

**Résumé
and Cover Letter
Writing:
A Complete Guide**

The Cover Letter

Effective letter writing is an important part of your job search. The letters you write not only convey your qualifications for the job, but also give the employer the opportunity to observe your attentiveness to detail (spelling, grammar, punctuation, organization, sentence structure) and the overall quality of your work. Care should be taken to give the employer the best impression possible.

The cover letter can be one of the most difficult letters that you will write. It is worthwhile to take time in composing, rewriting, and editing this letter until it conveys your message in an interesting, well-organized and professional form. **The application letter is a personal sales letter to the employer.** It will encourage your prospective employer to read your resume and possibly offer you an interview.

DO:

- Make your cover letter personal! It should be a personally typed letter in business form on quality, letter-sized (8 1/2" x 11") paper.
- Address the cover letter to the individual responsible for hiring. If you are not sure who this individual is, research the company in the Career Placement and Planning Office or by calling the employer and asking for the name of the hiring authority.
- Highlight your qualifications and convey your interest in the organization. Try to respond exactly to the requirements listed in the job announcement and communicate why you would be a valuable asset for the company by stressing relevant experience and education.
- Close the letter with an expression of appreciation for considering your application.

DO NOT:

- Use perfumed, personal stationery.
- Repeat all the information provided in your resume.
- Ask for a minimum salary or request information on insurance benefits in the cover letter.
- Write a single cover letter and reproduce it for a number of employers.
- Send a resume to an employer without a cover letter.
- Be too aggressive with your language and word choice.
- Write a long, detailed cover letter. It should be **one** page only.

Guidelines For Cover Letters

Date of Writing

Mr. & Ms. Employer
Title of Employer
Organization
Street Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Mr. or Ms. Employer:

1st Paragraph: Tell why you are writing. Name the position, field or general areas about which you are asking. Tell how you heard of the opening or organization.

2nd Paragraph: Mention one or two qualifications you think would be of greatest interest to the employer addressing your remarks to his/her point of view. Tell why you think you are particularly interested in the organization or type of work. If you have had related experience or specialized training, point it out. If you are a recent graduate, explain how your academic background makes you a qualified candidate for the position.

3rd Paragraph: If you plan to be in the geographic area of the company, you can mention it, and suggest a specific date and time that you will telephone to see if it might be possible to meet with the employer while you are in that location, unless you hear beforehand that the reader does not wish an interview. Make sure your closing is not vague, but make a request for specific action from the reader. Do NOT state in your letter that you will contact the employer to set up an interview—that approach is far too aggressive and is viewed negatively by employers! Close with an expression of appreciation and indicate that you are willing to send more information if necessary.

Sincerely,

(Your handwritten signature—there should be 4 blank lines here)

Type your name
Street Address
City, State, Zip Code
Telephone (area code included)

Note!

If you are submitting your cover letter electronically, delete the employer's address from the top of the document. Also, at the end of the document where your handwritten signature would be, leave only two blank lines instead of the four you would use when submitting a hard-copy of the letter.

Writing Winning Resumes

What is a Resume?

A Resume is an **advertisement for you**. It is a one or two page summary for potential employers highlighting your education, professional experience (both paid and unpaid) and other qualifications pertinent to your job search. The goal of a resume is to get you an interview.

There are many ways to write a resume using different styles and formats. What you include and how you choose to present it depend on your experiences, major accomplishments and the position you are seeking.

Tips for Resume Writing

Basic Guidelines

1. Keep the resume to one page. Two pages may be appropriate when applying for a specific job or if you have extensive work experience.
2. Edit and re-edit until it says exactly what you want it to say. Eliminate unimportant details. You can expect to have several drafts of your resume before you perfect the content and layout.

Cover the Basics

- Name and contact information- Including your email address.
- If you have “Current” and “Permanent”, indicate the time frame that the current address is valid.
- Describe all duties and tasks with quantifiable and measurable outcomes and goals.

Create a Heading

Create a heading (full name, address, email address and phone number where you can easily be reached). In addition to your campus address, include a permanent address and phone number where messages will reach you. Be sure to include zip codes and area codes. Information should always be current. If the information changes you must re-do your resume.

