

RESUME AND COVER LETTER WRITING

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RESUMES

Your resume is a snapshot of who you are and what you've done/are capable of doing. As a recent college graduate, you should probably keep your resume to one page – you probably haven't done enough yet to warrant a second page. You may want to alter your resume based on specific job postings (make it as relevant as possible to that job). Some types of jobs allow for more creative leeway when building a resume. For example, advertising agencies often get extremely creative resumes (search for some online), whereas if you're applying to work at a bank, your resume should probably be more straightforward. In any case, your resume should represent you. As such, there's plenty of room for individualizing your resume, but below are some general tips. The main thing is to make the layout visually clean, easy to read, and well organized.

1. Put your name at the top of the resume page, displayed prominently in bigger and bolder type than the rest of the page. If you choose a distinctive type style, make sure it's easily readable. Include your cell phone number, your e-mail (keep in mind, your siue.edu account goes away 6 months after graduation) and any relevant (professional) website/social media links (**like your portfolio**). You may or may not want to include a current address (read about the pros and cons online).

Be sure to check your email account and cell phone mailbox regularly. You don't want to miss a job because you didn't get a message. Be sure to have a short, courteous, professional-sounding outgoing voicemail message. The same professionalism is required on social media. Expect them to Google you; so make sure your online presence shows you as the kind of person they'd like to hire.

2. Do not bother including a statement of objectives. There's no such thing as a general statement of objectives on a resume that isn't boring, uninformative and hackneyed. If you feel you must say something about specific objectives, put it in your cover letter, or better yet, save it for the interview.

3. When you cite your educational record, omit the high school you attended. Employers want to know what you've done recently. Include other relevant schools or training courses from which you've graduated (e.g., Army tech. schools, etc.) and professional certifications (e.g., FCC Radiotelephone License, Microsoft IT Certifications). All these show your versatility and experience.

Start with the most recent school/training. In the case of SIUE, be sure to list it correctly – **Southern Illinois University Edwardsville**. There's no "at" or "-" or anything else between University and Edwardsville. When you list your degree, include your GPA if it's 3.0 or better, plus any honors or endorsements on your diploma, e.g., cum laude. The further you get away from graduation, the less important GPA will be, so at some point in the future you may drop it.

If your resume feels a little "light," you could include a section of "Media Courses" and

list the relevant courses you've taken. I'd only do this if you don't have much else to put on your resume. Otherwise it just takes up space (anyone with a Mass Comm degree probably has taken these or similar courses). Plus, just because you took the class doesn't mean you passed or are any good at it. Your actual work – in a portfolio or demo reel or past jobs will better show what you're capable of.

4. List all previous employment in reverse-chronological order (most recent first), unless there are good reasons not to list something (e.g., years spent making license plates in prison, etc.). Discuss such omissions with your advisor or the internship coordinator. Remember, a sharp interviewer will ask you why there's a gap in your employment record for, say, four years. If this corresponds to when you were in college, you have a good answer. If not, be prepared to provide a reason.

List a full employment history (you never can tell when the boss who's doing the hiring also started out schlepping burgers at McDonald's), special skills, foreign language fluency (an advantage in the job marketplace), and other college honors and distinctions. If there are many jobs you could list, select only the most recent, or the most interesting ones. In listing your work and professional experiences, prominently display the ones that are most relevant to the kind of job you are currently seeking. Just list the beginning and ending years (e.g., "2001 to 2003") for each job. Then give a few bullet points about the most important aspects of that particular job. If you're currently at the job, use present tense ("I supervise 15 employees."). If it's a past job, use past tense ("I supervised 15 employees.").

Also, under job experience, don't forget your internship and to feature the work you did on student publications, web work, video and radio productions. For example, if you took the *Global Village* class, you have experience as a producer, shooter, editor, etc.

Include any time in the military. In most employment situations, being a veteran is a big plus. Older grads don't need to worry so much if the main content of their resumes goes longer than one page.

5. Toward the bottom of your resume you can list your major memberships and activities in any professional organizations (e.g., SPJ, PRSSA, Ad Club, etc.).

6. You may want to include a section of "Technical Skills" or "Additional Skills" if you have proficiency in specific software applications (Adobe Creative Suite, Avid, etc.) or hardware (Canon XF300, Ross switcher, etc.), especially if these wouldn't be obvious from your past work experience. Unless the job posting specifically asks for it, you can probably leave out Microsoft Office and other programs most everyone knows how to use.

7. Use active voice verbs (e.g., "I supervised,"), not passive voice ("supervised by me"). Look up URLs for "good resume words" or "powerful resume words" on Google for tips on supercharging your resume language.

8. Keep your resume current. An employer will consider an applicant careless if he/she uses an outdated resume or a cover letter he/she forgot to update. Think about it: If a person is careless or lazy about selling himself/herself, how careful will he/she be when working for the company?

9. Most employers will trash a resume with any typos, spelling or grammar errors! This is especially true for applicants right out of college. Employers assume that if you can't produce as important documents as your resume and cover letter without errors, you won't create careful, responsible work on the job. Use the dictionary and the spell-checker. After you've proofread your resume thoroughly, get someone else you trust to read it.

10. If you have space, you may want to include references on your resume. If you don't have the space, don't worry about it, but be ready to provide references if/when asked. Before you need them, ask three people who can vouch for your skills/abilities, and get their contact information (name, title, business address, phone number, and email address). Create a separate sheet with this information (be sure your name is on it too). Have this ready to send if requested.

11. Be sure to use good quality bond paper on your resume. Print them on a good laser printer. Personalize each copy of your resume for the kind of job you apply for.

