office *of* **career development**

Resume & Cover Letter Guide

Self Assessment:

In order to write an effective resume, you need to sit down and answer some questions about yourself. These are the same kinds of questions that you have been asked throughout your college career and will be asked when interviewing. Can you answer them?

- What are your short and long range career goals?
- What are your three greatest accomplishments?
- What skills do you possess that may be of interest to someone reading your resume?
- What have you done in your academic work, summer jobs or co-curricular activities that the reader might find relevant? Have you held leadership positions or supervised anyone?
- What have others said about your work through evaluations and informal comments?

Using Your Answers To Build Your Resume:

Now that you've begun to think about your best qualities you can begin to develop and organize your resume. An employer spends about 15-20 seconds on an initial review, so keep in mind that the information with the most impact should be closer to the top.

- Have in mind the purpose of your resume (summer job, internship, full time professional position…). An objective, a statement that tells what you want to do, what strengths you have to do it and, possibly, what environment you want to do it in, used to be a typical piece of a resume. Many employers are now telling us that an objective is no longer necessary and that when written poorly often hurts your chances. Even if you don't include an objective, it is still important to know the purpose of your resume so that you can easily prioritize the sections of your resume by relevance to the goals you discuss in your cover letter.

- Once you have your target field, research what qualifications the reader may be seeking. You can do this by going to our website and looking at posted openings or talking with Career Partners or other networking contacts and getting their advice. Knowing what kind of background and skills employers in your field want can help you to prioritize the rest of the information on your resume.

- Organize your resume in order of importance. Give more information about those experiences and qualifications that make you a good candidate and don't give a lot of detail about extraneous or unrelated experiences. Exception: if an unrelated experience allowed you to develop significant skills, go ahead and give more detail. An example: perhaps you served as President of a major campus organization (unrelated to your career goals), and as a result, developed strong leadership and organizational abilities. Those skills are valued by all employers and should be acknowledged in some way on the resume.

- Most people do not provide highly personal information such as age, marital status, ethnic background, religious preferences, etc.

- Finally, understand that your resume is a demonstration of your qualifications now. It is an ever-changing document and should be updated on a regular basis.

Skills and Characteristics to Consider

We develop our skills in the classroom, at work (part-time, summer and full-time), through an internship, volunteer experiences, student organizations, athletics and even in our leisure activities. Before writing your cover letter and resume, it's important to evaluate the skills you have developed thoroughly and honestly. You don't have to do everything and be everything for your employer. Simply learn where your strengths and skills exist and highlight them. It is difficult to clearly state your skills when you begin this reflection process so think about the skills below and use them as your starting point.

Management skills:
Motivate and supervise others
Handle a variety of tasks and responsibilities
      simultaneously
Negotiate, review, evaluate

Leadership skills:
Make decisions
Self-directed without supervision
Coordinate people to work as a team
Ability to work under pressure

Organizational skills:
Systematic and efficient
Schedule, arrange tasks and time frames
Attention to detail

Communication skills:
Speak and write with clarity
Listen and answer questions cohesively
Open-minded

Instructing skills:
Motivate and inform others
Encouraging and positive
Explain and summarize clearly

Creative skills:
Expressive and imaginative
Ability to design things
Imaginative with ideas

Analyzing/Evaluating skills:
Research and gather pertinent information
Diagnose and resolve problems
Ability to manipulate data

Helping skills:
Show sensitivity to other's feelings
Ability to maintain confidentiality
Able to give insight; perceptive

In addition to skills, think about any of your personality traits and characteristics that may be helpful to know about yourself when writing a resume, cover letter or preparing for an interview:

