

RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS



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RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS

Your resume and cover letter form a historical document that looks back over your experience and ahead to where you'd like to be. They should be concise yet detailed, formal yet personal, clearly focused on you yet designed for the needs of an unknown reader. Outstanding resumes and application letters, as you can imagine, are not easy to write, but they are essential for a successful job or internship search.

You should think of your resume and cover letter as part of a unit that includes the interview. They not only should present a convincing case for interviewing you, but should also provide an easy reference during the interview. By doing so, they help set the interview's agenda.

THE RESUME

Your resume documents what you have done and what you have gained by doing it. For most college students, a single page resume is sufficient. (If necessary, you can go onto the second page. It's better that the resume be clear than that everything become squeezed together.) Though resumes may look like form documents, they aren't. You have to choose how to present yourself in the best possible way.

FOCUS: The resume should be clearly focused on a well-defined objective, which is often stated on the resume. The objective is a sort of thesis statement for the resume, and it controls what should and should not be included. Don't be fancy with the objective statement. Personnel departments often use it to file resumes, so the clarity and brevity are of primary importance. Even when you don't include an objective statement on your resume, you should have a good idea of what you're applying for, so that your resume will focus on the appropriate experiences and skills.

ORGANIZATION: There is no set format for a resume. Each writer should consider what organization would present his or her individual experiences in the best light. But remember that many people who review your resume will want to do so quickly. Your resume should be easy to scan. Information should be easy to locate. Brief sentences and fragments, such as "Promoted to office manager," are preferable to long sentences.

FORMATTING AND PRINTING YOUR RESUME

Although there are professional printing services that will typeset your resume, we recommend that you handle the formatting and printing yourself. Once you get your resume set up on a word processor, you can change it whenever you need to. It's easier to keep it up-to-date and to tailor it for the application. From our experience, these are overwhelming advantages; well worth the time you will invest in learning how to format your resume.

There are some tricks to this and you would do well to make a formatting appointment in the Writing Center. If you are using a graphics oriented computer, such as the Macintosh or a PC using Windows, you should not attempt to format a resume using the spacebar. What looks like perfectly formatted resume may come out as gobblety-gook. For greatest convenience in the

long run, you should use style sheets, which are a feature of most recent word processing programs. In lieu of these, use margins and tabs.

Good facilities are available on campus. Instructional Media Services and The Writing Center have Macintosh or PCs hooked to laser printers. You do need to schedule time for the MAC and purchase a laser printer card. The Center for Contemporary Media has six Macintoshes (with laser printer) available in its computer graphics lab. The Writing Center can also provide printing on high quality bond paper at 10¢ per sheet. The campus printing service (Union Building Basement, 658-4169) offers high quality copying for those needing a large number of copies.

ELEMENTS OF THE RESUME

OBJECTIVE: A concise, one sentence statement of what you want to do. You may have to change the objective for each type of position you seek. Avoid banal generalizations, like "an exciting and challenging position." Does anyone want a dull position? Your objective should show that you have some knowledge of the field to which you're applying.

EDUCATION: You should just list college education, unless you attended a high school or special program (like a student exchange program) that has special relevance to your application. If you've attended more than one college, you may list them all, beginning with the one at which you are seeking or have received a degree. Besides the name, city and state of the college and the name and date of degree you have received or are seeking, you may also include your major and minor, your GPA, special programs you've participated in (e.g., semester abroad), course work relevant to your application, and special skills (languages, computer skills, etc.)

