

Resume & Cover Letter Guide



What is a Resume?

A resume serves as a tool to interest prospective employers in offering you an interview. It summarizes your work history (both paid and unpaid), relevant academic experiences, skills, and accomplishments in a concise and readable format. It also clearly demonstrates your ability to produce results in areas of interest to potential employers. Remember, a resume is a personal statement and should reflect your own style. There is no single “correct” formula for writing a resume. What is important is that your resume presents a positive image of you to the employer.

Steps for writing your Resume

- 1. Conduct a personal inventory** - Begin by listing all of your jobs, achievements, volunteer activities, special projects, honors, involvement in professional organizations, college education, and experiences, etc. Include everything at this point, you can edit later. For each prior work experience, emphasize your accomplishments and the skills you used.
- 2. Identify potential employers** - Define your career goals and objectives. You will need to determine the types of positions for which you are qualified and the employers for whom you would like to work.
- 3. Categorize your information** – Organize your information into appropriate categories. You may omit some of the sections if they are not applicable to you. Review the resume samples included in this guide for examples of possible ways to present the information:

Resume Categories

Contact Information

Include your name, address, zip code, telephone and fax numbers, and email address at the top of the resume. You may list a single address or both a permanent and current address.

Qualifications statement (Optional)

This section can be used to briefly summarize your experience within a particular industry or career field and emphasize areas of expertise and special skills. It needs to be tailored to the job for which you are applying and be no longer than two or three sentences. Individuals who are changing careers should include this category.

Job Objective (Optional)

Briefly state the position and field for which you are applying. If you do not include the objective on your resume, it needs to be included in the first paragraph of your cover letter.

Education

Name of college attended, city, state, degree received, major, date of degree awarded.

- Study Abroad – list institution and semester/year.
- Academic Honors/Awards (Optional) - Include single honors or create a separate category for multiple listings.
- Relevant Courses (Optional) – Only list classes outside of your major which are directly related to your objective. Create a separate category if necessary.
- Senior Thesis Title and Independent Studies

(Optional)

- Grade Point Average (Optional) - List if favorable (typically 3.5 or above)
- Exclude High School Experience. (**Exceptions can be made for first and second year students.**)

Work Experience

Include full and part-time work experience, volunteer work, and internships. List your current or most recent employment first. Include job title, employer name, location, and dates of employment. Describe duties performed and include previous titles, when necessary, to show growth within an organization. This section can be titled “Experience,” “Work Experience,” “Employment,” “Professional Experience,” “Additional Experience,” etc. Use action verbs and skill words to describe your accomplishments and work responsibilities.

Activities

List the organizations, positions held, dates involved, and a description of your responsibilities (if these relate to the objective). Emphasize leadership and teamwork skills when possible.

Honors/Awards

Include academic honors or awards.

Publications

List any publications that communicate your knowledge, interest, or expertise in an area related to the position.

Presentations

List the dates and names of the programs/speeches and the organizations to which you presented.

Professional Affiliations/Memberships

List your roles held in organizations or memberships that demonstrate your leadership abilities.

Special Skills

- Computer – list software programs and hardware
- Language – include level of fluency
- Technical equipment – list for some lab and science positions (see Scientific Resume Guide if needed).

Interests (Optional)

This can include travel, personal interests, and activities that can often serve as “icebreakers” in an interview.

References

References are generally listed on a separate page. Obtain permission from your references before you submit their names. Typically you should have 3-4 individuals (work supervisors or professors) who can address your ability to do well in a work or academic setting.

Format

This guide provides samples of different resume formats. Choose the style which most effectively presents your work experiences, education, skills, and accomplishments in relation to the type of position you are seeking.

Chronological

This is the most common format used by college students and recent graduates. It is an historical presentation of your experience, in reverse chronological order with the most recent jobs/internships listed first. This format allows you to emphasize job titles and places of employment and to elaborate upon accomplishments, duties, and responsibilities of each position.

Skills/Functional

This format is useful if your prior experience is unrelated to your current career objective. It emphasizes your skills and accomplishments rather than dates, job titles, and responsibilities. This format is typically used by professionals who have been in the workforce for several years.

Combination

This format combines both the chronological and skills/functional layout. It lists your experiences in reverse chronological order within several skill sections.

Guidelines

Your resume should be no longer than one page. Exceptions can be made when your experience is directly related to the job for which you are applying. In this case, the maximum length is two pages.

- Make verb tense consistent with experience (use present tense for current experience; past tense for previous experiences).
 - Avoid personal pronouns (I, me).
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- Avoid abbreviations.
- Do not begin phrases with “Responsibilities include...”
- Use a single font style for the entire resume. Use a font size no smaller than 10 point.
- Choose action words and phrases that effectively illustrate your involvement and accomplishments.
- Carefully proofread your resume and correct all grammar, punctuation, spelling, and formatting errors. Ask someone you respect to proofread it as well.
- Print your resume and cover letter on quality bond paper. Use light colored, smooth textured, standard size (8 1/2 x 11) paper when sending hardcopies.

E-Mailing your Resume and Cover Letter

- Apply only to positions for which you are qualified.
- Send attachments only when employer requests them.
- Proofread. Avoid relying on spell check.
- Attach resume and cover letter as separate documents. (for example: Resume for Ann Smith)
- Since graphics cannot be used, enhance readability by using lower-case letter o's, plus signs, dashes, and asterisks in your layout.
- Format well.
- Use keywords.