Sample Headings: Option 1

Reese Entgrad

1000 Beattie Street Helena, MT 59601 (406) 555-5555 r.entgrad@gmail.com

Sample Headings: Option 2

Reese Entgrad

Address until May:
Saints Central Box 218
Carroll College
Helena, MT 59625
(406) 555-5555

Sample Headings: Option 3

REESE ENTGRAD

1000 Beatle Street
Helena, MT 59601
(406) 555-5555
r.entgrad@gmail.com

Objective

This is a tricky one. Many experts believe that objectives have gone out of style. More popular now: Summary Statements—but they work best for people who have a lot of experience. If you decide to use an objective: avoid telling the employer what YOU want from them—be clear and concise. Best objectives are ‘lean and mean’ – get to the point. Many organizations have multiple openings; be clear about what type of position you seek if a particular organization wants to see an objective

What is an objective anyway? It is a brief statement summarizing your career goals. Your goals should be focused and specific. If your goals are still unclear, the cover letter provides an opportunity for you to tailor your objective to the position to which you are applying. This part of a resume is optional if you are short on room and if you will submit the resume with a cover letter. Use an objective if you take your resume to a career fair, where you will submit your resume without a cover letter.

Objective: Goal statement (What goal do you want this document to have?).

If there is no current or specific opening, you can say, “To obtain an entry level professional position.”

OR “To obtain a summer position as a XXX at XYZ organization.”

OR “To obtain a summer intern position at XYZ organization.”

Summary Statement Example: Proven collaborator with leadership experience, proven skills in project management, organization and research and a background in wellness program development and promotion, office administration and organization. Excellent multi-media skills as well as administrative support and polished communication skills.

What kind of information belongs on a resume?

Include sections for items such as:

- Education
- Work Experience
- Membership or Leadership Experience
- Volunteer Experience
- Extracurricular Activities
- Athletic Participation
- Scholarships, Awards, Honor Societies

Litmus Test Question

How does this piece of information make me a better candidate for this job? (All content of your resume should relate directly to the goal- the objective!)

Before you start, remember to use attractive formatting!

The Key: Create a good balance of white space and text.

The resume should not look empty, nor should it overwhelm the reader with text.

Margin space is negotiable; remember there is usually a lot of white space at the top, so the margin can be narrower.

Make the resume readable by using a minimum of a 10-point font for text and 11-point for headings.

Use, at most, three levels of formatting (normal text, bold, and italics) or else it will distract the reader.

A badly formatted resume will look sloppy. If you submit such a document, you may as well forget an interview.

Select a format that works well for your particular situation.

Avoid canned computer resume programs! They do not showcase your talents well. They tend to be rigidly formatted, which makes individualizing them difficult to impossible.

Education Background

Begin with the most recent level of education and degree and list **in reverse chronological order**. Briefly summarize your education achievements including colleges attended (you may include semester(s) off-campus and summer study) and their locations, dates, degrees, GPA (if 3.0 or above), academic majors/minors, course concentrations and honors. If listing your major does not adequately reflect educational experiences, include fieldwork projects, research papers, etc. which are relevant to the work you plan to do.

Also include special certifications and qualifications that relate directly to the position which you are applying for.

Do not list your high school experience unless you are a first-year student or a first-semester sophomore applying for an internship. The major focus of your resume should be on your college skills, activities, volunteerism, and other career-related experiences. Once you have worked full-time for several years following college, college experience should be omitted.

Reese Entgrad

2310 Park Street, Apt. 3
Helena, MT 59601
(406) 555-5555 email@address.com

OBJECTIVE: To obtain an entry-level professional position at the Lewis & Clark County Health Department in Health Education for Families.

EDUCATION

Carroll College

Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in **Public Health**

- Honors Thesis: *Sudden Cardiac Arrest in Young Athletes: Silent But Deadly*

Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in **Business Administration**

- Minor in Marketing

Helena, MT

Expected: May 20XX

Expected: May 20XX

Leadership Experience

Community Advisor- Carroll College, Helena, Montana. School Year 201X - Present
Enforce college policies for residence hall occupants
Provide guidance, resolve conflicts, and serve as active listener to the 55 female freshmen residents living on my floor

Student Ambassador- Carroll College, Helena, Montana. School Year 201X -201X
Provide tours of campus for prospective students and their families.

SEARCH Staff- Carroll College Campus Ministry, Helena, Montana. School Years 201X-201X
Serve as a group leader for 'SEARCH', a spiritual weekend retreat for college students

Basketball Coach- Helena Youth Basketball Association, 201X-201X
Prepared daily practice schedules and coached bi-weekly games for middle school students

Volunteer Experience

"Up til' Dawn" Fundraiser, Carroll College, Helena, Montana. Fall semester 20XX

Emergency Food Box Assembly and Distribution- Helena Food Share. March 20XX-Present

Clinica La Experonza- San Quintin, Mexico. March 201X
-Promoted and facilitated health care activities during this week-long experience

Counselor- Legendary Lodge, Seeley Lake, Montana. June 20XX

Volunteer Experience and the Targeted Resume!

