

How to Build a Resume and a Cover Letter

I am Suzi Mathias, the director of Transfer and Placement at NTC. First, please check out the Placement website. Go to www.ntc.edu, click on Current Students, and then click on Job Placement. If you have not registered to receive job postings, just click on “Register for Techconnect.” You may want to post your resume to this site too. At NTC, it is very important to us that you get a job, and we want to help you in any way that we can. Review the resources on this site, as we want you to be successful.

Today, I am going to talk about resumes and cover letters. Click on The Job Search Skills booklet as it is the one I am referencing in the video. If you have a chance it would be a great booklet to actually print, because there are many good examples of resumes and cover letters, plus items such as how to prepare for interviews.

Let’s get started by talking about how to do a resume. Resumes have one purpose: to get you an interview. Employers have very little time to read them. As a matter of fact, they tell me that they spend usually about 30 seconds looking over them. Because of that, it needs to be in a very neat format that is quick and easy to read. When you are using a combination of bullets and highlighting, it makes the document very easy to glance and understand the main points. It is important to remember that your resume is just a snapshot of your life; it is not too many details. The purpose is to get the attention of an employer. The key thing to remember is a resume is not all about you, but why you would be a good hire for a particular job. Utilize the company’s job description and qualifications when building your resume.

There is no right or wrong way to do a resume. If consulting with multiple sources about creating a resume, take the good points you hear from all and become a self-advocate of the resume you created. In other words, you determine what your resume and cover letter are going to look like... in the end, no one else can decide, unless you are doing it for a class assignment.

A few “do’s” of a resume: If possible, keep your resume to one page, then the employer can actually glance it in 30 seconds. Use bullets where appropriate. Begin sentences or phrases with action verbs. Some people like an objective to start the resume and some don’t. A strong statement is used to identify the position and company and what skills set you apart from others. Try highlighting headings in bold to make it visually appealing. If you mention what you are currently doing at work, make sure you use a present tense verb. If it is a past work experience, the verb tense is past. When listing work history or education, use reverse chronological order. Start with the present and go back in time. When including information about education, include your current education at Northcentral Technical College, but generally speaking, leave off high

school information. The only time that you would include your high school education is if it shows that you had a passion for your current program back then. For work experience, you do not need to go back further than 10 years in time.

Taking ownership of your resume and cover letter means that in the end, it is your product. You may have other people look it over, but you are the one that is responsible for making sure there are no errors. Employers frequently tell me if there is more than one error on the page, they don't consider the person. So make sure a number of people have reviewed it, and use spell check too. Practice reading it out loud too.

A few things not to do when developing a resume : Do not use abbreviations, as the reading may not know what you mean. Simple things, such as writing Northcentral Technical College out, rather than writing NTC, will make the resume easier to understand. Try not to use the word "I" on a resume. It is not all about you in the resume, rather it is how you are fulfilling the needs of the business. Leave out personal information as you do not want to give the employer information that they might use to make a judgment call about your lifestyle. Do not mention your age or health. Your references should be on a separate page rather than in the resume. One of the reasons a resume does not include references is to protect the privacy of the people giving the references. References are given at the time of an interview.

Some common items that appear in most resumes:

- Start with a header, including your name, address, phone number, and email address. Make sure your email address is appropriate. I have seen many that are not appropriate. Do not put one out there that says "big mama" or "silky kitten". Do not include your age in your email address. Generally, you can use your NTC email for about six months after graduation.
- As I stated before, I like to add the objective. That one is your call. An objective identifies the position, place, and what skills you have that set you apart from others. If you have more experience, you may want to add a summary profile rather than an objective. The summary would give key characteristics about your background that you want the employer to see right away.
- If your education is current and you are about to graduate or have graduated, that might be something that you add next. Start with your present education and go back in time. Include the name of the school, location, date of graduation, and your program. Other types of training can be included, but you really do not need to add your high school education. By your education, you might want to add your grade point average, especially if it is high.

