

Lesson #3

Choosing the Right Job for You

How do you know which jobs you should apply for? A good first step is to consider what is most important to you in a job: your job priorities. Are you looking for a high salary? Flexible hours? Job duties that interest and challenge you?

You also need to consider your strengths and weaknesses. What are your skills and talents? What are you great at? What are you not so great at? Most importantly, what past experience do you have and what jobs fit best with that experience?

When you are first looking for work and have very little experience, you may not have a lot of job choices. Scott, an inmate at the Winnipeg Remand Centre, told us about the hard time he has had looking for work:

“I've never felt like I had a lot of options for work. I chose jobs based on what was available and who would hire me. I only went up to Grade 10 in school, and I started coming to jail when I was 13. Those are big factors in who will hire me and what's open to me. Most of my education has been through correspondence while I was in the youth centre. I was in and out of jail all the time between 13 and 18 – a couple of months in, a couple of months out. A few months at a job, then back to jail.

I didn't really like any of the jobs that I've had, but you have to do what you have to do, you know? Warehouse jobs are pretty boring and tedious, doing the same thing all day long. My first job, when I was 16, was working in a clothing factory, putting zippers on jackets all day. Pretty dull, but whatever – it's five bucks an hour, right? I was working in a fish factory for a while. I've done lots of jobs. The best job I had was when I was doing construction; I was outside all the time. It was hard work, but the

pay was okay. I've got a job with a steel mill lined up for when I get out of here.”

Another former inmate, Jody, told us that he had a very difficult time when he first began looking for work as a young person. “I couldn’t get hired anywhere,” he said. “I didn’t have any skills or experience to offer employers, so that made even writing a resume a tough job in itself.”

Jody started by working for a temp agency, and eventually a job opened up at one of his temporary work sites. This led to full-time employment in construction.

Eventually, as Jody got more experience in construction, he decided to go back to school for carpentry so he could jobs that paid better in that field.

An employment coach we interviewed admitted that a lot of time, your first job might not be something you love. If you have very little job experience you may need to start at the bottom and build from there.

“I think one of the most successful strategies is to figure out where you want to be, what job you would love to have down the road,” he said. “But then, you should realize you aren’t going to get there in an instant. Some of the most successful men and women that I’ve worked with have started out at entry level jobs that maybe aren’t ideal for them. But, they need to pay their bills and they need to gain some job experience. So they start at an entry level position and work really hard and they get a good reference, and then sometimes within just a couple of months they can move on to something a little better. And then they get another good reference, and another job they can add to their resume, and then they move up from there. They build, build, build; they’re building the blocks of their career history, always aiming for better opportunities that are closer to their goal.”

It's a good idea to set a long-term goal that you can work toward. Where do you hope to be working in five years? To do this you'll need to think about your strengths, weaknesses, and your job priorities.

Next, what are the smaller steps it might take to get you to your goal? What sorts of jobs could you start working at right now that would help you build your way up to where you want to be? What education and training might you need? Are there volunteer opportunities that could help you gain job skills?

This book will help you to answer those questions. At the same time it will help you to work on your reading and writing skills, which are important for almost any job.

Literacy Tip: Finding the Main Idea

Finding the main idea of a piece of writing is a way of summarizing that piece of writing in just a few words. Every story has a main idea. When we say, “What’s the main idea?” we mean, “What’s this story about?”

Most stories contain a lot of information, and we don’t need to summarize all of it. A main idea statement describes the most important parts of the story, and the story’s overall message. It leaves out the smaller details.

For example, in the lesson you just read you heard a short story from Scott, an inmate at the Remand Centre. Look back at Scott’s story from the lesson. Then read the main idea statements below.

- A. This story is about work.
- B. This story is about Scott’s favourite job, working construction.
- C. This story is about how Scott has few job options, and so has to take boring, low-paying work.

Statement A is too broad. Sure this story talks about work, but let’s be more specific. A lot of stories could be about work. You could write about how literacy skills can help you at work, like we did in the last lesson. You could discuss job training and upgrading, like we will in Lesson #4, or apprenticeship and skilled trades work, like we will in Lesson #6. “This story is about work,” doesn’t give us enough information to be the main idea of the story.

Statement B is too narrow. Scott does mention his work in the construction industry, but that’s just one small part of his story. There are other important things that he talks about in the story.

Statement C is an example of a good main idea statement. It includes everything in the story. Everything Scott tells us relates to his limited work options and how not having a lot of experience or education has affected the types of jobs he is able to do.

When you are asked, “What is the main idea?” picture yourself reading a story or news article, and a friend comes up and asks, “What’s that about?” Try to think of a way you can tell your friend about the whole story in just a sentence or two. That is a good main idea statement.

Exercise #3

Read the story below, from one of our students in the John Howard Society literacy program. Then identify the main idea of the story.

When I was about 19 years old I stumbled into a job as a sub-prime car salesman. I had just got out of Headingley, having done my first adult time, and I didn't really have anything to do. I was trying to get back into my usual way of making a living – the narcotics industry – and I called up an old buddy who used to be a partner of mine. He told me he wasn't selling drugs anymore. I asked him what he was doing and he said he was selling cars.

I said, "Are you making any money at that?" And he said, "Yeah, actually. I'm actually probably making more than I was before." So I said, "Hey, get me into that," and he did.

I ended up liking it a lot, and I was good at it.

What is the main idea of this student's story?

Job Priorities

Lesson #3 talked about how it's always a good idea to think about what's most important to you in a job: your job priorities. Below is a list of some different job priorities. Read through them and put them into categories: Very Important to Me, Somewhat Important to Me, and Not really Important to Me. Feel free to add any others you can think of.

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|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> flexible work hours working with other people making a lot of money loving what I do doing different things every day opportunity for overtime work that is interesting or challenging coworkers I get along well with working with my hands a job that doesn't require much education plenty of vacation time job security (unlikely to be laid-off) making enough to support a family | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> being my own boss working alone helping others being creative having regular hours easy or repetitive work having weekends free being physically active at work working with my mind on-the-job training good health and dental benefits a consistent, regular paycheck no criminal record check needed |
|---|---|

Very Important to Me	Somewhat Important to Me	Not Really Important to Me

Using some of the ideas you put in the chart, write a short paragraph with the main idea of “What is important to me in choosing a job.”

If you have access to the Internet or are working with a tutor who has access to the Internet, see if you can get a Career Interests Quiz. You can use Google or another search engine to search “career quiz” or type in one of these links:

<http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/postsecondary/careerplanning/program/wizard.html>

<http://checkoutacollege.com/explorecareers/interestsurvey.aspx>

Fill out the career quiz and see what types of careers it suggests for you. Write a few sentences below about what your quiz said, and whether you agree with the career suggestions.