The student who is used as an example below is a double major in Communications Studies and Public Relations. Their volunteer experience would be expanded and included under relevant experience on the resume and has helped to target their resume based on their previous relevant experience in a volunteer activity. By simply giving a few more specific examples of what they accomplished, they have increased their appeal as a candidate for the position they are applying for.

Before

20XX- 20XX

Managed public relations and advertising for “Up ‘Til Dawn”, St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital campaign on campus. Carroll College received the 201X-201X “School of the Year” award from St. Jude’s, for campus awareness, public relations, and marketing.

After

Up ‘til Dawn - Carroll College Chapter
Public Relations Vice President

Helena, MT
August 20XX - Present

- Manage public relations and advertising activities for campus campaign to benefit St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital
- Actively create online awareness with Facebook campaign, increasing clicks by 27%
- Produce dozens of brochures, posters, and handouts for campus-wide distribution
- Recruited 15 students to conduct letter-writing campaign to raise awareness and generate funds
- Organized and set-up celebration event to celebrate fund-raising success, an increase of \$5,000 from the previous year
- Carroll College received the 201X-201X “School of the Year” award from St. Jude’s for campus awareness, public relations and marketing, and largest monetary contribution of all colleges in Western district: \$36,000 for St. Jude Children’s Hospital

Helpful Hints

Relevant work experience- can be paid, unpaid, volunteer, internships, etc.
Your internship experience is likely to be your strongest point.

All experience should directly support the objective.

All experience should strengthen your candidacy and be targeted to the position you are seeking.

A Step-By-Step Approach to Writing up Your Job Experience

(Find Your First Professional Job, Scott Weighart)

Writing job descriptions takes time, effort, and practice. But once you learn how to do this effectively, you will have mastered a skill that will help you for the rest of your career. Let’s look at a step-by-step formula to writing effective job descriptions. Note that the changes in each step are indicated by having the text underlined: You would not underline any job description text on a real resume.

One of the great advantages of using this step-by-step approach is that it will make your interview easier. If you take the time to nail down an excellent description of your job and employer, then that becomes one less thing that you will need to worry about accomplishing during the interview itself...when you won't have much time to think about what to say! Instead of having to explain the basics of your previous experience, you can build on the resume by diving into specific examples of the points made on your resume.

Step 1: Write down the job title and dates of employment, then the organization's name and location on the second line.

Office Assistant	April 201X-Present
<i>Fenway Project Administrative Office</i>	Billings, MT

Step 2: Write down in simple terms the various duties you had in a given job.

Office Assistant	April 201X-Present
<i>Fenway Project Administrative Office</i>	Billings, MT
Schedule and organize events.	
Perform research and administrative tasks.	
Recruit and train student interns.	

Step 3: Add details describing the nature of the employer in question and the purpose of the job.

Office Assistant	April 201x-Present
<i>Fenway Project Administrative Office</i>	Billings, MT
Schedule and organize dozens of events <u>and community services for needy socioeconomic groups in Billings.</u>	
Perform research <u>on corporate and nonprofit organizations to identify strategic methods for getting donations of resources.</u>	
Recruit and <u>motivate college students to participate as volunteers.</u>	

Step 4: Add quantitative details and professional terms when possible to bring the experience to life.

Office Assistant	April 201X-Present
<i>Fenway Project Administrative Office</i>	Billings, MT
<p><u>In a timely manner</u>, schedule and organize events and community services for <u>over 50 Billings teenagers in</u> needy socioeconomic groups.</p> <p>Research <u>roughly 250</u> corporate and nonprofit organizations to identify strategic methods for <u>soliciting</u> donations of resources.</p> <p>Successfully recruited and motivated <u>ten</u> college students to participate as volunteers.</p>	

From this job description, we get a much better sense of who this student really is. We get a sense of their research experience, altruistic motives, and ability to juggle tasks- without directly mentioning these soft skills. A hiring employer would infer that the student was responsible and motivated. These qualities are probably the most important that any potential supervisor wants to see in a new hire.

