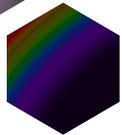
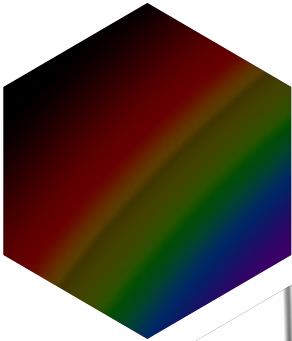


# APPLYING FOR JOBS

FOR THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY



***This guidebook reflects information from 2020 and may change over time.***

***This guidebook has been produced with funding and support from  
Alberta Status of Women.***

# RESUME AND COVER LETTER BASICS

Resumes are the foundation of every job application. They're the basic way to communicate your experience, skills, contact information, and references to a company you want to work for. Hiring managers and supervisors often see dozens of resumes (or even hundreds) for every position, making it even more important to make sure that your application stands out from the rest.

Cover letters are your chance to make a first impression in your own words. They allow you to introduce yourself, set the stage for your resume, and add your unique voice to the application process. The basics of resumes and cover letters are applicable to every job you can apply to, and getting them wrong can prevent a resume from being considered. Getting them right and creating an engaging resume and cover letter, on the other hand, can help you capture an employer's attention and get your application to the interview stage.

## BUILDING YOUR RESUME

Resume templates can be a good starting point. Templates can make basic resumes and cover letters more attractive, and can include graphic elements or non-traditional formats to help emphasize your strengths. Templates are available on many word processors like Microsoft Word or Google Docs as well as online from a variety of resume building websites like [creddle](#), graphic design websites like [canva](#), and job websites like [indeed](#). Many templates come with versions for resumes and cover letters for consistency in both your documents.

Templates are a good way to start with a cohesive design, but the template should be a good match to your experience and the position you're applying for. An application for a barista or server probably doesn't require a skills-based resume format over a traditional chronology, for example, or one that emphasizes design over space for your resume's entries. But if you're applying to an office job for the first time and are worried about not having enough experience, an attractive template could pique an interviewer's interest in your resume while a skills-based format could help you focus their attention on areas where you excel.

Some basics may seem to go without saying, but it's worth mentioning that your resume should, in fact, include your work experience. Your full work history may not be necessary; anything from more than ten years ago does not need to be included unless it's specifically relevant to your application. If you have many experience entries from different positions and organisations, you may need to trim some of them to avoid distracting from more relevant entries. If you have a post-secondary degree or are enrolled in a degree

program, have specialised training, or possess any relevant additional credentials, these can be included in your resume under a separate heading for education and training.

Other extra-basic basics: Resumes and cover letters should be written in clear, professional language, without use of slang terms or profanity. They should not be written in a casual style and, though this isn't everyone's strong point, they *must* be checked for spelling and grammar. Font sizes of 11 or 12 point are best. If submitting a resume digitally, you'll typically want to send it as a PDF to retain your formatting. Make sure the file name is clear and professional. Unless instructed otherwise, it should include your name. You might also want it to include the title of the position you are applying for or a reference number if one is included in the posting. Always check the job posting for any specific requests regarding formatting and naming conventions. When hiring managers are filtering through a large volume of applications, even small things can be enough to remove you from the competition. You want to demonstrate your attention to detail and ability to follow instructions.

Regardless of your choice of design, format, or individual templates, every resume and cover letter must include your contact information. This includes your name, phone number, and email address, and can include your physical address (or parts of it, like your city and province). Email addresses should be professional, avoiding crude or slang terms. Best practice is typically something like *firstname.lastname@email.com*; an address like *FortNite420@email.com* could give the impression that an applicant is too immature for the job.

Read the job posting carefully and use it to tailor your resume and cover letter to highlight the skills and experience they are looking for. Echo the language they use. Go to the company's website and social media for more insight on their values, mandate, and brand to further strengthen your application. Demonstrating shared value and understanding of a company can go a long way towards getting your foot in the door for an interview.

If possible, your cover letter should be addressed to the person in charge of hiring for the position. If the name of that person is not known, *Dear Hiring Manager* is a safe bet. Your cover letter should introduce you to the company, and can include an outline of your strengths, your goals for the position or the organisation, a highlight of your relevant experience, or anything you feel is relevant to your application but isn't part of your resume. Cover letters shouldn't be more than one page, and should end with a thank-you for the time taken to consider your application.



