



# Getting Your Resume & Cover Letter Started



**WRITING A RESUME and COVER LETTER**

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A resume should support your career objective by presenting evidence to the employer that you have the skills and knowledge necessary to perform the job. If you are unsure of the career options you want to pursue then it will be difficult to design an effective resume. Once you have an idea of what you want to do, you can write a resume that highlights the appropriate skills and experiences. Visit Academic and Career Development if you need help defining your career objective.

Before you write your resume, take time to do a self-assessment on paper (see attached worksheets). Develop a working list of your education, experience, skills and abilities, honors, and activities. Write everything down that pops into your head. What skills have you learned? What have you achieved that makes you stand out? What special qualities do you have that others might not? Use this information on your list to fill in the different sections of your resume.

### **General Resume Tips**

**Length** –A resume for a current college student or a recent graduate is generally 1 page; however 2 pages can be acceptable. If you are going into a research field or teaching in higher education then you would use a Curriculum Vitae (CV) rather than a resume and CVs are often longer than 2 pages.

**Keep Your Resume Professional and Easy to Read** – Employers spend about 20 to 30 seconds on each resume during the initial screening period so don't give them a reason to throw yours away before they even have a chance to read the content. It is important to be well organized and use consistent formatting so that your resume is sleek and easy to follow. Use an easy to read font of 10-12 points in size, utilize bullets to organize experience, bold text to highlight key words and **PROOFREAD CAREFULLY**.

**Your Resume is Your Marketing Brochure** – Too many resumes basically list employment history, focusing on tasks and duties rather than accomplishments and skills. An effective resume excites employers about the possibility of you joining their staff so think about that with everything you put on your resume.

**Your Resume Should be Adapted to Each Position** – Different positions you apply for will require different skills or experiences so your resume should be reflective of that. Information can be added or deleted according to the needs of the position or the order in which you present the information can be changed. The content categories you select for your resume should be determined by a number of factors, especially by your strongest "selling points" relative to the type of position you are seeking. You may find that you have several versions of your resume if you are targeting different types of career positions.

**"Your resume should be built around the intersection of your greatest strengths and an employer's greatest needs."** -Robert Dagnall, ResumeGuru.com

## PARTS OF A RESUME

**HEADING**—name, address (campus/permanent), phone numbers, email; could include a web page address if you have developed your own website or have an online portfolio of your work.

**OBJECTIVE** – this is an optional section that indicates your immediate career goal and should be specific without limiting your options. If you include one then tailor it to each employer and focus on skills you bring to the organization rather than what you want from them.

- Example: To obtain an entry-level position within the banking industry requiring strong analytical and organizational skills

**EDUCATION** – most recent educational information is listed first.

- Name and location of institution, degree and graduation date (or anticipated graduation date), major/minor/endorsement/emphasis
- GPA if above 3.0; this could be cumulative GPA or major GPA
- Mention honors, awards, scholarships, elective offices, special training, special class projects, research, study abroad (some of these could be separate sections as well)

**EXPERIENCE** – include not only full-time positions, but also part-time, seasonal, temporary, practicum, volunteer, field experience, observation, internship, and cooperative education experience. For each position, list the organization for which you worked, the location (city and state), your title, and dates (month/year). There is no single correct order for presentation of this information as long as you are consistent throughout the resume. List most recent experience first and consider using different section headings to organize experiences (i.e. Relevant Experience, Teaching Experience, Related Experience, Additional Experience, Leadership Experience).

- Provide a bulleted description of experiences, with emphasis on skills developed and accomplishments.
- For accomplishment statements use the following formula:
  - Action Verb + Subject + Outcome
- Avoid personal pronouns

**QUALIFICATIONS SUMMARY** – Candidates with strong skills or extensive experience may be very well served by listing them concisely in a separate category. This can highlight skills not explicitly stated elsewhere as well as point out unique aspects of your background. Below is an example:

### Summary of Qualifications

- 3 years experience in providing NetWare Operating Systems support, file server installations, troubleshooting and technical consulting.
- Well versed in Novell NetWare 4x, NDS, DOS and client tools; familiar with NetWare DHCP and DNS administration
- Demonstrated skill in training and supporting end users as well as developing technical staff to achieve performance objectives.

**OTHER SECTION HEADINGS** – you may list other types of information if they relate to your career, reflect achievements or demonstrate transferrable skills. Avoid simply “filling space” and ensure that everything you put on your resume is relevant to the employer and strengthens your candidacy.

Relevant Coursework – for college students or recent graduates, your education might be your biggest selling point. You could have completed a special project or learned a particular skill that you would like to highlight on your resume for potential employers.

Special Skills – This section highlights any expertise you may have in foreign languages, computer operation and programming, equipment you can use, or other areas of excellence that have not been mentioned elsewhere.