Passive Verbs vs. Action Verbs

If, after all this, your resume is still lacking something, try to review your use of verbs. Remember: never use passive verbs where you can use active verbs instead. The following is a list of POWER words for inclusion in your resume.

Passive Verbs	Active/Power Verbs
Maintained	Enhanced
Assisted	Resolved problems
Answered	Expedited
Spoke to...	Negotiated
Sold	Increased sales by...
Taught	Directed
Processed	Earned
Received	Contributed (to)

Transferable Skill Phrase Cheat Sheet

If you would like to try building transferable skill phrases into your resume, try using this formula: Pick an accurate word from each column below in order to figure out how to graft a transferable skill phrase on to a bullet point or sentence in your ‘*Experience*’ section.

Verb	Adjective	Transferable Skill	Linking Word
Demonstrated	Effective	Ability to learn quickly	When
Displayed	Excellent	Communication skills	While
Showed	Outstanding	Interpersonal skills	
Exhibited	Strong	Attention to detail	
Proved to Have	Solid	Dependability	
Utilized	Very good	Attitude	
Exercised	Consistent	Organizational skills	
Used	Exceptional	Patience	
Possessed	positive	Customer service orientation	
		Willingness to do whatever asked	
		Ability to work in a team	
		Ability to work independently	

Step 1: Capture what you did in a simple, straightforward way.

- Customer Sales Representative at a local bank.

Step 2: Add quantifiable and quantitative details to make the job come alive.

- Perform variety of banking transactions for customers using Jack Henry System; prepare cashiers’ checks, money orders, and traveler’s checks; convert currencies through foreign exchange software

Step 3: If you were GOOD at the job, identify the transferable skills you used in the job and use them to create a phrase using the above formula.

- Perform variety of banking transactions for customers using Jack Henry System; balance drawer daily with consistently high marks in transaction and paperwork accuracy.

You don’t need a transferable skill phrase with every single sentence or bullet, but students without any directly relevant job experience probably should make sure to use at least two per job... assuming you were GOOD at that job!

Action Verb Lists

Communications

Acted as a liaison	Demonstrated	Lectured	Publicized
Advised	Displayed	Marketed	Published
Advocated	Edited	Mediated	Recommended
Authored	Guided	Moderated	Referred
Commented	Informed	Negotiated	Sold
Consulted	Instructed	Notified	Trained
Corresponded	Interpreted	Presented	Translated

Administration

Administered	Distributed	Managed	Recruited
Appointed	Eliminated	Motivated	Referred
Arranged	Executed	Obtained	Represented
Completed	Governed	Opened	Reviewed
Controlled	Implemented	Organized	Selected
Coordinated	Instituted	Overhauled	Supervised
Delegated	Issued	Presided	Supplied
Directed	Launched	Provided	Terminated

Planning and Development

Broadened	Devised	Improved	Prepared
Created	Discovered	Invented	Produced
Designed	Drafted	Modified	Proposed
Developed	Estimated	Planned	

Analysis

Amplified	Detected	Forecasted	Researched
Analyzed	Diagnosed	Formulated	Solved
Calculated	Disapproved	Identified	Studied
Compiled	Evaluated	Investigated	Systematized
Computed	Examined	Programmed	Tested

Manual Labor

Assembled	Installed	Operated	Replaced
Constructed	Maintained	Repaired	Rewired

Financial/Records Management

Allocated	Collected	Logged	Purchased
Audited	Documented	Maximized	Recorded
Balanced	Expedited	Minimized	Scheduled
Catalogued	Invested	Monitored	Traced
Classified	Inventoried	Processed	Updated

General Terms

Accomplished	Delivered	Originated	Serviced
Achieved	Expanded	Performed	Strengthened
Assisted	Handled	Provided	Transformed
Completed	Increased	Served	Utilized

References

References should be an addition to your resume and should be listed on a separate document. You should have a list of 3-5 people who have agreed explicitly to serve as strong references on your behalf. These individuals should be in a position to objectively evaluate your suitability for the type of positions you seek. These references may be former supervisors, professors, or anyone that can provide information about your skills and abilities.

As you begin listing references, remember to include the individual's name, position or title, place of business, city and state, daytime phone number, and email address. If it is not clear from the position or place of business what the objective relationship is, then briefly describe it. An example is listed below:

REFERENCES

Jane Smith, PhD

Professor of English

Carroll College, Helena, MT

(406) 447-5530 / jsmith@carroll.edu

Dr. Smith served as an advocate and helpful academic advisor for two years, while completing three courses under her instruction.