Use your cover letter to emphasise why you should be considered for this position. You might also want to share why you want this position in particular. Honesty is the best policy, but *“I just got fired and really need to pay my rent”* might be too honest. However, if you looked at the company’s website and saw that they have commitments to reduce their carbon emissions by 40% in the next 5 years, you might mention your passion for environmental conservation and how you are excited at the opportunity of working with a company that shares this value and is demonstrating responsible leadership in this area. A little flattery doesn’t hurt, but make it genuine and don’t go overboard. Let this be an opportunity to show that you understand the company and that you are a strong fit for the position.

### **DO I NEED TO USE MY LEGAL NAME?**

You get to decide for yourself what your comfort level is around what name(s) you use for yourself on your job application, on your resume, or in an interview. It is a personal decision with no right answer. Depending on someone’s unique circumstances, there might be different concerns around using legal vs chosen names. While there might be a sense of pressure or expectation to use one’s legal name during the job application process, it is worth noting that many people of all identities regularly use nicknames and non-legal names without question or concern (Robert might go by Bob or Marie Lisette might go by Lee). Even when signing legal documents, generally standard practice is to sign with the name you commonly use. Fun fact: it is the act of signing the document that matters more than what is actually signed, meaning that you are still bound to the agreement even if you sign it with a smiley face instead of your name. That said, if hired, you’ll want to be sure that HR or whoever manages contracts, payroll, ect. has the information they need to ensure you can get paid and set up with benefits if available. It is recommended that your legal name be used

for any sort of tax documents, insurance forms, or background checks. Note that even if your name has been legally changed, your previous names may be disclosed to your employer during a background check.

Your name is the first thing a potential employer knows about you when they receive your application. How you identify yourself here might determine how you are perceived going forward. Depending on your gender expression and level of comfort around being out in different ways to different people, you might make different choices about how you share your name during the application process. A couple options might include:

- Using your chosen name on your application and explaining later that you are also known by different name
- Using your legal name on your application and explaining later that you use a different name
- Using your chosen name in your resume's heading and in your email address while also using your legal name as an A.K.A. in your email signature or to sign your cover letter (or use your legal name throughout and then your chosen name as the A.K.A.)
- Using the first initial of your legal name followed by your chosen name (S. Taylor Smith)
- Using your legal name followed by your chosen name in quotation marks (Sam "Taylor" Smith)

If you feel comfortable doing so, you might also consider sharing your pronouns. Some people choose to display theirs prominently alongside their name in the header of their resume. Others prefer to have it alongside their contact information or in their signature. Others don't include it at all. The choice is yours!

## REFERENCES & PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

References can be potentially difficult to navigate, especially if previous employers/previous references aren't aware of your current name or your gender identity. If you aren't comfortable re-introducing yourself to past references, or find you don't have as many as you need, there are some things that can help. Any references are better than none, so consider asking coworkers who know you better to act as references if supervisors aren't an option. Consider other professional connections like volunteer supervisors or even teachers. If that isn't possible or you're still coming up short, you can ask a friend to be a reference. The reference should come from someone who has known you for a while (two years is often considered a good benchmark if possible), and should *not* be from a relative or partner. You should specify that this reference is a character reference. For added weight, ideally your character reference should come from someone who's been

employed at the same organisation for two or more years. The more advanced in their profession or career, the better.

Always talk to your references before listing them and giving out their contact information. While technically references aren't allowed to actually say anything bad about you, you want to be sure you are getting the strongest references possible - and not everyone is always willing or able to do that. Don't be afraid to ask your references to highlight the particular strengths you want to emphasize with a new potential employer!

Just because you put an employer on a resume, that doesn't mean your new potential employer has permission to contact them. Even if you used a different name or presented differently at a previous workplace, you absolutely can and should include them in your resume.

If you want to include a former employer who you weren't previously out to as a reference, you might want to reach out and talk to them about your situation. Explain that you want to continue to use them as a reference and that if you are to do so, it is important for them to use your current name and pronouns. This can seem daunting but is often worth a try, especially if you had a strong working relationship in the past. If you are concerned about their ability to follow through appropriately, you can have a friend call and pretend to be a prospective employer to see how they do.

