

Changing Careers: Identifying Your Transferable Skills

A guide for newcomers to British Columbia



Vancouver Public Library



Canada

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1. Choosing a New Kind of Work

Introduction

Coming to a new country can often mean a change in career for new immigrants. When you first arrive in Canada, you may need to consider working in a job that is different from your previous occupation.

You already possess a number of skills and attributes required to be successful in this new career.

Taking the time to explore the skills you already have is an important part of your job search process. This guide offers you strategies for identifying your transferable skills to help you find a new kind of work.

Tip:

The list of skills mentioned most by Canadian hiring managers and recruiters seeking to hire new employees include:

- *Communication skills (oral and written)*
- *Teamwork/group/interpersonal skills*
- *Leadership skills*
- *Work-ethic traits, such as drive, stamina, self-motivation, ambition, initiative, reliability, positive attitude toward work*
- *Logic, intelligence, proficiency in field of study*

Source: *Quintessential Careers*

http://www.quintcareers.com/cover_letter_transferable_skills.html

To see what transferable skills are most valued by Canadian employers see:

- **Employability Skills 2000+. Conference Board of Canada**
<http://www.conferenceboard.ca/topics/education/learning-tools/employability-skills.aspx>

2. What are Transferable Skills?

Transferable skills are competencies that can be used in many situations and many types of work. While some of these skills can be taught, most are gained through experience. They are skills you acquire throughout your life – through paid employment, volunteer work, school, hobbies, community activities and/or life experiences.

Most jobs require two types of skill sets:

- *Technical or job-specific skills:* mandatory job requirements such as a degree or diploma, specialized training, etc
- *Non-technical or soft skills:* skills that can be easily used in more than one work environment. These are your transferable skills

Transferable skills include a wide range of abilities such as:

- report writing
- negotiating
- giving presentations
- budgeting
- using the telephone effectively
- dealing with clients
- problem solving
- working in a team
- operating office equipment
- flexibility

For further about types of transferable skills see:

- **Transferable Skills: What are They? JobWave BC**
<http://www.jobwavebc.ca/Resources/Participant/TransferableSkills.html>
- **Skills Identification...What Do You Have to Offer? Community Employment Services. Woodstock, Ontario.**
http://www.ceswoodstock.org/job_search/skillsidcontent.shtml
- **Skills Inventory. Government of Canada Services For Youth**
http://www.youth.gc.ca/eng/media/skills_inventory.shtml

3. Identifying Your Transferable Skills

All your life, you've been acquiring skills that can be transferred to a new career. When exploring your transferable skills think about all of your life experiences, not just your employment history. For example, think about the skills you've acquired through the following activities:

- current & previous employment
- school
- volunteering
- hobbies or interests
- parenting or caring for family members
- sports participation
- other community involvement

Not sure what skills you have?

There are a number of tools that can assist you with identifying your transferable skills.

Try taking the following tests to identify your transferable skills:

- **Motivated Skills Test. Stewart Cooper & Coon.**
<http://stewartcoopercoon.com/jobsearch/freejobsearchtests.phtml>
This test helps you identify:
 - Your proficiencies in a broad range of transferable skill areas
 - Your level of motivation to use these skills
- **Identifying Your Skills. University of Iowa Career Center**
<http://careers.uiowa.edu/guide/Skills/IdentifyingYourSkills.pdf>
- **Transferable Skills Survey. University of Minnesota Duluth**
http://www.d.umn.edu/kmc/student/loon/car/self/career_transfer_survey.html
A quick online test of your transferable skills. Test results will show you your strongest and weakest areas.
- **How Do Your Skills Measure Up? Human Resources & Skills Development Canada**
<http://measureup.towes.com/english/index.asp>
Helps you measure your skills against the "Essential Skills" developed by Human Resources & Skills Development Canada

4. Exploring Careers that Match Your Skills

Once you have identified your transferable skills, how do you find careers that require these skills? There are a number of resources that can help you match skills to careers.

Tip:

If you already have a potential career in mind, try searching a selection of job postings to see what skills are consistently highlighted by employers.

