



A STUDENT'S GUIDE TO EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

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INTRODUCTION TO EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Experiential learning opportunities are hands on learning experiences that help you prepare for future employment, allowing you to further expand your knowledge and skills in a field of your choice.

Experiential learning is a growing field of learning, and is becoming increasing important for students in today's economy, in order to develop the right skills and experience for future employment opportunities. Some common experiential opportunities that you can participate in, during school as well as post-secondary, include volunteering, coops, internships, etc.

The following guide goes through these opportunities and how to get them, the benefits experiential learning provides for students. The end of this guide will also include resume and cover letter writing skills, and interview preparation tips, sample questions, and an assessment guide to ensure you are making the most of your opportunity.

BENEFITS OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

- Allows you to **develop crucial skills and experiences** to support your learning and development.
- Gives you an improved attitude and **interest in your education**, as you are actively taking part.
- Great way to **network and meet new people**, building relationships with future employers.
- You gain practical experiences that employers value as you **build your resume**.
- Combines your **academic studies with alternating work terms**, constantly relating your theory in class to the real world.
- Develop **top employability skills** and work habits to be used in the workforce.¹
- Helps you to identify future **career and academic directions**.
- Allows you to develop the skills you need for **easier transition into the workforce** after graduation.
- Gives you the opportunity to not only connect, but also **expand classroom knowledge**.

Not convinced yet?
Here are the facts.

80%

of Ontario employers recognize EL as source for new talent and potential hires.²

2 years

Students who take part in EL opportunities are more likely to pay off debt within

60%

of Ontario undergraduate students will be benefited an EL placement in the near future.³

BUT DON'T JUST TAKE IT FROM US!

Here's what students had to say when we asked what experiential learning meant to them.

"Just completed my first co-op, now going into my second! It has allowed me to learn more about my field and give me a clearer idea of what I would like to pursue as a career. It also gives me the chance to build my resume and network with many people and companies."

- Nikita, 3rd year University Student,
Honours Biochemistry co-op

"Experiential Learning allowed me to use what I had learned through textbooks and classroom lectures, and learn additional new skills and techniques that one can only learn first hand."

- Marium, College Graduate, Pharmacy Field Placement

"I had the opportunity to engage in a summer co-op in which I learned a lot about the industry. I also got first hand knowledge regarding how to deal with different types of consumers. The skills and tools that I developed at my placement I can utilize in the future as I advance in my career."

- Asfiya, 4th year University Student,
Summer Co-op Experience

"The program allowed me to practice and learn conversational French, which allowed me to correct pronunciation and grammatical errors as well learn expressions. In the end, I could express myself better because I learned some new rules for conversational French and put to practice what I had learned in school."

- Katarina, 3rd year University Student,
Langue et Travail Program

¹Smith, P., and Lam, M. (2013). Campus Recruitment & Benchmark Report: Educator Summary. Canadian Association of Career Educators and Employers.

²Universities Canada (2014). "Leger Marketing Employer Survey." <https://www.univcan.ca/media-room/media-releases/co-op-and-internship-students-a-valuable-source-of-new-talent-survey/>

³Council of Ontario's Universities (2014). "Bringing Life to Learning at Ontario's Universities: Experiential Learning Report" <http://cou.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/COU-Experiential-Learning-Report-2014.pdf>

TYPES OF OPPORTUNITIES



There is a great range of experiential learning opportunities, and before going into one it is best to understand what opportunity will be best for you. The following four are the most common experiential opportunities, and all student's should aim to have at least one of these in their career pathways.

VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering is defined as **giving your time to help a specific cause or organization**. Volunteering comes with many benefits to students, including helping you to connect with your passion and interests, allowing you to **explore different career opportunities** in fields of your interest, helping you to gain new skills and **experience to build your resume**, and is a great networking opportunity and way of meeting new people, increasing your communication skills. You can volunteer at any stage of your career, and is always a great start to experiential learning opportunities.

INTERNSHIPS

Internships are a work-term assignment, typically lasting from 2-16 months in length. They can be paid or unpaid, many taking place in the summer, and near the end of a student's post-secondary education program. This allows students to **apply the skills and knowledge they gained in the classroom in a real work environment**⁵, with potential for full time employment. Internships are a great way for you to gain experience and **start your career**.

