

Resume and Cover Letter Tips

Resume Advice

You are most likely going to run into Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) as you apply for jobs

Your resume is screened by an algorithm, then scored. If the score is high enough, then a human being might give it a 2-10 second glance. Only after all that might a reviewer come back to actually READ your materials. You need to customize your resume (cover letters are often not read until later in the process) for these first two interactions, or you will probably never hear back from anyone, ever. To create a successful resume for both ATS and humans:

- **Pay attention to the formatting tips below.**
- **Steal the nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, etc of the job description and substitute them for your language.**

Formatting Basics

- NO TEMPLATES! They contain hidden formatting that makes an ATS unable to parse and read your resume.
- Resumes must be clean, concise and consistent with no typos or errors of any kind.
- Use a single sans-serif font such as Calibri, Tahoma, Arial, Verdana, Gill Sans; font size should range between 10 and 14.
- Dates are in reverse chronological order and consistently written).
- Use the preset margins in Microsoft Word. No fancy bullets or other graphics – ATS gets confused.
- Italics, columns, parentheses, lines and underlines can be problematic for human eyes and some scanners; bold and all-caps read fine.
- Put your name in the title of the file (e.g. “Jane Smith Resume Spring 2017”), and use the format the employer asks for, or a Word doc (not docx) if you are not sure.
- Allow for white space. Too much black type on a page looks busy and hard to read; not enough looks unqualified.

Name and Education

- Your name is clearly visible and could be probably two points bigger than the rest of the text. No titles or abbreviations on the same line.
- Use only one address; two may be confusing to the employer.
- Your email address should be professional and not offensive. Seniors – stop using your umass.edu on your resume.
- Consider adding a relevant web address or link to your LinkedIn profile.
- UMass is a nickname; write out “University of Massachusetts Amherst” every time (no “at,” “-,” or “,” in the name.)
- Include GPA if 3.0 or higher; if it is not there, employers will think it is below a 3.0.

Content Basics

- Every entry in an “Experience” section needs a title, company, location and dates. The order of this information is a strategic decision that then must be consistent under each heading. See below for different kinds of headings.
- Use descriptive titles (i.e. Intern = Software Design Intern). Major titles are capitalized (e.g., lifeguard = Lifeguard).
- Start descriptions with active verbs, preferably the verbs from the job description. Describe your accomplishments and skills as they relate to the desired position; don’t just list “job duties”.
- No pronouns or articles (I, them, their, a, an, the, etc.).
- Use as many numbers as possible (Supervised group of 13 children, Managed budget of \$15,000).
- Verb tenses: if currently holding a position, use present tense (i.e. “collaborate,” not “collaborating.” Otherwise use past tense (“collaborated”).
- Well known abbreviations only (e.g., “CPR” is good; “ASB” is not); write out most acronyms.

Possible Experience Section Headings (Strategic choice based on human resume audience.)

- | | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|
| • Relevant Experience | • Teaching Experience | • Relevant Courses |
| • Additional Background | • Relevant Projects | • Computer Skills |
| • Languages | • Laboratory Skills | • Leadership |
| • Community Service | • International Experience | • Research |
| • Honors and Awards | • Certifications | • Technical Skills |

Other Important Resume Concerns

An Objective... is not mandatory. It is the shorthand version of a cover letter, so if you are using a cover letter, the objective is redundant and takes up space. No-cover-letter situations such as career fairs, networking, conferences or posting your resume online are the only GOOD times to use it as it can briefly highlight the kind of position you are looking for.

Profiles and Summaries of Qualifications... are not mandatory and can be either helpful or problematic. Consider that many employers do not read these (they can seem manipulative) and just skip down to the first experience section. Depending on your relevant knowledge and the audience, it may be better to leave out the summary and spend time and space detailing how you can solve their problems in your experience sections.

Degree or University Name First?

There is no correct answer. Ask yourself which one has better market value for you. What would be more eye-catching? When you're writing a resume for ATS recognition, any old way of writing about your education won't do. You need to use the exact same keywords listed in the job description. Many ATS can't distinguish between Bachelor of Arts, Bachelors of Arts, Bachelor's of Arts and BA.

Relevant Skills/Coursework

Include computer skills, languages, coursework, class projects and large research papers as ways to demonstrate your relevant skills. Pay attention to the job description qualifications to know what is relevant to include. For courses, focus on those most relevant to the employer, and simplify course names if necessary (but do not use course numbers, most employers have no idea what they might mean).

Awards and Honors... may not mean what you hope they will to an employer. For example, "Awarded the Mary Jane Scholarship freshman year 2014." Why did you receive this award? What is your message to the employer by having this on your resume? How are you demonstrating relevancy, value, skills, or abilities by including this? You may be rightly proud of your award, but the employer? Not so much. Your internship(s) probably count(s) for more.

Dates... belong toward the middle or right side of the page because the left side is where people scan first, and dates are never more important than your experiences. List them in consistent places in a consistent format.

