Do not speak poorly about previous employers.
- ✓ Come prepared with questions to ask about the position or organization.
- ✓ Be calm and poised.
- ✓ Do not bring up salary or benefits.
- ✓ Thank the interviewer at the end, leave as soon as the interview is over, and say good-bye to the receptionist.

Best Kept Secret

Did you know that after you leave an interview, the employer will sometimes ask the receptionist for their opinion of you? How did you act? Were you friendly and respectful? This is one way that an employer can get a sense of who you are outside the interview setting, and how well you may fit into their company culture.

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR INTERVIEW

There are several different interview formats, but most will be a “behavioural” interview. This means that the employer will ask you questions about your previous behaviour in order to predict your future behaviour. Example - “Can you tell us about a time where you implemented a good idea (or solved a conflict or achieved something you are proud of)?”

One of the most important facets of a behavioural interview is the ability to summarize both the action that you took in the past and the result of your action. The S.T.A.R. method can help ensure you address key points in your response: Situation – Task – Action – Result.

- SITUATION** Describe the circumstances
- TASK** Specify the project or assignment
- ACTION** Outline the steps you took
- RESULT** Discuss the outcome of the situation and any lessons learned

Be clear and concise, and make yourself sound great. Obviously, you want to choose key moments that you are really proud of and that demonstrate your star qualities to the employer.

It is a good idea to try to anticipate the types of questions you will be asked in an interview and practice your responses beforehand. Make sure you practice your answers out loud. If possible, get someone to videotape you, so you can really see how you are coming across. Hearing and seeing yourself perform can help hone your interview skills.

Your preparation should also include research about the company and a thorough re-reading of the job description:

- Focus on what they are looking for in an employee
- Focus on situations in the past where you have demonstrated the qualities and skills they are seeking
- Link these attributes to what you have learned about the company

Visit nscareeroptions.ca/lookingforwork for sample interview questions.



Many employers will ask if you have any questions during the interview. You should take this opportunity to ask questions about the position or organization. It will show the interviewer that you are actually interested in the position and organization. Some questions to consider before the interview are:

- Are there any recent projects that you would like to know more about?
- Are there certain aspects of the job description that you would like clarified?
- Other questions may come to you during the interview, keep a pad and pen handy to jot down notes so you can ask them later.

The more prepared you are, the more relaxed you will be in the actual interview. This is a huge advantage. Individuals who are comfortable in their own skin put employers at ease. If you can combine this with a natural enthusiasm for the job and the field, you will be able to present yourself in the best possible light.

Remember!

- ✓ Prepare and practice.
- ✓ Maintain eye-contact.
- ✓ Be sincere and positive – do not criticize your old job or boss.
- ✓ Take notes to show you are interested and have good questions prepared.
- ✓ Collect business cards from every member of your interview panel and send each of them a thank you note within 24 hours.

STAYING POSITIVE

It is easy to feel overwhelmed when you are taking these first few steps into the working world. Receiving a rejection after an interview, or not being called for an interview at all, happens to everyone, but can make you feel down.

Top tips for remaining positive during your job search:

- ✓ Think of looking for work as your current job. Treat it like a workday, setting aside designated hours and identifying specific goals you want to achieve each day.
- ✓ Surround yourself with positive people who will provide advice and encouragement.
- ✓ Remember your talents! If you start to feel down take the time to list all areas where you do well.
- ✓ Be aware of the messages you say to yourself. Negative self-talk can make you depressed. Make sure you are speaking in positives and not constantly criticizing yourself.
- ✓ Learn from the past. When we think of past mistakes, it can get us down. Instead of focusing on the negative, take the time to identify the lesson from each situation. Determine what went wrong so you can ensure that it does not happen in future situations.
- ✓ Smile! Even if you do not feel like it, greeting the world with a positive face can make you feel good inside.

Preparation Meets Opportunity

It has been said that luck is when preparation meets opportunity. The same can be said of looking for work. If you are well prepared and do your research, you will be prepared to act when the right opportunity arises. Looking for work is a full-time job, but does not have to be a stressful experience. Here is a brief re-cap of what we have covered:

- Tailor your resumes and letters to the specific job and employer.
- Build your network and use it!
- Dress professionally for the interview – and practice your responses beforehand.
- Send a thank you email as a follow-up.
- Remain positive!



Visit nscareeroptions.ca/careerplanning for a complete list of Career Resource Centres across the province.

Professionals in Career Resource Centres across the province can help you in your job search.

For more information on labour market and career planning information, visit www.nscareeroptions.ca.

Good luck with your job search!