CO-OP

Cooperative education opportunities are paid, full time work experiences that alternate periods of **academic study with work terms**, in fields relevant to the student's program of study. Co-ops are offered in high schools, colleges, and universities, and students can **choose opportunities from a variety of sectors**, including marketing and design, arts and media, business and technology, health, education and civil services, as well as skilled trades.⁴

FIELD PLACEMENTS

A field placement includes short-term and unpaid **work placements**, which provide you with hands on experience in your program of study. It is supervised, and provided by your college or university institution. Often these placements will **involve you job shadowing an employee for you to better understand the work environment** and what they do. Field placements can take place anywhere, including in a clinic, social work, education, and much more.

⁴ Peel District School Board (2018) "Cooperative Education." <http://www.peelschools.org/parents/programs/coopeducation/Pages/default.aspx>

⁵ Goode Education Group (2018) "Five Benefits of Completing an Internship." The Good Universities Guide. <https://www.gooduniversities-guide.com.au/education-blogs/after-graduation/five-benefits-of-completing-an-internship>

FINDING THE RIGHT OPPORTUNITY

You may not know what you want to do yet, and that's okay! Experiential learning helps you to explore different career options, and that's what's great about it. Before going to an experiential learning opportunity, go through the following steps to find out what stage you are at and where to look for opportunities.

1

The first step to finding the right opportunity for yourself is **knowing what to look for**. To do this, you need to understand your personal career goals, abilities, values, and learning styles. We recommend [THIS](#) quiz page, which allows you to explore different occupations, as well as to understand your personality, learning styles, and work values. [THIS](#) career quiz is also a great resource that helps you find your best skills and abilities, as well as top careers that match those traits.

2

Whether you are in high school completing your required 40 hours of community service, or simply looking to gain more experience, **VOLUNTEERING is always a great place to start your search for experiential learning opportunities**. There are many resources online for you to search for volunteer opportunities, including the [Peel](#) and [Halton](#) volunteer boards. Be sure to look for volunteer opportunities through your school, and ask your teachers about how to get the best volunteer placement for yourself. Check out our [Additional Resources](#) page for more volunteer resources.

3

One opportunity often overlooked is **co-operative education for high school students**. Students do not have to wait for post-secondary to begin co-op, and can earn credit in grades 11 or 12 through a semester long work placement. It is best to know your education and career interests before going into post-secondary, and high school co-op accomplishes that, while also gaining valuable experience. All Ontario school boards offer co-op, and if you are interested, talk to your schools' teacher, principle, counselor, or contact your [school board](#).

4

Before going into post-secondary, **do your research on what programs offer experiential learning opportunities**. Field placements, Co-ops, Internships, Apprenticeships, are all very important to keep in mind when deciding on a program, and should be one of the top criteria in your decision. To look over different institutions and the experiential opportunities they offer, you can use [THIS](#) data table on our site, or check out the [Additional Resources](#) page.

5

Now that you know what you want and where to look for it, the next step is to **apply to the opportunities**! Whether you are in post-secondary or just searching yourself, be sure to apply early for the jobs you are interested in and do your research! Carefully read job descriptions for all opportunities and apply to all positions you believe will help you grow. Don't be disheartened by any rejections you receive **it's all part of the process**. The next few pages will walk you through how to build a resume, cover letter, and acing an interview.

BUILDING YOUR RESUME

FOR AN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITY

YOUR NAME

youremail@address.com
123 Street Name, City, Zip Code
(123)-246-7890

OBJECTIVE STATEMENT: This section is the first part of the resume your reader will see, and should include a brief summary that hooks the reader, no longer than 1-2 lines. It should summarize who you are and what you are looking for in an opportunity.

SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS: This section includes a list which summarizes the skills you possess that make you qualified for this position. They are your best features, and should take information from your education, any experiences, and projects.

Ex. Demonstrated strong leadership skills through organizing School event

EDUCATION: This section lists your relevant education, and allows you to explain the relevance of your studies to the position you are applying for. Should include your school and program name, expected graduation date, and relevant courses/projects. If you are in post-secondary, high school education is not necessary to include.

EXPERIENCES: This section includes a brief list of your relevant experiences, which can be either volunteer or work. For each experience, be sure to include your role and the organization's name, discuss the tasks and duties you were responsible for, skills you gained and demonstrated, and any achievements you may have had.