EXPERIENCE: Most resumes include work experience, listed beginning with the most recent or relevant experience. This section is especially useful for students who have had interesting jobs, have held positions directly related to the job for which they are applying, or have worked for well-known companies. Experience in menial jobs may show that you are at least willing to work and you may have derived pertinent skills from them. If you've had a number of part-time jobs, you may want to list them on a single line #e.g., "Experience as a short order cook, waitress, parking lot attendant, and concession salesperson." This will save space for more important items, but still show that you have been willing to work. Many students may have scanty work experience. They might find it better to supplement or replace the EXPERIENCE section with a SKILLS section. Work experience does not need to be limited to paid experience; you can list internships unpaid and other non-paid work in this section. Listings should include the position, name of the company, company's city and state, dates of employment, and a short narrative when necessary. If you've had a job as a bank teller or a lifeguard, and have done what bank tellers and lifeguards normally do, there's no need to explain this. However, if you've acquired special expertise, such as operating a certain type of computer, or have done something relevant to the position you're applying for, list it. For instance, a lifeguard applying for a teaching position might note she taught a swimming class for small children. Experience narratives generally focus on job responsibilities, skills acquired, or record of promotion. They

should be brief. Use verbal fragments rather than complete sentences: "Taught swimming."
"Organized work schedules."

SKILLS (Optional): Many writers present a list of the skills they have gained from their education and previous experiences. The skills section is appropriate for people who have not held many jobs, who have gained professional experience through activities or volunteer work, or who wish to emphasize how their academic background helps prepare them for the next position. Many employers are interested in skills in the following areas: Written and verbal communication, research (especially involving work with primary sources), critical thinking, and problem solving, organization and management, technical (especially related to computing), quantitative reasoning, collaborative work, and foreign languages. Sometimes, these skills are more important than specific job-related skills, which can be acquired on the job. When you list skills, you need to substantiate or verify them. You might cite a term paper you did as evidence of your research abilities, or publications in a literary magazine as evidence of writing skills. Organizational skills are often apparent in public service or even socially oriented activities. Work in one of the competence centers may show you can work well with others.

Whether you write a work experience or skills resume, the descriptions of your experiences must be concise, detailed, convincing, and focused not on how you spent your time but on what you learned from the work.

ACTIVITIES, VOLUNTEER SERVICE, HONORS/AWARDS, SHOWS, PERFORMANCES, INTERESTS

After the work or skills section, most resumes have 1-3 "activities" sections. In these, you want to show the varieties of your interests and accomplishments and the different sides of your personality. Resist the impulse to simply list everything you've ever done and instead try to focus on items that really help to define who you are. Interviewers often use these sections to begin small talk, which can be a very important part of the interview.

In designing these sections, a good rule of thumb is to include no more than five items under a heading. Many people have a simple **ACTIVITIES AND HONORS** listing on their first resume. When it grows too large, they might divide it into separate activities and honors sections, or they might create a new section, **VOLUNTEER SERVICE**, for their community service activities. People in the arts, theater, television production, etc. often have headings for shows, performances, or productions.

Keep in mind that these "activities" sections are flexible. Design them to best show yourself off.

REFERENCES: Most people now make references available upon request. This allows you to let your references know that a particular company in regard to you may contact them.

WHAT NOT TO INCLUDE: It is no longer appropriate to include age, sex, weight, height, race, religion, marital status, dependents, and other similar personal information.

THE COVER LETTER

The Cover Letter should be a simple, straightforward letter, stating the position you're applying for and discussing the skills and interests that you will bring to the position. The cover letter is very difficult to write; however, if you think of it in sections, it may become a little easier.

600 S. Locust
Greencastle, IN 46135
February 2, 2002

[Your address]

[Date]

Ms. Kelly Smith
Marketing Director
HCCH Industries
101 W. Jones Street
Chicago, IL 60606

[Inside Address]

[Salutation (if you don't know the address's)]

Dear Ms. Smith:

[gender, use the full name)]

Clearly explain what you're applying for in the first paragraph

I am writing to inquire about a January internship in marketing and promotions. DePauw's Winter Term Program allows students to spend a month off campus as full-time, unpaid interns. An internship with your HCCH would help me learn more about the field, and I could offer you some enthusiasm and a willingness to work.

At DePauw, I have been active with several campus publications and served as an advertising representative for the student radio station. The combination of writing, creative design, and promotional work your appeals to me, and has made me interested in pursuing a career in marketing and promotions. Along with courses in English, I've begun taking courses in economics and management, and I'm hoping an internship will give me further direction in developing the skills I need.