Leadership – If you’ve held leadership roles on campus or in other organizations then that could go in your experience section or you can have a separate section for leadership.

Research/Presentations – If you have done extensive research in your chosen field then you may wish to state the title or thesis of the paper and a brief description of your findings. This gives the employer insight into your professional expertise and is especially useful for graduate school applications. If you have presented your research at a conference or if it has been published then you will want to indicate that as well.

Honors and Awards – Honors such as Dean’s List, membership in an academic honorary, or scholarships can be included in the “Education” section or can be listed separately.

Professional Affiliations – If you have joined a professional association that is related to your chosen field then you can list it here. Write out the name rather than abbreviating. If applicable, include information about your involvement in the association; leadership positions held, conferences or workshops attended, special guest speakers, etc.

Additional Training – You may list any significant seminars, workshops, or other training that has enhanced your knowledge or will be helpful in your chosen career field.

Campus Involvement or Student Organizations – Some would prefer to label this type of experience as “Leadership” but you can include it in its own section as well.

Volunteer Experience or Community Involvement – Shows a certain level of selflessness and a willingness to be a “team player”. Also, could potentially open a door if the person reading the resume shares a similar interest.

Military Experience – This could be listed under its own heading or as work or leadership experience. Be sure to reflect promotions you received in addition to describing your responsibilities.

## RESUME DO’S

- Print on white or cream colored quality bond paper using laser printer (print on one side only)
- Have your resume critiqued by Career Services

## RESUME DON’TS

- Photographs or illustrations (of yourself or anything else)
- High school information
- Mention of age, race, religion, sex, marital status, political affiliation, national origin

## Constructing an Achievement Statement (Bullet Point)

### Bullet Point “Formula”

Action Verb + Example + Result

Action Verb: Always begin a bullet point with an action verb. Use a variety of action verbs to show the variety of skills you have.

#### Average Bullet Point with Action Verb

- Tutored an eighth grade student

Example: Give specifics as to what you did at that position. This will make you unique.

#### Better Bullet Point with Action Verb and Example

- Tutored an eighth grade student in pre-algebra

Result: State what you achieved from your example; what was the purpose of you doing what you did?

#### Perfect Achievement Statement with Action Verb, Example and Result

- Tutored an eighth grade student in pre-algebra, using teacher’s curriculum to raise her grade from a C to B+ over the course of a year

## WORKSHEET TO CATALOG EMPLOYMENT

Use one sheet for each employment experience you have had (professional, part-time, seasonal, temporary, internship)

Employer name \_\_\_\_\_

Employer location: City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Month/Year you were hired: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

Month/Year you left: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ (list "Present" if still employed)

Your most recent title: \_\_\_\_\_

List any prior positions with company: \_\_\_\_\_

Area of expertise, strengths, specializations:

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Accomplishments: \_\_\_\_\_

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Advanced degree, certification, licensure: \_\_\_\_\_

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Briefly describe job duties and your scope of accountability, listing items in order of importance. Begin descriptions with an action verb (see attached list of action verbs):

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## WORKSHEET TO CATALOG OTHER INFORMATION

**EDUCATION:** You can include university, community college, vocational trade school, or night classes.

Name of institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Location (city and state): \_\_\_\_\_

Dates attended or expected date of graduation: \_\_\_\_\_

Your degree/major/minor/emphasis/endorsement: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

If you are a recent graduate, consider including a list of important or relevant coursework.

Seminars or conferences: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Clinical/practicum/internships/special class projects/research:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**COMPUTER SKILLS:** List software, hardware, operating systems, or programming languages.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**PROFESSIONAL OR STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS, COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT:** List leadership positions such as president, chair, treasurer, etc. , as well as names of professional/student organizations and community organizations/events.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**AWARDS, HONORS:** List awards from college or community service including Dean's list, scholarships, elected positions, etc .

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**PUBLICATIONS, PRESENTATIONS:** Include publications, professional writing, research, formal presentations.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## WORKSHEET TO CATALOG OTHER INFORMATION

**INTERESTS/HOBBIES:** Be careful to use only information in this category that directly relates to your career objective. For example, it might be to your advantage to put that you coached a middle school baseball team or run marathons if you are looking for a position with a sporting good company.

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**SPECIAL ABILITIES:** These skills should again relate directly to your target position. For example, if you are applying for a sales position, it might be to your advantage to mention abilities in public speaking, making formal client presentations, networking, negotiating, etc.

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**LANGUAGE(S):** List languages and degree of competency (i.e. knowledge of basic vocabulary, fluent, conversational skills).

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**PROFESSIONAL PROFILE:** Think in terms of a potential employer's point of view and what they need in an employee (i.e. if you describe yourself as dependable, provide evidence such as "perfect work attendance record for the past 3 years)."