RESUME TIPS

- Before writing your resume, carefully consider the job description and requirements, and tailor your resume towards that. Employers often look for key “buzzwords” when reading resumes.
- When discussing your experiences, make sure to consider the positive results of your work, and how you benefited the organization.
- Primary objective statement is no longer a requirement, and many include their summary within the skills and qualifications section
- Keep your resume 1-2 pages in length
- Keep the font size 11-12 pt., in a professional font ie. Times New Roman
- Keep your resume clean and professional
- Attention to detail matters! Look over any spelling or grammar errors, and make sure all information is correct and accurate.

BUILDING YOUR COVER LETTER

FOR AN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITY

A cover letter provides a brief introduction to your resume, as it is generally what employers will read first. It should highlight your top skills and qualifications, and explain why you are the best candidate for the role. It should give employers a glimpse of who you are, and excite them to read more about you.

YOUR NAME

youremail@adress.com | 123 Street Name,City, Zip Code | (123)-246-7890

Date

Recipient Name, Title

Company

Street Address

City, Zip Code

Dear [Recipient Name] [Hiring Manager] [To Whom it May Concern],

The *intro paragraph* should outline who you are, what program you are in/pursuing, what position you are applying for, and why you are writing this letter.

The *body portion* of the letter should consist of 1-2 paragraphs. This should outline why you want this opportunity, and why you would be the best candidate for the position. Pick skills and experiences from your resume and detail how they make you qualified. This paragraph should demonstrate your personality and style.

The *conclusion paragraph* should briefly summarize everything above, restating why you would be the best candidate for the position. Thank the reader for considering your application. It is always nice to close the letter by sharing your excitement for this position, and asking to meet the interviewer in person to further discuss the position.

Sincerely,
Your Name

COVER LETTER TIPS

- If the job description states a cover letter is not required, still write one! Employers see your motivation, and this is important for an experiential learning opportunity
- Don't simply restate your resume. The cover letter should be used to outline additional details and expand on your skills and experiences.
- Discuss what you're going to bring to the table- not just why this position is good for yourself.
- Showcase your skills and what you're capable of- Don't be modest!
- Stay positive, and focus on your strengths- highlight the right skills!
- Keep the letter one page, 11-12 pt. size font, and clean and professional

INTERVIEWING: PREPARATION & TIPS

The interview is the opportunity for you to showcase and discuss your skills and qualifications with the employer, and determine if the position is right for you.

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

RESEARCH

- Analyze the **job description** thoroughly, and make sure you understand your role. What are the skills and qualifications that the job description emphasize?
- There are three main areas that interviewers will judge you on, and determine if you are fit for the position: **knowledge, skills and abilities, and personal characteristics.**⁶
- Focus on these three areas, and relate them back to the job description whenever possible.
- Remember to **do your homework!** Make sure you know everything you can about the company and position you are applying for:
 - The best way to do this is exploring the company's website and social media- understand the their mission statement, goals, products/services, and their management team. **Find out about the organization as much as possible!**
 - Through this, determine what knowledge, skills, and characteristics are required for you to perform the job. Think of situations where you have demonstrated these qualities.

PRESENTATION

- It's important to **look the part** when going for an interview. Dress professionally and make sure you are well groomed.
- Your attire is the first thing that employers see, and statistics show that **first impressions** are determined 55% of the way you dress, act, and first walk in; 38% of the quality of your voice, grammar, and confidence; and 7% by the words you choose to say.⁷

PRACTICE

- When it comes to interviews, **practicing is key!** While you don't know what questions you may be asked, it is always best to go over common interview questions, and predict what questions they can ask about your position specifically.
- Practice your answers for common questions, but don't make it sound too rehearsed- focus on the main points.
- Bring extra copies of any materials you may need, such as your resume and portfolio. Bring any letters of recommendation and references.
- Be on time for the interview- allow for extra travel time in case of any traffic or any delays
- Know and **be yourself!** When it comes to interviews, employers always value confidence.