- Depending if you are highlighting your skill sets or your work history depends on what you might put next. A functional resume gives skill sets, and is sometimes used because one's work experience does not relate directly to the job one might be seeking. A functional resume may be used if you have had a career change, or maybe you have gaps in your work history or have been out of the job market for some time. Identify skills that you have in the field that would make you very marketable. For example, customer services skills are important in many jobs, including Health, Human Services, and Sales, as well as many others. For the Administrative Professional program, noting your technology skills would be important. If you highlight your skill sets, use phrases seven to nine words long, starting with a verb. Let's say you have management skills. You could state: hired and managed eight workers daily, and collaborated as a team to accomplish daily goals. Even on a functional resume, include your work experiences by adding your position, place of business, city, state, and dates that you worked. Sometimes on a functional resume, the information is not detailed out as to what you did on the job.
- Employers seem to like chronological resumes. Chronological resumes detail your work history and shows how your work history relates to the job. In this format, most of the resume (after header and education) would detail what you have done on the job. Start with action verbs, and have phrases 7 to 9 words long each.
- Some people highlight a few functional skills and give some of their work experience. Create a resume that best shows what you can do for the company.
- I would not add at the end "References Upon Request." That simply is filler.

Check out the Job Search Skills booklet and review the resumes. This will give you a chance to see some of examples of what might work for you. Stay away from templates, and create your resume in a word document. Eventually, you will want to create in a PDF. Templates look "cookie cutter" and it may appear that you just wanted to produce something very quickly without giving it much thought.

You will also see how to put together a cover letter in the Job Search Skills booklet. A cover letter takes the place of a personal introduction. Years ago, there was no such thing as a cover letter. Instead, you shook someone's hand, introduced yourself, and made a short introduction. But today, employment forms are done either online or through mail and people send a cover letter as a means of introducing themselves to a particular company.

Strategies for winning cover letters:

Make it easy for someone to understand who you are. Your cover letter should be unique, and set you apart from others. Your cover letter shows your personality, your

drive, your willingness to go above and beyond, your soft skills, etc. Keep it to about $\frac{3}{4}$'s of a page, and make sure it is neat and free of errors.

Just like resumes, if you would go to the internet you would see hundreds of different examples of how to do a cover letter. Just like a resume, there is no right or wrong way. Human Resource directors often state, they review a cover letter in 15 seconds, and sometimes read just the first paragraph. Make those first 15 seconds count!

A few tips that might make it easier to create:

- Use the same header as on the resume.
- Left justify the rest of the information. Use a current date.
- Identify the name of the person, position in the company, the business name, address, city and state and zip code next.
- Try not to be too personal. It is better to be more formal.... Instead of Dear Jim, Dear Mr. Jim Smith would be more appropriate. If you cannot identify who the cover letter is going to, simply write "To the attention of" and then put the job number or position down.
- In the first paragraph, identify the position and company that you are referencing from the application. It is always good to add how you learned about the position. Make the last sentence counts in the first paragraph. What makes you any different than anyone else? In other words, why hire you? Be very specific because if this line is generic, your image becomes a blur.
- In the second paragraph, if your education is recent, I would identify the program that you are completing. If your education is dated, I would not mention it. Adding information about your work experience as it pertains to the work skills mentioned in the job description, would add value in the second paragraph.
- The third paragraph may be optional, but personally, I think it is important to add. People are hired and fired often times because of their personality, rather than their ability to do a job. In the third paragraph, mention your soft skills that set you apart from others, and give examples. For example, mention your strong work ethic and give a specific example of it. The example is what the employer will remember about you.
- In the last paragraph, thank the employer for considering you. Add a positive comment about the business. Ask politely for an interview, without being too pushy. Identify how to reach you. Type your name, and sign it above it. Keep the cover letter and resume together, flat not folded, and not stapled.

Please review the Job Search Skills booklet for specific examples. If you have any questions, please free to contact me at 715.803.1767 or email me at mathias@ntc.edu. Or, stop by the Transfer and Placement Office, C132, and meet the staff. We would love to assist you.