Relate your interests to the position you're applying for

I look forward to hearing from you. I will call your office early next week to check on the status of this inquiry. You can reach me afternoons at (317) 658-0000.

Thank you for your consideration.

Give clear information about when you will call and when you can be reached

Sincerely,

Sally Smith

Encl: Resume, Information for Hosts

Give clear info about when you will call, where and when you can be reached

ELEMENTS OF A COVER LETTER

First Paragraph

The first sentence should clearly state the occasion. If you are applying for a job, state what job you're applying for and where and when it was advertised. If you're applying for a winter internship, explain what a winter internship is, what you'd like to get out of it. Your first paragraph should end with a persuasive statement about why you're qualified for the internship or position. This statement will serve as the thesis for the second paragraph, which substantiates your skills and interests. Try to avoid overwriting this sentence or becoming over anxious about it. Let the statement organize what you will say in the rest of the letter: "I feel my education and work experience have prepared me well for this internship, which will, in turn, help me set goals for my remaining college years."

Second Paragraph

Now, you need to support the claims you've made about being right for the job. This section works closely with the resume, particularly the education, work experience, and activities sections. You shouldn't recite your experience over again; rather, you should argue that your experience, interests, and skills fit the employer or sponsor's needs. The more you know about the job or internship, the more easily this paragraph will come. For instance, if you're applying for an internship with a physical therapist, you might draw upon your experience teaching swimming to young children: "I am particularly interested in working with children. I enjoyed teaching swimming to children, and would like to see how physical therapists deal with the special problems child patients present." In some cases, the second section will expand to a third paragraph, but if you're finding it hard to end this section, you should double check to make sure you not repeating your whole resume.

Third Paragraph

This one is difficult to write, because it's mostly filled with pleasantries. You need to avoid becoming too flowery or effusive. And there is important information you need to put here. You may say that you are looking forward to an interview, and give dates when you're available and when and how you can be reached. Don't say you can be reached at any time, day or night, because you can't. Try to give the employer or sponsor definite times when you can be reached at a particular phone number; then be there. An employer who calls twice and gets the fraternity/sorority runaround # "Just a minute, I'll page her...(infinite hold)"# may not call back. Especially on internship requests, it's a good idea to call the sponsor. But let him or her know you will be calling and do so in a way that doesn't demand decisions: "I will call your office next week to check on the status of this inquiry."

FOUR TIPS

#Don't Overwrite

A cover letter is regularly regarded as a writing sample. In general, employers and sponsors look for the same qualities they look for in their everyday writing. This does not mean you need to write like a lawyer if applying to a law firm. But since most lawyers spend a great deal of time wrestling with ambiguous, overly qualified prose, they appreciate direct, clear writing that makes and supports definite assertions. Engineers work a great deal with technical specifications. They like to see a well laid out resume and a cover letter that uses language efficiently and precisely. No one is particularly appreciative of verbal flourishes and excess. Keep it simple and direct.

#Not Too Much Hype

Applicants are often trying to make more of their experience than they actually think is there. Given this state of mind, they might favor pompous over simple wording, elaborate over concise statements. They may invent fancy job titles for everyday occupations ("cuisine selection specialist" for waiter) and overuse intensifiers # very, really, especially, truly. This will make their prose sound weak or silly. Present yourself in the best light, but don't overdo it.

#Proofread

Like any piece of writing you revise frequently, the cover letter and resume may come to contain many errors. Because you become so familiar with what is there, you actually don't read what is on the page. Using the computer is particularly conducive to such errors. You may accidentally delete an extracurricular word or make a subject plural without changing the number of the verbs it governs. Our best advice is to have other people read your resume and cover letter carefully.

#Focus on Education, Skills, and Interests

Most of you won't have experience that "qualifies" you for a job. Rather, your qualifications will lie in your education, skills, and interests. Employers will be willing to invest in on-the job training, but they want to be sure that you read, write, and think well; that you communicate with others effectively; that you learn new things easily; that you show leadership, responsibility, and initiative. Your resume and cover letter can suggest or demonstrate these qualities in many subtle ways.