

**TOP  
TRANSFERABLE  
SKILLS FOR**

**TODAY'S  
JOB  
MARKET**

**HOW TO BE A  
STUDENT  
RESEARCHER**

**DURING A  
PANDEMIC**

**THE  
CO-OP  
ADVANTAGE**

**YOUR  
STUDENT  
RÉSUMÉ  
MADE SIMPLE**

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**NEWSLETTER**



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# HOW TO BE A STUDENT RESEARCHER DURING A PANDEMIC

WRITTEN BY AHMAD GALUTA

So you're a curious student who appreciates learning, discovering, and innovating. But what kind of career can curiosity get you? Well, one major and impactful avenue that your curiosity can take you as a student is research.

In this article, we're going to break down what the research process looks like, how you can contribute as a student, and how to land your dream research position.

## WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF RESEARCH?

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, research is defined as the "detailed study of a subject, especially in order to discover new information or reach a new understanding". Using the current COVID-19 pandemic as an example, medical research has played an important role in diagnosing patients, determining effective preventative measures (e.g. wearing masks), developing vaccines, and validating the effectiveness of various treatments. The beautiful thing about research, which is especially clear in the development of COVID vaccines, is the worldwide collaboration of scientists with the intention of improving human health, knowledge, and prosperity.

## WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH PROCESS LOOK LIKE?

The research process is cyclical. There are **six steps** and the process both starts and ends with knowledge. Before embarking on any research endeavor, it's important to know what information already exists by conducting a **literature review**. Only then can you truly identify gaps in knowledge or aspects of current knowledge that could use improvement.





Once you've identified a gap, it's time to **pose a hypothesis** or research question to fill that gap. Next, you need to **devise a plan** that's structured in a way that allows you to prove your hypothesis. At this point, you're well prepared to **execute your plan** and collect data. After all your hard work, you **analyze your results** to make sense of your data. Finally, you **write and publish** your work so the entire world can learn from your discovery! The process sounds a bit reminiscent of your science labs, right? That's because the research process follows the same scientific method.

## HOW CAN YOU CONTRIBUTE?

It all depends on the type of research that you're interested in! However, if executing your plan requires you to be present in a lab, you might encounter some difficulties, given the restrictions with the pandemic. Additionally, there are many pieces of lab equipment that are very complicated and/or expensive, so using these may require special training or permissions. However, you can contribute to the research process in many other phases, including conducting literature reviews,

posing a hypothesis, devising a plan, analyzing results, and publishing manuscripts. If you're new to a field of research, it's best to focus on a literature review to get acquainted with the knowledge in the field.

## HOW TO LAND A RESEARCH POSITION

Ironically, you often need to do research to find a research position. It's always useful to start by looking into what **scholarships and funding programs** are available to you. There are [summer research programs](#) created specifically for high school and undergraduate students that guarantee you a paid research opportunity, either locally or overseas. You'll then want to figure out what type of research you'd like to pursue because this will strongly influence your decision regarding what lab you're going to work in. The next step, **finding a research supervisor**, is a tedious process that could take weeks or months, so it's best to start well in advance. Your research supervisor will have a major impact on your overall experience, so it's highly recommended to choose wisely. A good place to start would be doing a Google search of professors at your local university



within the department that you'd like to work in. Once you've come up with a shortlist of potential research supervisors, **send your application!** Typically, you'll send professors an email indicating your interest in their work and eagerness to contribute. Don't forget to attach your CV and transcript (or report card). It's also recommended to personalize each email by mentioning specific work that the researcher has done and offering your input. After you've sent your application by email, you might have to **follow up** a week or two later, since researchers are busy people and may not respond to every email. Sending a follow-up email shows the researcher that you're truly interested and will most likely elicit a response.

## **THE IMPACT AND BENEFITS OF RESEARCH**

As a researcher, you are at the forefront of innovation contributing to discoveries that will improve our understanding of the world and the quality of human life. You will have a role in creating solutions to worldwide problems and knowledge that will have a long-lasting impact. This could mean creating vaccines for a worldwide pandemic, discovering historical knowledge, or developing a new creative method of communication. The possibilities are endless. As a curious individual, you will feel naturally rewarded by the cycle of inquiry and discovery involved in the research. As a bonus, a career in research offers you the chance to become a published author and have plenty of opportunities to travel and network with other brilliant minds!