Adaptable	Easygoing	Open-minded	Service-oriented
Ambitious	Empathetic	Optimistic	Spontaneous
Artistic	Enterprising	Patient	Stable
Assertive	Enthusiastic	Persistent	Teachable
Astute	Expressive	Personable	Team player
Authentic	Flexible	Persuasive	Thoughtful
Calm	Focused	Poised	Tolerant
Candid	Friendly	Practical	Trusting
Capable	Good judgment	Proactive	Understanding
Confident	Good natured	Progressive	Unique
Conscientious	Honest	Reliable	Versatile
Cooperative	Leader	Realistic	Wise
Curious	Loyal	Resourceful	Witty
Decisive	Managerial	Self-directed	
Deliberate	Methodical	Self-motivated	
Diplomatic	Motivated	Sensitive	

Hints On Cover Letter Composition

When sending your resume by mail or e-mail to any employer, make sure you always include some type of "covering" letter. Employers often receive so many inquiries about positions that they are genuinely impressed when a well-crafted, professional letter accompanies a resume. Styles and formats vary, but essentially a cover letter is considered formal communication, which serves as an introduction of you and your qualifications to a prospective employer.

The three most common types of cover letters are: *letters of inquiry* in which you are unaware of any specific vacancies, but want to establish your interest in opportunities which *may* become available with a particular employer; *letters of application* are written when you are aware that an opening does indeed exist and you wish to address your specific attributes which qualify you; *networking letters* for those employers you have been referred to through your networking contacts.

Keep in mind the following points when writing your cover letters:

- Your letter must be directed to a specific person and reflect that person's correct title. **If necessary**, refer to a person's title, ex. Dear Human Resource Director, **do not** use Dear Sir/Madam.

- Appearance is very important when making a first impression. Use high quality bond paper in the same color as your resume when mailing your documents. Do not use harsh or severe shades. **Boldface**, *italics,* and the use of simple graphics or multiple type fonts/sizes can be utilized but should not be overdone or distracting.

- Personalize the letter whenever possible. For example, mention the name of the organization in the body of your letter rather than referring to "your organization". Careful use of creative techniques such as anecdotes, career-relevant quotes, and the stressing of unusual qualifications can make your letter stand out. It can help to think about not only what you've done, but how well you've done it. Use these techniques to avoid simply restating information that you have included on your resume.

- Cover letters are not autobiographies. The goal is to keep your letter short enough to sustain the interest of the reader, and at the same time include enough information about your qualifications to provide the employer with the incentive to invite you for an interview. Your task is to enlighten the employer about what you know, what you can do, and what you can bring of value to the employer in question.

- Have someone proofread your letter for errors, awkward phrases, etc. Your letter must be accurate, attractive and error-free.

Cover letters should always reflect *your* writing style. If you are having trouble, consult the Office of Career Development Career Library for additional information. Office staff would be more than happy to review rough drafts of your cover letter.

Sample Cover Letter Outline

YOUR STREET ADDRESS
CITY, STATE, ZIP
DATE

EMPLOYER NAME
TITLE
ORGANIZATION
ADDRESS

SALUTATION:

The **first paragraph** should establish why the letter is being written. Are you aware of a specific vacancy? If so, cite the source where you learned about the opening. Has someone referred you to this employer? If so, use their name (with permission). Perhaps you are just inquiring about the possibility of an opening. If so, try to write something that will attract the attention of the reader and encourage him/her to want to know more about you.

The **second and perhaps third paragraph** establishes your qualifications. You may wish to outline what you think are your unique academic, experiential and personal qualities and how they relate to the position you are seeking. **It's important to demonstrate that you're aware of what you can bring of value to an employer.** It may be a good time to mention information that points out that you've done your "homework." Ideally, through research, you've developed a certain degree of knowledge about the employing organization. Provide one or two specific examples that demonstrate your most outstanding career-related characteristics.

The next paragraph is fairly straightforward. Offer to provide additional information regarding your qualifications. You should let the employer know that you would welcome the opportunity for a personal interview and/or that you look forward to hearing their response. A more assertive approach would involve mentioning that you will follow-up within 1-2 weeks to discuss an interview. Only say this if you are willing to make the call. In this paragraph you may also want to mention when you will be in their area or how you can be reached after a certain date.

