

# RESUMES & COVER LETTERS

Most employers spend 20 seconds or less scanning your resume and cover letter for the first time. In those few seconds, you need to clearly demonstrate how your skills, experience, education, and characteristics match what they are looking for. 20 seconds isn't long to make that kind of impression. Here's how to do it.

Can you beat the 20 second challenge?

## Tips for success for your resume and cover letter

- 1** Tailor your application to match the job  
Before you work on your resume and cover letter, read the job ad and job description (if available) and learn everything you can about the organization. Ask yourself: "What skills and characteristics are this employer looking for?" Then make sure the employer will be able to clearly see how you meet some or even all of these criteria.
- 2** Rank by relevancy  
The top half of your first page is the most important "real estate" on your resume and cover letter. Highlight your most relevant skills, experience, and education in this section. If you gained your best experience a few jobs back, feature it by separating your experience into "Relevant experience" and "Other experience."
- 3** Focus on your accomplishments  
Emphasize quantifiable achievements. Use numbers (e.g., # of people you've trained, size of budgets you've worked with, month/years of experience you have, size of audience you presented to).
- 4** Keep it brief  
Keep your resume to two pages maximum and your cover letter to one page.
- 5** Use bullets, not paragraphs  
Bullet points make it easier for employers to scan for key words and phrases.
- 6** Pay attention to formatting  
Organize your information into readable sections. Make your headings, degree, and job titles stand out from the regular text. Use bold letters or horizontal lines.
- 7** Use consistent formatting  
Repeat visual elements of the design throughout the resume, and between the resume and cover letter if appropriate. For example, if you choose to make a heading bold with capital letters, then do it throughout your resume.
- 8** Personalize your cover letter  
Your cover letter should reflect your personality. But avoid appearing pushy, overbearing, or too familiar. This is a business letter, so humour is generally out of place.
- 9** Proofread and edit  
The first impression of your resume is the most important. Look at your resume and cover letter closely, then have someone read them over to check for grammatical and spelling errors.
- 10** Be honest  
Make the most of your experience and achievements, but don't mislead the employer or say anything you can't back up in an interview.

**Your  
next  
steps**

**To get more help with resumes and cover letters:**

- Call 604.822.4011 to book a 30-minute session with a Career Educator or Career Peer Educator.
- Visit the UBC Career Services website to sign up for a resume workshop.



## What do you put in your resume?

These guidelines will help you build a solid resume, but don't think that resumes always have to have the same sections in the same order. It's to your benefit to create a unique resume. So although the following sections appear on many resumes, you have a lot of freedom on where they appear, how they are labeled, and so on.

### Contact Information

- Include your name, address, telephone, and professional-looking e-mail on page 1, and name and phone number on page 2
- ✘ Do not include personal data such as age, gender, marital status, social insurance number, health status, or photograph

### Objective

- Use a clear, concise statement about the kind of position you are seeking
- ✘ Avoid vague statements, e.g., "a position that will allow me to grow and learn"

### Summary of Strengths/Highlights/Skills Summary

Include 4-6 bulleted points highlighting strengths and skills pertinent to the position.

These may include:

- The amount of relevant work and/or volunteer experience you have
- Relevant training or education
- Relevant skills and abilities
- Personality traits or characteristics that make you a good fit for this kind of work
- ✘ Avoid clichés such as "a good team player" or "good communication skills"

### Education

- List in reverse chronological order, starting with your current degree (specify expected completion date if still enrolled)
- High school is optional
- Include relevant special course work, clinical placements, thesis, or certification
- Mention grades if noteworthy (e.g., gpa, top of class, etc.)

### Awards (optional)

- Include honours, citations, entrance scholarships, passport to education, etc.
- List with related education listing if you only have one or two awards

### Work and volunteer experience

- Include all paid, volunteer, and academic experience relevant to the position
- For each position state:
  - » Position title
  - » Name of employer
  - » City
  - » Period of employment

- Indicate non-paid experience as "volunteer" or "school project" next to the position title
- Focus on accomplishments. For example:
  - » instead of "wrote essay on topic abc" try: "received B+ grade on abc essay"
  - » instead of "served customers" try: "generated repeat business by delivering excellent customer service"

### Extracurricular activities & interests

- List hobbies, clubs, sports, etc.
- Include your role in these activities (e.g., Club treasurer), especially if relevant

### References

- ✘ Do not include references on your resume unless the employer asks for them explicitly
- ✘ Do not write "References available upon request"
- When invited for an interview, bring a well-formatted list of three references
- Include references' name, address, phone number, position, and place of employment
- Best references are supervisors from past work and volunteer experiences. Next are professors, teaching assistants, or anyone who has reviewed your work. Next are personal references, e.g., friends of family.

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**OBJECTIVE:** A position as a Communications Assistant in the Ministry of Natural Resources.