⁶ Ryerson University. "Interviewing Guide for Co-op Students." <https://www.ryerson.ca/co-op/docs/interviewGuide.pdf>

⁷ College Atlas (2014). "34 Tips For Your Next Job Interview." https://thumbnails-visually.netdna-ssl.com/34-crucial-tips-for-your-next-interview_531a0b6db5acc.jpg

INTERVIEWING: PREPARATION & TIPS

DURING THE INTERVIEW

- Make a **positive first impression**- hiring managers typically make the judgment on whether or not to hire you within the first four minutes.⁸
- If you are interviewing at the company site, it may be important to impress reception and any other staff members
- Always shake hands before and after the interview- make sure to have a nice, firm handshake
- Speak clearly, direct, and straight to the point- keep your responses **short and sweet**.
- Maintain eye contact and keep good posture
- When answering questions, make sure to include **real life examples**, and show how you would **contribute value to the company**.
- While you have anticipated and prepared responses, try not to be thrown off by any surprise questions. **Stay confident** in your answers, and bring up positive points in response to questions. Focus on the three main criteria for analysis: knowledge, skills and abilities, and personal characteristics.
- Make sure to explain why you are interested in the position, and what you have to offer
- Interviewers always ask what questions you may have for them- prepare any questions you may want to ask but make sure it is in a nice order (ask about job expectations first, then later about salary or benefits)
- If you don't have any questions to ask, take that opportunity to make a summary statement about your skills and qualifications, and restate your interest in working for the company.
- Find out what the next steps in the process are and when any decisions will be made. Ask them if they require any transcripts or references
- Thank the interviewers for their time and for the opportunity to meet them.

Sample Interview Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- Strengths and Weaknesses.
- What are your career goals?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- What motivates you?
- Why do you think this would be a good opportunity?
- What are some examples of where you demonstrated leadership skills?
- Why should we consider you?
- What skills or attributes do you have that you can bring to this position?

Illegal Interview questions

Illegal interview questions include any inquiries about *age, marital status, home ownership, financial status, religion, ethnicity, political influences, or national origin*.⁸ These questions may be asked because employers may not realize it is an issue, but if you are not comfortable answering the question, do not answer it. State that you don't feel it affects your qualifications for this position.

⁸ Ryerson University. "Interviewing Guide for Co-op Students." <https://www.ryerson.ca/co-op/docs/interviewGuide.pdf>

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Once you are in an experiential learning placement, it is important to assess the **quality of your learning experience**, which can be done through testing whether each of your learning goals are being met. The following assessments are created for you to use before accepting your placement, during your placement, or on an on-project basis.

BEFORE ACCEPTING A PLACEMENT

Before accepting an opportunity, consider the following criteria for a quality experiential opportunity.

Does the job description relate to your field of study and career goals?	Y E S	N O
Does the job description assure that you will learn new skills and challenge yourself?	Y E S	N O
Is this a paid opportunity?	Y E S	N O
Does the position offer any perks or benefits?	Y E S	N O
Will the opportunity allow you to balance your school and work life, and continue to focus on your studies?	Y E S	N O
Does the opportunity allow for flexibility, in terms of travel distance, timings, etc.	Y E S	N O

DURING/ AFTER THE PLACEMENT

This assessment can be completed during or at the end of the placement, or on an on-project basis. Rate each of your experiences from 1-10 to determine the quality of your experience. If completed during the placement, it is important to discuss these ratings with your supervisor so they can improve on your experience.

	Not Effective	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Very Effective
Is the position following the initial job description?												
Was there educational value in the work you were given?												
Is the work you are assigned being related to your studies and/or career goals?												
Was there educational value in the work you were given?												
Was there a mentor to help guide you through the experience?												
Were you able to develop positive work habits?												
Was your mentor/supervisor considering your ideas?												
Was your supervisor/mentor capable of answering your questions?												

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

EXPLORE FUTURE CAREERS

- Quizzes that explore different occupations for you and your personality, produced by the Canadian Job Bank.
- Quiz that determines your top skills and abilities, and best occupations matching those, produced by the Ontario Government.
- Search different jobs and careers in Ontario.

EXPLORE POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

- DataTable consisting of all University or College programs with an Experiential Learning Component.
- Guide to Ontario Universities
- Guide to Ontario Colleges

FIND VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES IN...

- Peel Region (Mississauga, Brampton, Caledon)
- Peel, Health Services
- Mississauga
- Brampton
- Caledon and Caledon Community Services
- Halton Region and for High School students
- Burlington
- Milton
- Oakville

PREPARING A RESUME & COVER LETTER

- Resume Builder by the Canadian Job Bank
- For Students
- Design a unique resume
- Resume and Cover Letter Templates by Microsoft Office

STUDENT JOB BOARDS

- Job Postings
- Talent Egg

GENERAL JOB BOARDS

- Linkedin
- Indeed
- Monster



For more information and resources, visit the [**ELPH**](#) site.
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