Thank you for your time and consideration is all you need to say in the last paragraph.

Sincerely,

Signature

Typed Name

Enc. (means *enclosure*, indicating that your resume is included with cover letter.)

Quick Answers to Your Questions on Developing a Quality Resume

Probably one of the most important documents you'll ever compose, your resume serves as a highly polished, professionally written presentation of your qualifications to prospective employers. Keep in mind that friends, family, faculty, recruiters--almost everyone has an opinion about what constitutes the "perfect" resume. No such document exists. A strong resume needs to contain certain kinds of information that employers expect to see, but what you say, how you say it and the style in which you present it is entirely up to you. You need to use a little imagination and creativity to present your unique qualifications to employers.

For more information about resumes or cover letters, refer to one of the many books on resume writing in the Office of Career Development Career Library or consult with the staff. The following are some key points to remember:

Length
The resume should be a concise statement of your background and qualifications. While one page is generally sufficient, in some cases a particularly capable and experienced candidate may require a second page. If a second page is needed, it needs to cover at least half of the second page, and should include your name at the top and use a paperclip, do not staple.

Format
There are many different formats and approaches to visually present your qualifications. Your choice of a format is going to depend to a great extent on the type and quantity of information you wish to provide. Avoid splashy and overly creative gimmicks, but don't be afraid to break from the norm to some extent. The use of simple linear graphics and varying type fonts/sizes can liven up an otherwise drab resume. Try to keep the resume pleasing to the eye. Don't present information in long, thick paragraphs. Potential employers will review this document quickly, so make it easy to read.

Language
Avoid phrases such as, "My duties included…" or, "Responsible for…" Do not use personal pronouns such as "I" or "My". Be careful not to use words that exaggerate your responsibilities. Carefully proofread for spelling, grammar and spacing errors. One mistake can cost you an interview. Finally, quantify whenever possible. Numbers can say more than your action sentences.

Paper and Printing
When not sending your resume electronically, use high quality bond 8 1/2 x 11 inch paper in white or off-white colors. Your resume and cover letter paper as well as your envelope should match. The Office of Career Development has a Student Computer Lab area with 2 computers, printer, resume paper and envelopes available for your use. If possible, run your envelopes through a printer as well. If not, use labels or print the address carefully. Sending your resume electronically? Consider converting your Word document to a pdf so that no matter what kind of system opens your resume, the formatting is maintained.

References
Your references should be listed on a separate page on matching paper with your name clearly stated at the top. Along with the names of 3-5 references, you should also list their job title, organization, address, phone number and e-mail address.

Remember, your cover letter, resume and reference page are typically your first introduction to an employer and their presentation makes a statement about you. Are you neat, organized, do you use your words well and with impact, are your sentences coherent and enlightening? Take the time and care to make a strong impression!

Sample Resume Outline

Your Name ● Your Address ● Your Phone Number ● Your E-Mail

Objective

It is no longer necessary to include an objective, but you should have a purpose for your resume in mind in order to make the organization of your resume easier. If you decide that you wish to include an objective on your resume, make sure that it is specific and well stated.

Education

In this section you will want to include information about the institutions you have attended, degrees received (if you're unsure of your degree, look it up), and your major(s), minor(s) and/or concentrations. Optional information for this section can include your GPA, honors and awards including Dean's List and study abroad information. A typical format for a Geneseo student might look like this:

State University of New York at Geneseo
Bachelor of Arts, Communication, May 2012
Overall GPA: 3.2/4.0   Dean's List: Spring and Fall 2011

