

## 12.7 Résumés and Cover Letters

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the purpose of a résumé.
2. Describe the elements of successful résumés.
3. Know how to prepare a good cover letter.

A **résumé** is basically a summary of your experience. Just as an advertiser will invest a lot of resources to condense the essence of his or her product into a thirty-second ad for the Super Bowl, condensing the essence of your experience onto one or two pages can be a challenging task. Fine-tuning, updating, and rewriting your résumé will become an ongoing process as you move through your career, and it is not too early to prepare one now. The purpose of a résumé is to get you invited for an interview. Unfortunately, too often a résumé is a reason to exclude a candidate. Poor grammar, misspelled words, lengthy listings of irrelevant experience, and messy formatting motivate hiring managers to move quickly to the next candidate.

There is no such thing as a perfect format for a résumé, though hiring managers and recruiters generally agree on the following principles:

- A short résumé is generally better than a long one. One page should usually be enough—two pages if you have a lot of experience.
- Focus on your accomplishments, not just the positions you held. Your résumé should point out your strengths. Use dynamic verbs (see “101 Action Verbs” below).
- Include numbers. Be sure to include dollar amounts and percentages that support achievements. For example, you might write “Reduced costs by 20 percent.” Keep track of your accomplishments in your “notes” notebook so that you don’t have to go back and recreate history when you are revising your résumé.
- Use keywords. Most recruiters and hiring managers look for résumés online and review submitted résumés with software that looks for keywords.
- Keep information easy to find. Use the standard convention of a reverse chronological listing of experience, starting with your current or most recent job and moving backward in time, unless there is a valid reason for following a different format (a function-based résumé might be appropriate if you need to cover two or more long periods of unemployment).

Deciding what to include in your résumé is where most of the work comes in, because it is in the careful wording of the body of your résumé that you can really sell yourself for a position. Ideally, you should review your résumé for each position you are applying for, particularly to include any accomplishments that you would not include in your “general résumé” but that are relevant to that particular job. Your résumé should include these elements:

- **Header.** Include your full name and complete contact information. Be sure that you use personal (home) phone number and e-mail address, not your work contact information.
- **Objective.** Include a short one- or two-sentence summary of the kind of position you

are looking for. Some résumé writers now recommend replacing or following the objective with a listing of skills, particularly when you are going to post the résumé online, because that provides a great opportunity to include keywords. Look to your list of transferable skills to populate this kind of list.

- **Résumé body.** Starting with your current or most recent job, internship, or volunteer position, list your experience in reverse chronological order. Each entry should include the title, the name and location of the company, and the dates you held the position. This should be followed by your major achievements in that position. Use strong action verbs and a quantitative measure for achievements. Look for things that will show that you are a better candidate than others. Consider accomplishments such as the following:
  - Being promoted
  - Gaining expanded responsibilities
  - Being recruited by a former employer or boss, or being asked to follow him or her to another company
  - Having your accomplishment copied by other departments or, even better, by other companies
  - Recruiting and training others
  - Receiving awards and recognitions, including speaking at conferences, writing, or being written about (if these are easily found online and you are short on space, omit these types of accomplishments, because you will be googled)

## 101 Action Verbs

Here are the kinds of verbs that help “sell” you to potential employers. Expand on this list to find good verbs specific to your accomplishments by doing an Internet search for “action verbs for résumés.”

acted	delegated	implemented	persuaded
adapted	demonstrated	improved	planned
advised	designed	increased	prepared
analyzed	developed	influenced	prioritized
arranged	devised	informed	produced
assembled	diagnosed	initiated	promoted
assessed	directed	inspected	publicized
assigned	edited	instituted	recruited
attained	educated	instructed	rehabilitated
authored	enabled	integrated	represented
balanced	encouraged	introduced	researched
budgeted	engineered	invented	reviewed
built	enlisted	investigated	revitalized
calculated	established	lectured	scheduled
chaired	evaluated	managed	set goals
coached	executed	marketed	shaped
collected	fabricated	mediated	solved
communicated	facilitated	moderated	spoke
compiled	forecasted	motivated	stimulated
computed	formulated	negotiated	strengthened
conceptualized	founded	organized	supervised
consolidated	generated	originated	trained

contracted	guided	overhauled	translated
coordinated	identified	oversaw	upgraded
counseled	illustrated	performed	wrote
created			

## The Finishing Touches

Once you have written the body of your résumé, review and discuss it with people you respect. Ask them what stands out, what puts them to sleep, what turns them off, and whether anything is missing. Make sure your résumé is “short and sweet” and that it demonstrates your strengths. Be sure you can support every point you make on your résumé during an interview.

Great résumés are a combination of a business document, marketing piece, and personal preferences. Expect conflicting opinions from others and don’t get hung up on them; the final decision is yours.

Finally, here are some tips on format. Name your résumé file clearly. Don’t give the file the name “résumé” or “My Résumé.” Include your name, abbreviated job title, and company name in the file name. For example, if Victor Smith applies for a marketing project manager job at XYZ Company, his résumé file might be named *VictorSmith-MktPM-XYZ.doc*.

Choose your document formatting wisely. Use a readable font! You have approximately thirty seconds to make an impact on the person reading your résumé, and nothing turns off a reader faster than a résumé that is difficult to read.

- Serif fonts, such as Times New Roman, should be no smaller than eleven points, and sans-serif fonts, like Arial, should be no smaller than ten points.
- Try to keep margins at one inch all the way around.
- Print your résumé on a high-grade, bright white paper. Do not use cream-colored paper or paper with visible fibers, as these papers can confuse scanners and optical character recognition software that employers may use to digitally store and search résumés.

## Cover Letters

The purpose of a **cover letter** is to entice the recipient to read your résumé. There is no better way to entice someone to read further than to demonstrate that you fit his or her needs. A successful cover letter should emphasize how your knowledge, skills, or experiences make you an ideal candidate.

When writing a cover letter, look over the job posting carefully. What are the keywords in the posting? Underline or highlight them. Think about how your experience and skills are related to those keywords. What examples can you give in short sentences? Now you can begin to write.

Be sure to state what job you are applying for and why in your opening paragraph. If you don’t hook the reader here, you will not be considered for the job. This is where you begin to show that you are a unique and qualified candidate. This, in marketing terms, is your selling proposition. Write this paragraph two or three different ways and then

choose the best. When you are happy with your opening paragraph, add one or two paragraphs that illustrate your proposition from the opening paragraph.

Remember that your cover letter also demonstrates your communication skills. Be clear, be concise, and be careful. You won't have another opportunity to make a first impression. Be sure your spelling and grammar are correct. Did you double-check the spelling of the company name? Read the document; look for mistakes your spellchecker won't catch (like the word "you" instead of "your"). Put it down for a while and then reread it again.

Keep your formatting simple. Often you will have to copy and paste your letter and résumé into a predetermined form on a company's Web site. You are likely to lose formatting conventions such as tabbing, tables, and bulleted lists.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The purpose of a résumé is to secure an interview.
- A good résumé is action based and focused on accomplishments.
- The purpose of a cover letter is to entice the recipient to read your résumé.

## CHECKPOINT EXERCISES

1. Explain some of the ways a résumé could block consideration of a candidate. What are some strategies for ensuring this doesn't happen?

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2. List your top three accomplishments to date. What were the key transferable skills you used in achieving them? Do both the accomplishments and the skills play a prominent role in your résumé?

Accomplishments	Transferable skills

3. Write your résumé. Everyone should have one. They are useful not only to apply for jobs, but also to secure internships and to explain who you are to your network. If you are a student who has no work experience, what kinds of

accomplishments can you use to illustrate your skills?

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