

# Appendix C: Résumés and Cover Letters

Your résumé summarizes your past and current education, experience, activities and skills — and it's what employers use most often to decide whether or not to interview you. Employers often take just 5–10 seconds to look at a résumé, so make sure it does these three things:

1. Highlights your accomplishments and qualifications
2. Is well-organized and easy-to-read
3. Is tailored to include the most relevant things to the position

## 6 Tips for a Great Résumé

### 1. Create a “master résumé” that has everything.

Write down everything from your past 3-5 years: education, classes, jobs, volunteering, activities, skills, language skills, and community-service projects. Use this master to create one or more versions for particular industries or positions.

### 2. Tailor it to the job.

Think about what should be trimmed down, expanded, reordered or reworded to emphasize relevant items on your résumé.

### 3. Show accomplishments rather than listing duties.

Focus on achievements or skills rather than routine job responsibilities. Avoid using “Responsibilities included” or “Duties included”. For each work experience or major extracurricular activity, frame it in terms of how you:

- Improved a work process or increased the quality of a service/product provided
- Expanded the scope of work completed to reach the organization's goals
- Helped increase the sales or profits of the organization or a particular event
- Accomplished projects or tasks that were of value to others
- Learned skills transferable to other environments, such as writing or problem-solving
- Were recognized for your achievements or contributions

#### 4. Use action verbs to describe your experiences.

#### 5. Maximize your formatting for an effective presentation.

- **Font:** Use an easy-to-read font such as Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri, Cambria, or Garamond.
- **Size:** Stay between 10 pt. and 12 pt. Your name can be larger than 12 pt.
- **Margins:** Ideal margins are .75” all around, and no smaller than 0.5”.
- **Style:** Instead of using larger fonts for section titles, use bold, italics or capitalization.
- **Email:** Convert it to a PDF to preserve formatting, and name your file so that it clearly identifies the résumé as yours.

#### 6. Use “résumé language.”

Résumé language is clipped and usually does not include articles (a, an, the). There is no use of the first person pronouns (I, me, my). While it may be easy to fill your résumé with acronyms and technical jargon, make sure it is readable to someone who may not be an expert (e.g. someone in HR). This is especially important if you are applying to positions outside of your current area. Avoid flowery or vague language and be specific about past experiences.

Adapted by SPLC from Princeton University Career Services:  
[https://careerdevelopment.princeton.edu/sites/careerdevelopment/files/media/resume\\_guide\\_2019.pdf](https://careerdevelopment.princeton.edu/sites/careerdevelopment/files/media/resume_guide_2019.pdf)

## **EDUCATION**

Southern State Technical College

*2005-2009*

- Received certification in welding, cosmetology
- Took courses in highway flagging and work zone safety

Prattville High School – Prattville, AL

*Graduated 2005*

## **WORK EXPERIENCE**

**Backroom Associate, Baker's Express**

*Summer 2011*

Montgomery, AL

- Stocked, organized, shipped, and received merchandise for business.
- Performed inventory on business supplies and merchandise.

**Stylist, Diamond Cuts Unisex**

*Fall 2009 - Winter 2010*

Wetumpka, AL

- Shaped and styled hair as a stylist; Consulted clients about maintaining desired styles.
- Advised customers about most effective chemical solutions.

**Ice Cream Maker and Attendant, Marble Slabs Creamery**

*Winter 2005 - Spring 2006*

Selma, AL

- Manufactured and supplied small-batch homemade ice-cream.
- Served and interacted with store customers; ensured high quality service.
- Cleaned, organized, and stocked the storefront

## **VOLUNTEER & COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

### **Soup Kitchen Volunteer, Elijah's Promise**

*Summer 2004*

Montgomery, AL

- Prepared and served food to Soup Kitchen clients
- Managed organization stock and inventory

### **Volunteer Laborer, Unique Masonry Incorporated**

*Fall-Spring 2006, 2014*

Prattville, AL

- Prepared cement, operated the jackhammer, constructed foundations.
- Supplied, cleaned, and maintained tools.
- Proficient with Microsoft Office

## **SKILLS**

- Extensive experience with using power tools (i.e. jackhammer, power tack mobile, etc.)
- Skilled in forklift operations
- Experienced in tiling and demolition

*Note: all sample résumés adapted from Princeton Students for Prison Education and Reform (SPEAR)'s PREP program. The résumés are included for reference only. All organizations and companies listed in them are fictional, and any resemblance to actual companies is incidental.*

## Cover Letters

When you send a resume to a potential employer, you will often want to send an accompanying cover letter. A good cover letter will communicate interest, motivation and self-confidence, as well as some understanding of the position. Below are tips to help you craft a well-written letter.