Creating a Scannable Resume

Increasing numbers of organizations are moving toward automated (paperless) resume processing and applicant tracking systems. Using special software, organizations scan, sift through and cross-reference a huge number of electronic resumes to identify appropriate candidates to match their job openings. Recruiters and others involved in the hiring process can query the database using criteria or “keywords.” Keywords are found in job descriptions, job titles, degrees, special skills or training, specific job responsibilities, professional associations, etc. The job seeker who writes and designs a scannable resume and cover letter enjoys an edge over the applicant whose

resume and cover letter cannot be added to a database. Additionally, job seekers who include more “key words” on their resume and cover letter increase the chances that their resume will be selected.

To make your resume computer-friendly and scannable, follow the tips listed below.

- Use a standard, single column resume style with headings.
- Use boldface or all capital letters for section headings, making sure letters do not touch each other.
- Avoid italics, underlining, horizontal and vertical lines, boxes, and graphics.
- Make sure your name is at the top of every page on its own line.
- Use simple typefaces such as Arial, Helvetica, Futura, Optima, Times Roman, Palatino, New Century, Schoolbook, or Courier. Font size should be between 10 and 14 points.
- Use a standard address format, with each line appearing below your name.
- If including two phone numbers, list each on a separate line.

Action Verbs

Management

administered
analyzed
assigned
attained
chaired
contracted
consolidated
coordinated
delegated
developed
directed
evaluated
executed
improved
increased
organized
oversaw
planned
prioritized
produced
recommended
reviewed
strengthened
supervised

Communication

addressed
arbitrated
arranged
authored
corresponded
developed
directed
drafted
edited
enlisted
formulated
interpreted
lectured
meditated
moderated
motivated
negotiated
publicized
reconciled
recruited

spoke
translated
wrote

Research

clarified
collected
critiqued
diagnosed
evaluated
examined
extracted
identified
inspected
interpreted
interviewed
investigated
organized
reviewed
summarized
surveyed
systematized

Technical

assembled
built
calculated
designed
devised
engineered
fabricated
maintained
operated
overhauled
programmed
remodeled
repaired
solved
trained
upgraded

Teaching

adapted
advised
clarified
coached
communicated

coordinated
developed
enabled
encouraged
evaluated
explained
facilitated
guided
informed
initiated
instructed
persuaded
set goals
stimulated

Financial

administered
allocated
analyzed
appraised
audited
balanced
budgeted
computed
developed
forecast
managed
marketed
planned
projected
researched

Creative

acted
conceptualized
created
designed
developed
directed
established
fashioned
founded
illustrated
instituted
integrated
introduced
invented

originated
performed
planned
revitalized
shaped

Helping

assessed
assisted
clarified
coached
counseled
demonstrated
diagnosed
educated
expedited
facilitated
familiarized
referred
rehabilitated
represented

Clerical Detail

approved
arranged
catalogued
classified
collected
compiled
dispatched
executed
generated
implemented
inspected
monitored
operated
organized
prepared
processed
purchased
recorded
retrieved
screened
specified
systematized
tabulated
validated

Other

achieved
expanded
improved
pioneered
reduced (losses)
resolved (problems)
restored
spearheaded
transformed

Cover Letter

A cover letter is a formal business letter that accompanies a resume and serves as an introduction of you to potential employers. It will inform the employer of your skills, abilities, and experiences that relate to the job. Since your letter needs to be tailored for each employer, you should do your homework to discover what is unique and special about the organization. Remember that your letter communicates your “voice.” It needs to be well-written and express your enthusiasm for the organization and the job.

Appearance

- It should be one page, written in a professional, business letter format.
- Each copy needs to be an original, not a photocopy.
- Use a professional font such as Times Roman, Bookman, or Garamond. It should match the font used on your resume.
- Everything a potential employer receives from you—resume, cover letter, follow-up, and thank you letters need to project professionalism.

Content

- Your cover needs to be tailored to each employer. Do your homework and focus on how your skills meet their particular needs.
 - Whenever possible, address your cover letter to the person who is responsible for the hiring process or for making the hiring decision. Try to avoid addressing letters “To Whom it May Concern,” “Dear Sir or Madam,” or “Personnel Director.”
 - Your letter needs to be 100% free of spelling, grammatical, and typing errors.
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Cover Letter Outline

Date

Your Street Address
Your Town, State, Zip

Name of Contact
Title
Name of Organization
Street Address
City, State, Zip

Dear Ms./Mr. _____:

First Paragraph. State the specific position or type of work for which you are applying, and indicate how you learned of the opening (Career Services, internet, contact person, alumni, employment service, etc.).

Second Paragraph. Indicate why you are interested in the position. Explain why you are interested in this particular organization, its products or services. Describe what you can do for the employer. Do not focus on how the job will benefit you. If you are a recent graduate, explain how your academic background makes you a qualified candidate. Emphasize specific skills you possess that are relevant to the job. Try to enhance and highlight the information found in your resume without simply repeating it. Refer the reader to the enclosed resume for more detailed information.

Third Paragraph. State what you will do to follow up on your letter. If you are replying to a job listing, state that you look forward to hearing from them. If you are writing a letter to an organization that does not have a specific job listed, state that you will contact them by a certain date to set up an interview to discuss your qualifications in more detail. Conclude by expressing your willingness to answer any of their questions. Be sure to provide your phone number, e-mail address, and, if applicable, a fax number.

Sincerely,

(Sign your name here)

Type your name