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## COVER LETTERS

- Should always accompany your resume – encourages the reader to progress to your resume
- Should be tailored to each position and/or employer
- Consists of 3-4 paragraphs

### 1) Why are you writing?

The beginning of your letter should catch the reader's attention but avoid catchy phrases and gimmicks. Also, tell why you are writing (name the specific position or type of work you are applying for) and mention the resource used in finding out about the opening. Introduce your credentials, professional experiences and personality traits.

### 2) Qualifications

Explain why you are interested in working for that employer or in that field of work, and most importantly, what your qualifications are (academic background/training, work experience, personal skills). Point out accomplishments and skills that relate to the position without duplicating exactly what is included in your resume. Then connect those things to the company's needs to show you have researched them and are aware of how you could benefit them. The key is to include information about the company and show you fit with them.

### 3) Take Action

Refer the reader to the enclosed resume and point out that it provides further details of your qualifications. Indicate your desire for an interview and let them know how they can contact you (phone and email).

### 4) Thank You

Thank them for their time and consideration.

## Cover Letter Checklist:

- One page preferred, produced on word processor and laser printer.
- No spelling or typing errors. Not even one! Check grammar, punctuation, and syntax.
- Write to the person who can hire you, with name, title, address correct and complete. (Call the company and find out who that is). If no name is available, choose a "non-sexist" term, i.e. "Dear Personnel Director or Search Committee."
- Use quality bond paper, 8 ½ x 11 inches, which matches your resume.
- Write in your own words, demonstrating knowledge, enthusiasm, and focus.
- Show you know something about the company, industry and use terms and phrases that are meaningful to the employers.
- Demonstrate your skills, motivation, and how you can fit in with the organization.
- Sign with a blue or black pen.
- Mail in 9 x 12 envelope with resume behind.
- Choose a conservative stamp for your envelope.
- Keep notes on date of mailing and date for follow-up call.

## SAMPLE COVER LETTER

### 10 Spaces

Your Street Address  
City, State Zip Code

Date

### 4 Spaces

Name of person who is hiring this position

His/Her Job Title

Company / Organization

Street Address

City, State Zip Code

### 2 spaces

Dear Ms. / Mr. / Dr. / Mrs. XXXXXXXX: or Hiring Representative or Search Committee

### 2 spaces

It is with great interest that I am writing to apply for the web developer position with XYZ Company. I learned of this position through the advertisement posted on the UNK Academic and Career Services website. I believe that my education, experience, and career interests make me a great fit for this position and would allow me to be a strong contributor to your organization.

I would be especially excited to work for XYZ Company because of the emphasis you place on teamwork. Throughout my academic career I produced some of my best work when collaborating with others and I believe this experience has prepared me to be a valuable member of your team. Your position also requires skills in various types of programming and software used in web development. My academic program in computer studies emphasized C, C++, Visual Basic, Assembler, Java, and SQL. In addition, I have extensive experience in using several software packages in web development, including Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop, AfterEffects, and Dreamweaver. My experience as a department computer consultant gave me exposure to both PC (Windows 200, 2008, XP, NT) and Macintosh platforms as well as Novell and NT LANs. With my broad technical knowledge, teamwork skills, and motivation to succeed, I can be an asset to your organization.

The enclosed resume provides further details on my background. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss with you how my qualifications can contribute to XYZ Company's mission and I can be contacted at 308-123-44567 or loper11@unk.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

### 2 spaces

Sincerely,

### 4 spaces

(Your handwritten signature – blue or black ink)

### 2 spaces

Type your name

Enclosure

## USE OF A REFERENCE SHEET

Select as references individuals who have worked with you and are able to talk with employers about your skills and abilities, and why you would be a successful employee. Current or previous supervisors, college professors or instructors are appropriate. Always contact references to obtain their permission prior to listing them on your reference sheet. Ask them, "Do you feel you know me well enough to be a positive reference for me?"

References are not part of a resume and should be listed on a separate page. Use a heading with your name and contact information that matches your resume. Enclose a reference sheet with your resume and cover letter if the employer makes a request for references. It's possible that references may never be requested. However, it is always a good idea to bring along extra copies of your resume and reference sheet to leave with the interviewer. This makes it as easy as possible for the interviewer to contact individuals who have agreed to discuss your qualifications. If you have letters of recommendation you may want to offer those to the interviewer as well.

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### REFERENCES FOR ...

#### NAME OF REFERENCE

Title  
Organization  
Mailing Address  
City, State, Zip  
Phone number  
Email  
(relationship if unclear)

#### NAME OF REFERENCE

Title  
Organization  
Mailing Address  
City, State, Zip  
Phone number  
Email  
(relationship if unclear)

#### NAME OF REFERENCE

Title  
Organization  
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City, State, Zip  
Phone number  
Email  
(relationship if unclear)