12. Do not list your birth date, your family situation (married, three children, divorced, etc.), and other personal things such as your state of health, your religion or political affiliations. These items are inappropriate and often illegal for employers to consider as an employment factor in this day and age. Exception: You're applying for a church P.R. or A/V job, or to work on the campaign of your favorite candidate. Then, if you're of the same denomination, mention it; if you're a faithful member of the same political party, mention that. Also, do not attach your photograph to your resume. Your good looks should have nothing to do with your candidacy. If they do, you may not want to work there. Where it usually matters is if you're a TV journalist. Let's face it: some of us have a "face for radio." But they'll see your face in your demo reel anyway. Also, leave off your hobbies, etc., unless it's directly relevant to the job you seek, e.g., you're applying for a correspondent job at *Golf Digest* and you happen to be a zero handicap golfer and were voted All-American on your college golf team. Bosses usually don't care how you spend your spare time. It's all about what you can do for them on the job.

13. Do not include a discussion of salaries, past or present or desired, in either your resume or cover letter. Wait for the interview to play "let's make a deal."

See sample resumes at www.siu.edu/MASSCOMM or search for examples online.

COVER LETTERS

While your resume shows your experience and a lot of facts, your cover letter gives you the opportunity to humanize that information and discuss why the information in your resume makes you qualified for that particular job. It allows you to go a little more in-depth into the most relevant information in your resume. While a resume may not change much for each job, your cover letter should be specific to a particular job posting.

1. Before a potential employer ever reads your resume, he/she reads your cover letter. If all you send in the mail is your resume, don't plan on an employer even reading it. Therefore this very important document should be just as flawlessly written and proofread as your resume. These employers don't have to settle for second-best: Your top competitors' paperwork will be flawless and stylishly written.

2. Use this letter to briefly state your intention to apply for a specific job you've seen advertised, or as a query letter to a company you'd like to work for that has no openings now. In a query letter, say you'd like to apply for any openings now or in the near future in your specialty area.

3. Cover letters are also used to summarize the strongest elements of your resume in a few paragraphs.

4. Don't send a form letter! Personalize each and every one with the name and title of the employer. Depending on the kind of media organization and the kind of job, say different things about yourself that reinforce why they should hire you for work at their company. If you send out hundreds of resumes and cover letters (and you probably will), you may carefully formularize certain key sentences or even paragraph blocks for certain kinds of employers. But ultimately, each letter should be as specific to their particular job opening as possible. Employers often say, "If he/she doesn't take the time to learn who's in charge and what we do here, he's/she's not right for us." So if you begin your cover letter with "To whom it may concern," or "Dear Sir or Madam," don't plan to ever hear back from them.

On this same subject, don't begin to write an employer a cover letter until after you have read every word on their website. Drop a few sentences in your cover letter to show you have done this homework.

5. Use the same quality and color paper for your cover letter that you used in creating the resume. Same with envelopes. Look classier than the rest. The more conservative the employer, the more conservative the stationery should be. The reverse is true for applying for a creative job, such as a copywriting or design job at an ad agency. Then you must be creative and exciting in making your cover letter and resume for them.

6. Start with a self-introduction and what specific job or kind of job you seek. Briefly and persuasively explain how the skills you possess, found in more detail in your resume, are spot on for the job they have just advertised. Provide here some examples of relevant achievements if you can, and explain how you produce results. Remember, the job search is about showing them how you can help them, not the reverse. Never write, "This job would really be great for my career," and so forth. They couldn't care less. Tell them how they will benefit from hiring you.

7. Close each letter with the statement that a portfolio of your written and/or published work (and, if you're a broadcaster, a demo reel) is available online. Then state your hope that soon you and the employer can meet to discuss how you can contribute to their organization.

8. Don't tell them that you will call them in a few days to arrange an interview. That's much too presumptive -- it's as if you're arrogantly saying, "Of course you'll want to interview me." Instead, they will decide whether or not they want to call you in for an interview. But since you still want to aggressively pursue leads, wait a week or so and then pick up the phone and call the employer to make sure that he/she has received your cover letter and resume. This may result in an impromptu phone interview, which can give you a

slight edge in finalist selection, and perhaps an invitation to visit. Getting face time in a visit may be especially helpful, even if they don't have any openings right now. When they do have an opening, you may be the first person he/she thinks of.

9. Adjust the tone of your cover letter so it doesn't sound too formal (you almost can't be too conversational when writing to Ad and P.R. types or to many broadcasters (use broadcast style with these folks), and you can't be too journalistic-sounding when writing to a newspaper editor). Also, make sure you don't come off as desperate.

10. Never use a cover letter to request information about the organization! Research this on your own on their website and other sources, so when you come for your interview, you'll impress them with your preparation. Other candidates will do this, so you want to come off as the most prepared.

11. Finally, remember that like the clothes you wear, or the cover of a book, your cover letter is what they see first, and makes that all-important first impression. The cover letter represents you and your resume until you have sold the employer on the importance of reading that resume. So make that cover letter look beautiful and read like Shakespeare.

Note: Many companies handle resumes, cover letters, and applications completely online, so you may not need to print a lot of copies. However, if/when you do get an interview, be sure to bring in a nicely printed copy of each in case you need to refer to it (if you know you'll be interviewing with more than one person, which is often the case, bring as many copies as people you'll be meeting). Being able to leave behind a physical copy (or perhaps a business card if you have one) may give you that little extra boost.

Also, be ready to save/convert your documents into different formats in order to upload them to company websites. Word documents are PDFs are probably the most commonly used.

Finally, you should be on LinkedIn. It's great place to use as an online resume.