### Format with Professionalism

#### 1. Adhere to business standards for letters and email.

- **Be concise.** Your cover letter should be one page and follow business-letter format, which generally includes 1" margins, a standard font between 10–12 point and correct grammar and spelling.
- **Address to impress.** For hard copies, print letters on good quality paper that matches your resume. For email, use an appropriate subject line.
- **Know email etiquette.** For email applications, you can either write a brief email that introduces your full, attached cover letter and resume, or write a modified cover letter as the body of the email, with only the resume attached. Both are equally acceptable. If the cover letter is in the body of your email, you do not have to include your mailing address, the date or the recipient's mailing address.

#### 2. Address your letter to a specific person, if possible.

Conduct online research to find this information for select organizations. You can also call organizations directly and ask for the name of the appropriate contact. If a name is not available, use "Hiring Manager" or "Internship Coordinator" in lieu of "To Whom It May Concern" or "Sir/Madam."

### Target Your Message

#### 1. Tailor your letter to each position or organization.

- **Show strengths.** Make clear reference to the skills or experience the organization is seeking.
- **Demonstrate enthusiasm.** Mention the aspects of the organization that appeal to you.
- **Be sincere.** Avoid generic or trite expressions in talking about your interest or qualifications.
- **Sell yourself.** Focus more on what you have to offer, rather than what they have to offer you.

## **2. Allow your personality to come through in your writing.**

Keep your language and tone professional, but don't write in a way that seems unnatural. This will make it harder for an employer to gauge your interest and enthusiasm. You should, however, be concise.

### **Check Your Work**

#### **1. Proofread your letters and have them critiqued.**

- **Search for issues.** Read your letters out loud to catch any typos or awkward phrasing.
- **Scan for detail.** Double-check that you have not left in details pertaining to another position.
- **Strive for eloquence.** A cover letter is often the first piece of written text that an employer receives from you, so make the effort to put forth your best writing.

#### **2. Keep track of your letters.**

Create a file that holds copies of all your cover letters, and make notes outlining further correspondence between you and the employer. It can be confusing and embarrassing to receive a reply from an organization (particularly a request for an interview) and not be certain of what you sent them.

Adapted by SPLC from Princeton Career Services:  
[https://careerdevelopment.princeton.edu/sites/careerdevelopment/files/media/cover\\_letter\\_guide\\_2019.pdf](https://careerdevelopment.princeton.edu/sites/careerdevelopment/files/media/cover_letter_guide_2019.pdf)

## COVER LETTER TEMPLATE

### Introduction

Your street address

City, State, Zip

Date

Contact's Name

Contact's Title

Organization Name

Street Address

City, State, Zip

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. Last Name [if you are unsure of gender, omit salutation and write full name]:

### Opening Paragraph

State immediately the position you are pursuing and how you came to know of the opening. If you were referred by a contact at the organization or company, mention that here, as well as any other interaction with representatives from the organization. Tell the employer briefly in one or two sentences why you are interested in this position and in their organization.

### Middle Paragraph(s)

Explain the *relevant* skills you have developed for the job, whether that is through classes, activities, or work experience. It is important to use examples that support your relevant skills. You do not need to have directly related experience but think about the skills you have gained from what you have done and how those could be used in this position. Also tell the employer *why* you are particularly interested in that organization. Avoid generic reasons that are taken right from the organization's website.

Remember, the goal of these 1 – 2 paragraphs is to connect the dots for the employer, relating your strengths to the particular demands of this position. Do not merely provide a list of things you have done, as this can be easily ascertained from your résumé. Instead, make your case for *what you have to offer* and *why you want to offer it to this particular organization*.

**Last Paragraph**

State that you are interested in an interview or further discussing this opportunity. If you need to explain anything out of the ordinary on your resume, this is the place to do it. You might mention that if you do not hear anything from the potential employer in two to three weeks time that you will call as a follow-up to see where they are in their hiring process. Finish by thanking them for their time and consideration.

**Closing**

Sincerely,

Your signature (leave 3-4 blank spaces for this; for email messages just type your name)

Your name in print

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