# THE CO-OP ADVANTAGE

WRITTEN BY KAY ASPINALL

Being a high school student can be hard. Really hard, actually. On top of the regular stresses of assignments, extracurriculars, and maintaining friendships, choosing a university program felt like I was being pressured to have my whole future figured out despite the fact that I was still a teenager. My anxiety was in overdrive most of the time and I was constantly afraid of making the wrong choices. Now that I'm close to finishing my undergraduate program, there are still a lot of tough decisions ahead of me related to graduate studies and my career, but I feel a much greater sense of direction and purpose when I think about my future. How did my perspective shift so drastically in only five years? There's no one simple answer, but I can confidently say that choosing to participate in a university co-op program had a major impact on my outlook.

## WHAT IS CO-OP?

You may have heard of co-op programs in high school or even participated in one yourself, but co-op in university is a little different. First of all, the majority of university co-op placements are paid.

Additionally, they are more competitive than high school co-op programs; at the University of Ottawa, you have to maintain an academic average of at least 80% to be eligible to participate in co-op. There are also several mandatory workshops that you must complete before the end of your second year. These are meant to teach you practical skills like how to write a student résumé, how to succeed at interviews, and how to make the most of your work terms.

During your second semester of your second year, you'll apply for a variety of jobs through the co-op office (or on your own) and complete a series of interviews with different employers. Through a process of ranking by both employers and student candidates, students are matched to jobs. Then, in the summer following your second full year of undergraduate studies, you'll start your first four-month work placement and then alternate between working and studying every semester thereafter until you have completed four work terms (roughly 16 months in total).





## FIGURING OUT WHAT YOU WANT TO DO

As a high school student, you've probably heard this question a million times: "So what are you going to do when you graduate?". I've often struggled with making big decisions when it comes to school and work, partially because I've been lucky enough to have a lot of options. My grades were good enough to open a variety of doors for me, plus I have a wide range of interests, so choosing a university program was difficult enough, let alone a specific career path.

Co-op is uniquely helpful in this regard. When I was looking at job postings before my first work term, I was largely focused on applying to jobs that I could do with the skills that I had. During that first placement, I had a great time working with the federal government coordinating programming for summer students. It also gave me the opportunity to learn more about which aspects of that work I really enjoyed and which were less interesting to me. By the time I was applying for jobs for my second work placement, and certainly, for my later placements, I had shifted my focus from applying to jobs that I could do to applying for jobs that I really wanted to do. In particular, I learned that I really enjoy working in communications and media - so much that I plan on pursuing a Master's degree in the field and building a career in public relations. Without the chance to experience jobs in different contexts, I wouldn't have nearly as much confidence in determining a path for myself after my undergraduate degree.

## BUILDING YOUR SKILLS & RESUME

I'm now nearing the end of my undergraduate studies (finally!) and I've started to think about working for a year or two before I go to grad school. This means that I've looked at a LOT of

Near the beginning of each placement, you're expected to write learning and performance goals for yourself that will guide your work during the term. These goals are also useful for creating your work term report at the end of each placement, which essentially acts as a reflection on the work you completed and the skills you learned.

This may sound like a lot of work, and it can be at times. However, you get out of the program what you put into it, and if you're interested in applying your learning in a practical context, there's no better way to do it. Now that we've covered the basics of what co-op involves, here are my top three reasons for choosing a university co-op program.



entry-level job postings to get an idea of what opportunities are available. One of the things that has surprised me about many of these positions is that despite being listed as “entry-level” or ideal for recent graduates, employers are often looking for candidates with 1-2 years of relevant work experience.

Participating in co-op means that I will graduate from my undergraduate studies with 16 months (4 work terms X 4 months each) of work experience in my field on my résumé. It also means that I've already started to develop many of the job-related skills that employers are looking for in candidates and that I am familiar with working in a professional environment. In a competitive job market, these are all significant advantages. If you want to create a smooth transition from student life to a professional career, co-op is the best way to prepare yourself.