A good starting place is a general job site such as Indeed.ca [<http://ca.indeed.com/>].

The tools below can help you explore possible career options:

- **Build a Career. WorkBC**
<http://www.buildacareer.ca/>
A smartphone and web application that uses a quiz to assess your skill set. It then provides a list of careers that are your best matches, as well as a list of “hot careers” in British Columbia.
- **Skills Search. O*NET Online**
<http://www.onetonline.org/skills/>
The Skills Search function is designed to help you use your skill set to identify occupations for exploration.
- **Working in Canada. Explore Careers by Skills & Knowledge**
http://www.workingincanada.gc.ca/report_skillknowledge-eng.do?action=search_form
Use this checklist to explore career options that match your skills and knowledge.
- **National Occupational Classification (NOC)**
<http://www5.hrsdc.gc.ca/NOC/English/NOC/2011/Welcome.aspx>
The National Occupational Classification (NOC) contains descriptions of 520 occupational groups and includes over 30,000 occupational titles in Canada. The NOC provides detailed descriptions of main duties and employment requirements for each occupation.
- **Skills Profiler. America’s Career InfoNet**
<http://www.careerinfonet.org/skills/default.aspx>
Use the Skills Profiler to create a list of your skills and match them to job types that use those skills.

5. Presenting Your Skills to Employers

Even if you do not have direct experience in a specific profession, that doesn't mean you lack the relevant skills to succeed in the job. Your job is to convince potential employers that you have the skills that they are looking for.

In resumes, cover letters, and during interviews, you should always portray your skills as applicable to the job you seek.

Use the job description or advertisement to understand and prioritize the transferable skills the employer might value most. Then include in these skills in your resume by showing how your experience matches what the employer is seeking.

Remember that your cover letter is your introduction. If you are applying for a position that is not directly related to your previous work experience, include a paragraph in the cover letter that connects your transferable skills to the job description.

Tip:

To find out what skills employers are looking for network!

Speak with employers and workers in your desired field, attend industry events and connect with industry associations to learn which skills are important. Once you have a good understanding of desirable skills, you'll know which ones to emphasize in your resume and cover letter.

The sources below provide specific examples how to incorporate transferable skills into your resume and cover letter:

- **Transferable Job Skills for Job Seekers. Quintessential Careers**
http://www.quintcareers.com/transferable_skills.html
See the articles on presenting your transferable skills in resumes and cover letters
- **Marketing Your Transferable Skills. Wilfred Laurier University Career Development Centre.**
<http://navigator.wlu.ca/content/documents/fileItemController/GRAD%20Marketing%20Your%20Transferable%20Skills%202011-12.pdf>
- **Examples of Marketing Transferable Skills**
www.labor.ny.gov/.../transferable-skills-handout-5-marketing-skills.doc

6. Additional Resources

Still looking for more information? Vancouver Public Library has many books on changing careers. Use the VPL catalogue and search subject "Career Changes."

Or try looking at the following resources:

- ***What Color is Your Parachute?*** / Richard N. Bolles. Central Library. 650.14205 B69w
- ***No Canadian Experience, Eh?*** / Daisy Wright. 2011. Central Library. 650.142 W94n1.
- ***Expert Resumes for Career Changers*** / Wendy S. Enelow. 2010. Central Library. 650.142 E56ec1

- **Career Cruising**

http://www.vpl.ca/electronic_databases/alpha/c

Available from the VPL Online Articles, Encyclopedias & More page: Click on "Explore My Interests" and answer questions about your likes and dislikes to find careers that match up with your interests. Free registration required to complete assessment.

Note: You can access this database from a Library computer. If you are using a computer from outside the Library, you will need a Vancouver Public Library card to login to this database.

- ***Networking for Employment: A Guide for Newcomers to British Columbia***
<http://skilledimmigrants.vpl.ca/images/uploads/Pathfinders/Networking.pdf>

Questions? Please ask the Information Staff on Level 4, Central Library or telephone 604-331-3624.