

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 oriented	Easygoing	Open-minded	Service-
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 Career Development Career Library for additional information. Office staff would be more than happy to review rough drafts of your 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!

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
Authored
Corresponded
Drafted
Formulated
Lectured
Negotiated
Publicized
Spoke

Arbitrated
Collaborated
Developed
Edited
Influenced
Mediated
Persuaded
Reconciled
Translated

Arranged
Convinced
Directed
Enlisted
Interpreted
Moderated
Promoted
Recruited
Wrote

Research Skills

Clarified
Diagnosed
Extracted
Interpreted
Organized
Surveyed

Collected
Evaluated
Identified
Interviewed
Reviewed
Systematized

Critiqued
Examined
Inspected
Investigated
Summarized

Technical Skills

Assembled
Computed
Engineered
Operated
Remodeled
Upgraded

Built
Designed
Fabricated
Overhauled
Repaired

Calculated
Devised
Maintained
Programmed
Solved

Teaching Skills

Adapted
Coached
Demystified
Encouraged
Facilitated
Instructed
Stimulated

Advised
Communicated
Developed
Evaluated
Guided
Persuaded
Trained

Clarified
Coordinated
Enabled
Explained
Informed
Set goals

Financial Skills

Administered
Appraised
Budgeted
Developed
Marketed
Researched

Allocated
Audited
Calculated
Forecasted
Planned

Analyzed
Balanced
Computed
Managed
Projected

Creative Skills

Acted
Designed
Established
Illustrated
Integrated
Originated
Revitalized

Conceptualized Created
Developed
Fashioned
Initiated
Introduced
Performed
Shaped

Customized
Directed
Founded
Instituted
Invented
Planned

Helping Skills

Assessed
Coached
Diagnosed
Facilitated
Motivated
Represented

Assisted
Counseled
Educated
Familiarized
Referred

Clarified
Demonstrated
Expedited
Guided
Rehabilitated

Detail Skills

Approved
Classified
Dispatched
Implemented
Operated
Processed
Retrieved
Systematized

Arranged
Collected
Executed
Inspected
Organized
Purchased
Screened
Tabulated

Cataloged
Compiled
Generated
Monitored
Prepared
Recorded
Specified
Validated

Management Skills

Administered
Attained
Contracted
Developed
Executed
Organized
Prioritized
Reviewed
Supervised

Analyzed
Chaired
Coordinated
Directed
Improved
Oversaw
Produced
Scheduled

Assigned
Consolidated
Delegated
Evaluated
Increased
Planned
Recommended
Strengthened

Accomplishment Verbs

Achieved
Pioneered
Restored

Expanded
Reduced
Spearheaded

Improved
Resolved
Transformed