If your new employer wants to contact a listed employer who wasn't necessarily on your reference list and who you are not comfortable speaking with or coming out to, you might consider speaking with your potential employer about the situation if it feels safe to do so. You might clarify with the hiring manager or person calling your references that you do not want your former employer knowing about your transition and that while they should use your former name with this employer, you do not want any other employees at this new company to know your former name and to keep all information regarding your transition in strictest confidence.

## **SKILL TRANSFERENCE**

Comparing your resume to a position's requirements can be intimidating, especially if you don't have a lot of experience in that field. You may find, however, that you're more qualified than you think, and positions may not be as far above your skills as it first seems. Accurate resumes start with making certain that you have an accurate picture of your own skills and experience. Regardless of what your previous experience may look like, it's important to avoid devaluing and underestimating your strengths.

Many people have more and wider-ranging skills than they realise. For one example, if you've worked as a restaurant server, you may not think of yourself as a skilled customer service representative. But you probably have used skills like:

- Effectively communicating with customers and other staff members; multitasking between different customers and service areas
- Anticipating customer needs, problem-solving as needed and following through to ensure satisfaction
- Delivering excellent service and performing well under pressure

Too narrowly interpreting your experience can make it a stumbling block rather than an advantage. In customer service or reception, the most important skills are your abilities to think in terms of fulfilling customer needs, interact with people in polite, open, effective ways, and delivering service within certain time expectations...the same things that make a successful server.

Rethinking your resume in broader or more general terms might show that your experience and strengths are more universal, not necessarily limited to the bare facts of your previous positions. Getting a meal that was made incorrectly back to the kitchen and making sure that it's right the second time may not *seem* like "problem-solving" or "troubleshooting", but the only difference is the setting and the tools you use to fix the issue. Try to focus less on the specific tasks that you did, and more on the bigger picture that includes them. Handing coffee through a drive-thru window may not seem like a transferable skill, but helping to ensure a smooth, engaging customer experience is. Server-to-customer-service is just the example here; the most important thing to have in mind when looking at whether your skills are transferable is to look for the skills *behind* the skills.

Some things to avoid are overcomplicating/oversimplifying your resume and redefining rather than rethinking. Broader interpretations of your skills shouldn't slip into redefining them as something they're not. To return to the restaurant server example, recognising the transferability of your service skills shouldn't result in rebranding yourself as something other than a server. Calling yourself a "*guest services representative*" instead (unless that was your actual job title) could be seen as misrepresentation, especially if you advance to interviews and the potential employer contacts your references and prior employers who would tell them you were a server.

More general wording can help you with applying your experience to new workplaces, but if it goes too far, it can result in vagueness or difficult language. Your resume entries shouldn't exclude the nature of your previous positions, or be written in terms so broad that the fundamentals are lost.

Describing one of your strengths as *“I leverage multiple streams of experience to ensure excellence in unfamiliar environments”* is significantly more difficult to decipher than something like *“Using previously acquired skills and principles allows me to consistently succeed in new positions.”* Both sentences say the same thing, *“I’m good at using old skills and experience at new jobs”*, but the first uses buzzwords and words with lots of syllables, which aren’t always easy to read (especially if your resume is the hiring manager’s 22<sup>nd</sup> of the day). The second statement, on the other hand, is professionally worded but much, much clearer.

## JOB SEARCHING WHILE LGBTQ+

Unfortunately, many of us in the LGBTQ+ community will find ourselves in an unsafe workplace at some point. Many of us encounter limited potential job opportunities, face a lack of transportation, or are expected to enter certain industries by family members who are unaware or unsupportive of our identities. Even without factors like those, it can be hard to find a job that’s safe to apply to. Some aspects of keeping yourself safe, like knowing the differences in workplace culture between sectors, can seem common-sense but actually require experience (whether your own or someone else’s) to learn. Some potential employers may seem different from the inside than from the outside, or have policies and guidelines that only work on paper. Knowing exactly what you’re getting into may not always be possible, and there are times when there may not be a good option. But there are steps you can take to make sure you have as much information as possible before you start a new job.