Proper Names in Resumes

Leave names of supervisors or principal investigators of projects out of the body of a resume, unless the employer knows the person. (Names generally go on a separate references page.) Only name-drop in your resume if you are sure the employer will be impressed with your association with that person, and even then make that reference to be about your work, not the 'famous' person, the team, or anyone else. Focus on achievements, not duties, and always show results, including measures of success whenever possible.

CV vs. Resume

A Curriculum Vitae (CV) is used in academia, and in theory would include all jobs you have ever had, every presentation done, every conference attended, every publication written. A resume represents only experiences that are relevant to the position for which you are applying. But even employers get the terms confused. Unless you are a graduating graduate student applying for professor jobs, you will be using a resume, no matter what someone calls it.

Hobbies/Activities

Is there a connection between your mentioning skiing and membership on the Humans vs Zombies Leadership Team to the skills and accomplishments you say you have acquired on your resume? If so, what is it? You have to tell the reader why the activity or hobby is on the resume. If it is not connected, why have it on there?

"References Available Upon Request"

Unnecessary. It's not like you would ever refuse if asked.

Crafting Cover Letters

Your cover letter should accomplish the following:

- Clearly get your cover letter and resume to the right person for the right job opening.
- Show you can communicate professionally in writing.
- Reflect your positive attitude, enthusiasm, and motivation.
- Reinforce qualifications presented in your resume and show that you are a good fit for the company by using short narrative examples of how your experience and skills match the needs of the employer.

Your Address

Your Address

April 4, 2017

Company Name

Company Address

Company Address

Dear (insert the correct contact person's name here, or if not available, use "Search Committee," "Hiring Manager," "Internship Coordinator" etc.):

Routing: Be specific in defining the purpose of this letter. Identify the position you're applying for and indicate how you heard about it.

- If appropriate, name drop someone in the company who can say good things about you (from networking you have previously done).
- If appropriate, state the dates you are available (especially for internships).

Sell Your Relevant Skills and Experience: Describe how you meet the job qualifications and the needs of the employer.

- Outline your strongest qualifications that match position requirements
- Write short, narrative examples of your skills and experience that relate to the position – one or two sentences each to provide concrete context for your claims of relevancy
- Provide details of your related experiences and accomplishments – move beyond the generic

Closer:

- Thank the employer for the time and consideration given to your application.
- Suggest a plan of action (request an interview; indicate you will follow up in some way during a specific timeframe).

Sincerely,

Your name signed in pen here if hard copy--if e-mailed, just eliminate these three extra spaces

Your Name (typed)

Sample Job Posting and Sample Cover Letter

Boston Non-Profit Housing Association (BNHA) seeks a well-organized, self-motivated individual to help coordinate advocacy efforts as part of BNHA's regional work. BNHA is a thirty-two-year-old membership association that focuses government policy on housing solutions for low-income people who suffer disproportionately from the housing crisis, while promoting the preservation, development, and quality management of affordable housing. The program assistant will help pass policies and programs on the local and regional level that will support the development of affordable housing.

Job Duties and Responsibilities

Coordination/Advocacy

- Help **schedule meetings, draft agendas, take notes, and circulate information** to the Housing Action Network.
- Participate in meetings and discussions with local **advocacy** groups to ensure connection between the regional and local work.

Organizing/Training

- Help **coordinate regional trainings** on Inclusionary Housing, Community Acceptance, Housing Elements, and other local or regional housing efforts.
- Assist in organizing local support for regional efforts by attending meetings and doing some **outreach** around sign-on letters or hearings.

Media / Communications

- **Provide regular updates** for BNHA's update, **newsletter**, and for the Housing Action Network.
- Assist in the release of reports by creating an updated press list and assisting in pitching stories.

Qualifications

Bachelor's degree required.

Experience in either organizing or **campaign work** helpful.

123 Amherst Avenue
Amherst, MA 01002

March 30, 2017

Ms. Mary James
Program Director
Boston Non- Profit Housing Association
100 Massachusetts Avenue
Boston, MA 02111

Dear Ms. James:

It is with enthusiasm that I apply for the Program Assistant position posted on the University of Massachusetts Amherst Career Services website. I am passionate about and have a personal interest in advocating for affordable housing for all. I am a University of Massachusetts Amherst senior looking to relocate to Boston this spring.

Last summer I had the opportunity to intern for the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Boston, where I was exposed to a variety of **advocacy** efforts and **campaign work**. I used my strong organizational skills to **schedule regional meetings, take notes and provide regular updates** for the program directors. I aided in creating promotional publications, such as the monthly **newsletter** and **circulated the information** both via hard copy and internet in order to advertise our events and provide **outreach** to potential members. Additionally, I was the liaison for our local branch and **coordinated** Skype teleconferences for the five **regional** chapters to participate simultaneously.

I am someone with a lot of self-motivation. For the past four years I have worked during the school year at Amherst Pizza and was recently promoted to manager. This, coupled with my strong desire to make a difference for others, makes me an excellent candidate. I look forward to discussing the position with you in more detail. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Emma Good