## **EARNING INCOME**

One of the key life lessons that I've learned during my time at university is the importance of managing money. Between tuition, books, rent, and other living expenses, it's expensive to be a student and every bit of extra income helps. Participating in a co-op program has allowed me to pay my own way during the terms that I'm working and even open a savings account. There are lots of ways for students to make money, but few options offer the professional development opportunities and the remuneration (often above minimum wage, especially in later placements) that co-op provides to students. Additionally, many co-op students I know have continued working for their employers part-time during the academic semester after their placement ends. If you want to make good money doing work that's relevant to your field of study, you should seriously consider adding a co-op program to your degree.





# Your Student Résumé Made Simple

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Written by Ahmad Galuta



Students have been and will continue to be important contributors to society's workforce. Whether you want to make some extra money or gain career-related experience through work, it's crucial to have a résumé on hand when applying for any position. In today's fast-paced world, students need to be prepared for opportunities whenever they arise. After all, in the words of Zig Ziglar, "success occurs when opportunity meets preparation".

A résumé is a one-page summary that shows your prospective employer or supervisor who you are, your education, skills, and experiences. A résumé is not a static document but should change with time to incorporate all your new experiences and competencies. Furthermore, a résumé should always be tailored to the specific position you're applying for to prove that you're the one for the job!

*So, what should you include in a resume?*

## **CONTACT DETAILS**

Ensure your potential supervisor knows who you are and can get a hold of you by providing your full name, telephone number, and a professional email address (it's time to ditch that email address you made in grade five if you're still using it). You can also provide links to your LinkedIn profile, website, blog, or any online content that's relevant to the position you're applying for. This section should be the first thing someone notices when they read your résumé.





## OBJECTIVE

This should be placed immediately following your contact details in a separate section. Make it short, sweet, and specific (3 S's). Start off by mentioning one of your strengths and how your education or experience will help you perform in the position that you're applying for. It's also important to make reference to the specific position and the company. Finally, mention how you'll bring value to the company.

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

List all your work and professional experiences in their own section and in reverse-chronological order (latest experiences first). If you don't have any work experience yet, you can mention your volunteer experience here. For each position, indicate your role and list your key responsibilities, including any key achievements that are worth mentioning. When listing your responsibilities and achievements, use action verbs such as increased, developed, managed, assisted, engineered, etc.

## EDUCATION

Summarize the main highlights of your high school or undergraduate education. State the schools that you've attended, their location, and your expected graduation date. You can also mention your GPA, any classes that you've attended that are relevant to the job, and any honors or distinctions you have received.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

To make your résumé stand out from the competition and show your prospective supervisor that you're unique, include any additional information about yourself that is useful for the position you're applying for. For instance, it's common to include a list of hard and soft skills. Hard skills are more technical and training-based (e.g. data entry, marketing, project management), while soft skills are learned passively over a lifetime of experience (e.g. emotional intelligence, communication, professionalism). You should also include certifications, volunteer work, language skills, extra-curricular, and even hobbies, as long as they're relevant to the position.





If you're still unsure of where to start or would like more information, Zety is a great online resource. They also offer free templates, which makes it much easier to format your résumé by filling in the blanks.

Great! Now that you're ready to write (or improve) your résumé, keep in mind the following Dos and Don'ts:

- Do keep your résumé short (1 page)
- Do make your overall résumé clear, concise, and compelling (3 C's)
  - Clear: The résumé layout should be tidy and easy to read. Avoid large blocks of text and non-standard fonts.
  - Concise: Keep all your statements as short and specific as possible. If possible, include numbers to show the impact of your work (e.g. increased sales by 20% over a 4 month period).
  - Compelling: Use persuasive action verbs that demonstrate exactly how you took charge during your experiences and made a real impact.
- Do categorize your experiences (e.g. education, work, volunteer, extra-curricular).
- Do state your experiences in reverse-chronological order for each category.
- Do list skills that are relevant to the job you're applying for.
- Do proof-read your résumé and get feedback.
- Don't overload your résumé with text. If you must include the information, it's best to summarize.
- Don't crowd a lot of information together. Don't write full paragraphs or generic statements (e.g. assisted the management team in being more productive; helped the marketing team fulfill their duties).
- Don't mention irrelevant information or skills.
- Don't use personal pronouns like "I", "me", or "my".