#### HIGHLIGHTS OF QUALIFICATIONS

- Previous work experience in public relations and communications
- Experienced researcher and writer of reports and executive summaries
- Skilled in creating press releases, briefing notes, newsletters and backrounders
- Success oriented with high energy and a positive attitude
- Confident public speaker to small and large groups of 30-500 people
- Computer skills: Publisher, Adobe InDesign, Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint)

#### EDUCATION

Public Relations Certificate, Humber College, Toronto, ON, 2009  
Bachelor of Arts – English Literature, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, 2008

#### RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

Public Affairs Intern, UBC, Vancouver, 2008 (summer)

- Wrote and edited press releases for local media and articles for in-house weekly newsletters and quarterly magazines, resulting in greater reader interest
- Researched issues and prepared briefs for senior Public Affairs staff
- Created and designed effective brochures and flyers using MS Publisher

Public Relations Assistant, Bayshore Homes for Seniors, Toronto, 2007 (part-time)

- Composed and published effective newspaper advertising copy, press releases and letters as part of a successful fundraising campaign that generated \$10,000
- Honed research skills, writing techniques and the ability to communicate effectively with professionals of all levels
- Planned, organized, and executed a one-day event that connected seniors with healthcare practitioners

Sales Assistant, The Bay, Vancouver, 2003-2006 (part-time)

- Persuaded customers and promoted products to increase sales
- Employed active listening and professionalism in all dealings with customers, managers and fellow employees
- Invited by senior management to participate in hiring committee as staff representative
- Developed superior time-management skills balancing 20 hours of work with full-time studies
- Created innovative eye-catching displays

#### INTERESTS & ACTIVITIES

- Researched and wrote articles for Ubysey, UBC campus newspaper
- Stage Manager of community theatre production of "Les Liasons Dangereuses"



You should always write a cover letter to go with your application. A cover letter is an excellent way to personalize your application and a professional way to introduce your resume. It is also another chance for you to emphasize your most relevant qualifications for the position. Below are some tips on how to do it.

**What do you put in your cover letter?**

### Contact Information

- Include your name, address, telephone, and e-mail
- Keep the format of this section consistent with your resume

### Date

- State the month, day, and year (e.g., May 15, 2009)

### Employer's Information

- Include the name of the contact person, job title, company name, address, and postal code
- Try to obtain as many of these details as possible through research or by calling the company

### Salutation

- Begin with "Dear" or "To"
- Address the contact person by the last name starting with "Mr." or "Ms."
- If you don't know the person's name, address the person by their job title or address your letter to "Human Resources"
- ✗ Avoid "To Whom It May Concern" or "Dear Sir/Madam"

### Opening Paragraph:

#### Why are you writing?

- Open with strong sentences that grab the employer's attention
- Demonstrate knowledge of the position:
  - » Address why you are interested
  - » Mention two or three strengths that qualify you for the position
- Mention the position you are applying for and how you learned about the job.
  - » Name your referral if possible, e.g., "Joe Davis, Manager of Customer Service, suggested I write you..."
  - » If you are responding to an advertisement, refer to the ad

### Follow-up Paragraphs:

#### What do you have to offer?

- Describe specific accomplishments from your past work, volunteer, and academic experiences that show your strengths
- Target your strengths to the needs and requirements identified in the ad or from your research

### The Next-to-Last Paragraph:

#### Why this company?

- Explain why you are interested in working for this employer
  - » Do research to show you know something about the organization's values, culture, or areas of prospective growth
  - » Describe how these values are similar and relevant to you and your previous accomplishments.

### Closing Paragraph:

#### Follow-up

- Mention your interest in an interview or discussion about opportunities.
- Provide information on your availability and how the employer may contact you.
- When appropriate, take a more proactive approach by arranging to call the employer.

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May 15, 2009

Owen Grayson  
Communications Manager  
Ministry of Natural Resources  
3478 Canada Way  
Vancouver, BC V4L 1R9

Dear Mr. Grayson,

I am excited by the opportunity to combine my commitment to environmental sustainability with my writing and communications skills in the role of Communications Assistant, a position you posted on UBC CareersOnline earlier this week. My work experience and education have enabled me to develop the writing and project management skills that this position requires.

My training includes a Public Relations Certificate as well as a degree in English Literature. Earning these qualifications has given me an excellent grounding in public relations practices. While finishing my degree, I wrote articles for a large campus newspaper. This experience polished my writing skills and helped me develop the discipline to produce high quality copy in a deadline driven environment.

While working as a Public Affairs Intern at UBC, I successfully implemented a communications plan to raise awareness of university events for alumni. I wrote regular press releases and newsletters, and secured sponsors for key events which contributed to significantly increased attendance at alumni functions.

In my position as Public Relations Assistant at a Seniors Home, I executed an event which brought together complementary treatment providers with residents. I managed all aspects of the planning and implementation including sourcing guest speakers, recruiting and training volunteers, and gaining local media coverage.

I am inspired by The Ministry of Natural Resources' "Ban Plastic Bags" public education initiative. I look forward to the prospect of working for an organization that demonstrates its commitment to conservation.

I would enjoy the opportunity to meet with you to discuss my qualifications. I will call you on Tuesday to confirm receipt of my application. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jack Cho



## Great verbs for your resume and cover letter

Good verbs can go a long way towards giving your accomplishments some pop when you describe them. Incorporate some of these powerful action verbs (written in the past tense) and watch your resume and cover letter come to life!

### 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

### 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
- represented
- referred
- 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
- 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
- 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
- counselled
- demonstrated
- diagnosed
- educated
- expedited
- facilitated
- familiarized
- guided
- motivated
- rehabilitated

### Clerical or Detail Skills

- approved
- arranged
- catalogued
- classified
- collected
- compiled
- dispatched
- executed
- generated
- implemented
- inspected
- monitored
- operated
- organized
- prepared
- processed
- purchased
- recorded
- retrieved
- screened
- specified
- systematized
- tabulated
- validated

### More Verbs for Accomplishments

- achieved
- expanded
- improved
- pioneered
- reduced (losses)
- resolved (problems)
- restored
- set goals
- spearheaded
- transformed

Source: *The Damn Good Resume Guide* by Yana Parker. (1996.) Berkeley: Ten Speed Press.