Experience

Your Experience sections can take on many different formats. You might have a separate section for **Related Experience** if you have had some experience in the career field that you wish to enter. Other Experience sections might be called **Work Experience**, **Internship Experience**, **Volunteer Experience**, **Leadership Experience**, etc. Keep in mind that you may have an Experience section with only one item in it. This is a good tactic if you want to draw particular attention to what you feel is a very important aspect of your resume. It is more important to categorize your experiences based on relatedness of the skills you used or learned rather than whether or not you were paid, received credit for the experience, or if it took place during the school year or the summer. Therefore, a Related Experience section might include a summer job, a credit-bearing internship and a research project that you did for class. A typical entry in an Experience section might look like this:

Public Relations Intern   SUNY Geneseo Office of Career Development
Fall 2011   Geneseo, NY
• Developed marketing pieces including flyers, e-mails and ads for programs
• Wrote press releases for campus distribution and publications for Career Services
• Wrote and produced, "What Not to Say on a Resume" video for the office

Activities

Include clubs and organizations that you have been a member of, volunteer activities that you have participated in and leadership positions that you have held not stated elsewhere on the resume.

Skills

Computer Skills: Should include information on systems, software, hardware and languages that you have used.
Foreign Language Skills: Written or verbal ability in any foreign language.
Research Skills: Familiarity with tools and equipment used for research.

You may wish to separate each Skills section or combine into one depending on the focus and length of your resume.

References

Can be simply stated as "Available Upon Request". This is another of those sections that is no longer necessary to include, but if you have the room, it's a good way to conclude your resume.

Action Verbs

The following is a list of action verbs that should help you in describing your experiences and activities on your resume.

Communication Skills

Addressed
Arbitrated
Arranged
Authored
Collaborated
Convinced
Corresponded
Developed
Directed
Drafted
Edited
Enlisted
Formulated
Influenced
Interpreted
Lectured
Mediated
Moderated
Negotiated
Persuaded
Promoted
Publicized
Reconciled
Recruited
Spoke
Translated
Wrote

Research Skills

Clarified
Collected
Critiqued
Diagnosed
Evaluated
Examined
Extracted
Identified
Inspected
Interpreted
Interviewed
Investigated

Organized
Reviewed
Summarized
Surveyed
Systematized

Technical Skills

Assembled
Built
Calculated
Computed
Designed
Devised
Engineered
Fabricated
Maintained
Operated
Overhauled
Programmed
Remodeled
Repaired
Solved
Upgraded

Teaching Skills

Adapted
Advised
Clarified
Coached
Communicated
Coordinated
Demystified
Developed
Enabled
Encouraged
Evaluated
Explained
Facilitated
Guided
Informed
Instructed
Persuaded
Set goals

Stimulated
Trained

Financial Skills

Administered
Allocated
Analyzed
Appraised
Audited
Balanced
Budgeted
Calculated
Computed
Developed
Forecasted
Managed
Marketed
Planned
Projected
Researched

Creative Skills

Acted
Conceptualized
Created
Customized
Designed
Developed
Directed
Established
Fashioned
Founded
Illustrated
Initiated
Instituted
Integrated
Introduced
Invented
Originated
Performed
Planned
Revitalized
Shaped

Helping Skills

Assessed
Assisted
Clarified
Coached
Counseled
Demonstrated
Diagnosed
Educated
Expedited
Facilitated
Familiarized
Guided
Motivated
Referred
Rehabilitated
Represented

Detail Skills

Approved
Arranged
Cataloged
Classified
Collected
Compiled
Dispatched
Executed
Generated
Implemented
Inspected
Monitored
Operated
Organized
Prepared
Processed
Purchased
Recorded
Retrieved
Screened
Specified
Systematized
Tabulated
Validated

Management Skills

Administered
Analyzed
Assigned
Attained
Chaired
Consolidated
Contracted
Coordinated
Delegated
Developed
Directed
Evaluated
Executed
Improved
Increased
Organized
Oversaw
Planned
Prioritized
Produced
Recommended
Reviewed
Scheduled
Strengthened
Supervised

Accomplishment Verbs

Achieved
Expanded
Improved
Pioneered
Reduced
Resolved
Restored
Spearheaded
Transformed