***“Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life.”***

—Confucius





# Top Transferable Skills for Today's Job Market

BY KAY ASPINALL

Students and young graduates entering the workforce today can expect to hold a variety of jobs throughout their careers, whether it's due to uncertain economic conditions, a desire to travel, or the availability of certain types of work. This means that it's more important than ever to develop skills that are transferable across positions. These are often so-called "soft skills", which is to say that they are abilities or qualities that are formed through habit rather than acquired knowledge. They contrast with "hard skills", which describe more tangible, technical competencies that are often learned through training or education. Both types of skills are important in the workplace; however, soft skills are generally more easily transferable between positions or fields.

*So what kind of transferable skills are employers looking for?*

It depends on the field, but there are several abilities that can be commonly found on job postings across different industries. Here are the top five transferable skills that students should develop in preparation for entering the workforce.

## **#1 - CRITICAL THINKING**

Regardless of your chosen field, employers are looking for candidates who can see problems from a variety of perspectives and find effective solutions. This involves carefully examining the possible outcomes of different courses of action and logically evaluating which is best. Whether you're an engineer, a lawyer, a therapist, or a business analyst, your work will almost certainly involve some degree of critical thinking and problem-solving, so it's important to start developing this skill early. There are a variety of



ways to improve your critical thinking, including joining a debate club, getting informed about political candidates before voting, or taking classes that involve in-depth analysis of theories or issues.

## #2 - COMMUNICATION

Another crucial skill in today's world of work is communication. Whether it's writing, speaking, or even your body language, it's important to be able to convey your ideas clearly and effectively. Key aspects of communication include active listening, conflict resolution, and confidence, all of which can be applied in almost any job. Paying careful attention to your word choice, audience, tone, and gestures when you converse with others will help you to get your message across as effectively as possible. To improve your communication skills, consider asking an academic advisor, tutor, or teacher for detailed feedback on your writing and presentations.

## #3 - TEAMWORK

In almost every profession, you'll have to interact with others in some capacity or another. Many positions (especially early in your career) will require you to work as part of a team, whether it's conducting research in a lab, developing a marketing strategy, or even playing in an orchestra. Communication and listening skills are crucial here, as is developing an understanding of the way that your teammates work, even if that's different from your own work style. Organization is another key element of teamwork, otherwise, it can be difficult to keep track of all the different parts of a project (anyone who's ever worked on a group project knows exactly what I'm talking about here). As a student, you have many opportunities to improve your teamwork skills, from class projects to volunteering to extracurricular activities like sports or band. For tips on effective teamwork in virtual settings, check out the September issue of our monthly newsletter.







## #4 - RESEARCH

If you don't plan on a career in the academic or hard sciences, you may not think that research will be an important part of your work. However, research skills feature in more careers than you might realize: financial analysts, journalists, political aides, communications specialists, and more all do different types of research as part of their jobs. The ability to identify credible sources, determine key points, synthesize information from different sources, and make inferences based on your findings are all important skills for almost all industries. You can improve your research skills by asking your librarian and/or teachers for help or taking courses that involve research methodologies.

## 5 - ORGANIZATION

Your teachers have probably been highlighting the importance of organization for years, and they're right! Being able to create a plan for your work, manage your time, and identify key resources and contacts are critical competencies in almost every position you could hold. Many jobs involve a variety of moving parts - you may find yourself working with multiple different people and on multiple projects at once. Deadlines will often overlap, so it's important to keep track of your various commitments. To improve your organization skills, try creating a study schedule for yourself (we have a handy how-to guide in the October issue of our monthly newsletter) or using a project management tool like Trello to organize your tasks.



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