Please note that the observations and guidelines below are generalisations and should not be thought of as strict rules without exceptions. Ultimately, the decision of whether a workplace is safe can only be made by you.

Service industries (restaurants, hotels, retail shops, etc.) are often felt to be safer for LGBTQ+ people than other sectors (oil & gas, manufacturing, etc.). Industries where the primary job roles are stereotypically masculine may still expect employees to live up to the stereotype, and for those who do not, they can become intolerant or dangerous workplaces. People who don’t fit “traditional” ideas of being straight and cisgender are often expected to go into sectors like hospitality - in other words, areas that are often viewed as “woman’s work”. In more “masculine” sectors there might be more concern about the potential to move from intolerance or hostility to verbal abuse or physical violence. Areas traditionally dominated by women might carry less concern about physical escalation as they often need to consider the

presence of customers - something that is not a consideration in a factory setting, for example.

Service industries can also be considered “open” in the sense that a restaurant, café, or shop receives and interacts with customers on a regular basis. These businesses are exposed to a wider variety of people and (*ideally*) serve customers of varying racial, cultural, religious, and LGBT identities, which can lead to greater tolerance and acceptance as an employer. Job settings like factories or warehouses, on the other hand, are “closed” in that they don’t directly serve outside customers or guests. Combined with the stereotypical expectations mentioned above, these workplaces can potentially develop insular employee cultures that are resistant to change and “outsiders.” On the other hand, some people find that these tight knit communities can be a place of safety and security once they are inside them, defying stereotypical expectations. The often independent nature of many warehouse or factory positions where one does not have to spend a lot of time engaging with other coworkers or customers can also be seen as an ideal scenario for some.

Public sector jobs, those under local, provincial, or federal government, are typically governed by significantly more inclusion and non-discrimination policies than much of the private sector. Public sector positions can include postal workers (federal), jobs in healthcare and post-secondary (provincial), and jobs in your local library or maintaining local parks (municipal). These positions are also more likely to be unionised and if so, may also have higher pay and more benefits than comparable jobs in the private sector. While actual employee experience will vary by work setting and role, public sector employers are much more likely to bar discrimination on the basis of gender identity or sexual orientation. These employers’ policies can also include important protections, such as protecting your right to use washrooms aligning with your gender identity.

When applying, and throughout the application/hiring process, do as much research as possible. Job-hunting sites like Glassdoor and Indeed have employer profiles that can include reviews left by employees. Ask around in your community and other networks too. Even “my friend’s friend had a positive/negative experience there” is more information than you had before. Some employers will be known for inclusive cultures or benefits that cover gender-affirming procedures, and vice versa.

If possible, try to find opinions from customers/guests/etc. as well. Treating customers well doesn’t always translate to treating employees well, of course, but employers rarely treat employees better than the people who pay for the

company's goods or services. Lack of respect for customers isn't a good sign for potential employees. Incidents of overt racism and harm towards marginalised people are definite red flags.

Pay attention and ask questions. If you receive emails from interviewers, for example, look for pronouns in their email signatures. If your resume included your pronouns and/or preferred name, watch for reactions to them. If you feel safe enough, ask interviewers about anti-discrimination policies and inclusion of LGBTQ+ people. Ask about employee culture in the specific location or site you'll be working in, and whether LGBTQ+ people have succeeded with this employer in the past or are employed there in the present.

Listen to your instincts. Guidelines and suggestions aside, sometimes there is no way to know beforehand how safe or tolerant your job will be. And unfortunately, sometimes we don't have a choice but to take the job that we can get, whether or not it's accepting or unsafe. There are laws in place that are supposed to protect you from harm or discrimination in the workplace, but filing a complaint comes after the fact and sometimes can feel like it is not worth the effort when we are focusing our energy on the basics of getting through the day and trying to figure out how to pay our bills. It's important to have others who we can rely on to help us through the process and support us in our lives including work and outside of it. For our own sake and the sake of our mental, emotional, and physical health, we need to lean on our loved ones - family, partners, community - and make use of the resources that are available to us. Reaching out is important when you need help, and help is something we all need eventually. Don't feel like you need to navigate uncertain or dangerous situations alone.





calgary outlink

Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity