

Résumé & Cover Letter Writing Guide

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RÉSUMÉ TIPS

- Attend a Career Center résumé workshop
- Use TribeCareers.wm.edu to format your résumé professionally
- Avoid using first person pronouns.
- Be brief – *one* page should suffice.
- Quality bond is essential, white or off-white (available at the Bookstore, Staples, or Kinko's; usually labeled as “Résumé Paper”).
- Maintain a consistent format with correct spelling – no typos!
- Have your résumé reviewed – Career Center staff, friends, family members, faculty, alumni contacts, etc.

RÉSUMÉ TYPES

The *chronological résumé* lists your background in chronological time sequence, starting with the most recent experience first and working backwards. This is the most common format, common for students and recent college graduates, and *one that is preferred by employers*.

The *online résumé*, also known as the *scannable résumé* or *text-only*, is different by format only. Many online résumé banks require you to submit your résumé in plain-text format. Many companies that allow you to submit your résumé via email also require this plain text format. These companies may also request that your résumé be sent not as an attachment, but rather as part of your email message. All you have to do is to save your existing standard-formatted résumé and save it as a .txt, or text-only' format. This will remove bolding, italics, bullets, etc. Go back into the document and replace bullets with spacing and asterisks, bolding with all-caps, etc. to make it easy to read.

Text-only Formatting Tips:

- You cannot use bullets in the preferred text-only format – instead use asterisks or hyphens (dashes)
- Use a fixed width font, i.e. 12 point Courier, Arial, Times, etc. (use fonts 10pt or larger)
- Use spaces to line up your text
- Use left justification, and use spaces to center text

By utilizing plain-text résumés, employers are able to store résumés in a large database and conduct searches using *keyword* criteria. With this type of résumé, it is helpful to use keywords either throughout the résumé or in a keywords section. To ensure that your résumé is selected from a search, you must include the key words an employer will use to search résumés. One way to identify key words is to underline all skills listed in ads and job descriptions for the types of jobs you want.

So how do you determine the keywords for your profession? All you need to do is a little research – review ads and job postings and make a list of the qualifications, technical expertise, industry jargon, and product knowledge that employers are looking for in your field.

Sample Key Word Criteria:

- Job titles, job title variations, your ideal job
- The next logical job in your career path
- Skills or knowledge required to do a job
- Technologies / industries you're interested in
- Degrees, certifications, special credentials
- Buzz words; Industry jargon/terminology
- Specific “hard” skills
- Transferable skills
- Locations
- Acronyms
- Technology terms
- Certifications
- Product names
- Software
- Technical expertise
- Company names
- Terms like *Fortune 500*

In short, résumé writing strategy should be based on the keywords employers use in their job postings. Your resume should always be targeted to the audience reading it.

RÉSUMÉ CONTENT: Designing your résumé

(Remember, it should only be one page, unless you are going into science research or academia.)

Contact section (required)

NAME

LOCAL/CAMPUS ADDRESS and PERMANENT ADDRESS

PHONE NUMBER

E-MAIL ADDRESS

OBJECTIVE (optional; a cover letter is recommended in place of objectives)

- Within most career fields, the objective statement is seen as redundant, because a cover letter should usually accompany the résumé (see our Cover letter handout). A cover letter will provide a much more thorough explanation of the type of job you are seeking and how your skills align with the position.
- Objective statements can sometimes be useful at career fairs or when networking through a contact; a cover letter usually won't accompany the résumé in these situations.
- Employers prefer a carefully worded, targeted job objective:
- Always specify the position you are applying for and one or two qualities you possess that make you qualified for it. (If you don't have a specific position, state the kind of position you want.)
 - *Example: To secure the Program Assistant position, where my experience in event planning can be utilized.*
- Vague or unclear objectives don't add anything to your résumé and, in fact, may detract.
- Do not talk about what you want to gain from this position.

EDUCATION (required section)

The College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA

Bachelor of Arts in (your major), May 2010 (date of your graduation)

GPA:

- Include if you have a GPA of 3.0 and above, but it is not required.
- If you do not have a strong GPA, a common alternative would be to list your major GPA only. Often your GPA in your major will be higher than your cumulative GPA.
- *Don't* create clever ways to show your GPA, such as "3.95 combining 3rd, 5th & 6th semesters"

Academic Honors: You may also list dean's list and academic honors here,

Relevant Courses: Relevant courses are also optional; they should not be included if there is already enough content to fill a one page résumé. Include this section *ONLY* if you have taken upper-level courses that are clearly related to your objective *OR* if you've taken *relevant* lower-level courses *outside* your major that are relevant to this job *OR* if you are trying to convey to an internship employer that you have covered some of the relevant classroom basics. (For upperclassmen, don't list courses that are standard requirements of your major) Listing 6 or less courses should suffice --be selective.

Note: In the EDUCATION section you can also list special skills (computer and language skills, class projects, research, and study abroad) if relevant to your objective. If the research is highly relevant, it is also acceptable to move it into the Experience section instead.

EXPERIENCE (required section)

- List experiences in reverse chronological order, beginning with current or most recent position. This should include not only paid employment, but also internships, community service, and activities where you have developed important skills.
 - If chronological order doesn't work to your advantage, or if you have too many positions to list on one page, you may want to group 3 or 4 of your most relevant experiences under the heading *RELEVANT EXPERIENCE*, still in reverse chronological order. If you have room, you can then list less relevant experience in an *OTHER EXPERIENCE* section, again, in reverse chronological order.

- Another alternative would be to create headings that are even more specific to your objective, such as *Counseling Experience* or *Leadership Experience*.

Employers like an easy to read format which concisely highlights your relevant skills, abilities and accomplishments.

- It is not necessary to list all your prior employment. Some students choose to lump together a variety of jobs in a summary statement that suggests you have worked steadily throughout college: *'Additional employment includes positions in retail sales and food service, Summers 2013-2015.'*
- Dates should be listed at the end of your experience description or aligned on the right side of the résumé —they are the least interesting part of the description.
- Begin each statement with an action verb! (see our Action Verbs section at the end)
 - Avoid beginning your phrases with "Responsible for..." or "Duties included..."
- Focus on SKILLS that apply to your objective: finance, management, leadership, interpersonal, project management, etc.
- Describe the highest level of your job responsibilities – no need to list everything you've done.
- Focus on OUTCOMES. Quantify your work experience where possible:
 - *'Increased sales volume by 20%'*
 - *'Processed an average of 150 loan applications per day'*
 - *'Calculated and made deposits of approximately \$20,000 on a regular basis'*
- Use bullets when describing your experience if you prefer, but stick with a simple circle or square (•) (◻).
- Indicate if you've paid college expenses:
 - *'Paid for 50% of college expenses through above employment and merit based scholarships.'*

** Generally speaking, for most W&M students graduating with an undergraduate degree, their Education is one of the most interesting things for an employer, and so the Education section should be first. However, this is not written in stone, especially for those who have a lot of relevant experience. EXPERIENCE doesn't have to follow EDUCATION; lead with your strengths! If your past work closely relates to the employment you now seek, list the EXPERIENCE section at the top of your résumé.

HONORS AND ACTIVITIES: *(Optional section)*

- List primarily those activities that somehow relate to your objective – there's no need to list every activity you're involved in or every award you've received.
- Explain honors/activities an employer might not understand; "Monroe Scholar" will mean little to an employer unless you include an explanation:
 - *'Selected as Monroe Scholar based on academic excellence; awarded \$2000 summer research grant.'*
- Dates often aren't as vital in this section as they are under EXPERIENCE.
- Don't feel obligated to go into explanations about each activity. If elaboration will help an employer understand the depth of your involvement, then by all means provide necessary details.
- Chronological order is not important within this section; list according to relevance.
- If your activity is very relevant to your objective, (e.g. you're Treasurer for a student group and applying for an accounting position), you will want to list it under the EXPERIENCE heading and describe your responsibilities in detail (similar to a work experience).

EXAMPLE:

Alpha Phi Omega service fraternity, The College of William and Mary, 2007-2009
President (2014-2015); Vice President (2013-2014)

- Reviewed budget proposals and allocated \$3,000 in funds for philanthropic projects
- Restructured committee organization to promote increased communication and efficiency
- Communicated student issues to the Board of Visitors
- Directed an eight-member executive committee on issues relevant to the campus
- Met with college administration and faculty to address student concerns

REFERENCES:

References are listed on a separate page; they are not listed on the résumé. If you feel it necessary to mention them, then you may write "References available upon request". However, most people *expect* that you will have references and it is implied without saying.

Potential employers want to be able to talk to your references and ask about your work ethic, dependability, initiative, etc. so choose your references in that light. Employment references are different from academic letters of reference, which graduate schools use. Academic letters of reference are from faculty member who can attest to your academic work ethic and intellectual abilities.

Sample References sheet:

JANE X. DOE
P. O. Box 8793, CSU XXXX
Williamsburg, VA 23187
(757) 221-3236 jxdoe@wm.edu

REFERENCES

Dr. John Smith, Chair/Advisor
William & Mary English Department
P. O. Box 8793
Williamsburg, VA 23187
(555) 123-4567 djsmit@wm.edu

Ms. Sally Jones, Manager
Saxon Shoes
P. O. Box 7010
Richmond, VA 23233
(555) 444-6179

Mr. Bob Miller, Head Coach
William & Mary Swim Team
P. O. Box 8793
Williamsburg, VA 23187
(555) 678-9012 bsmill@wm.edu

FORMATTING:

You have to make it easy for the reader to skim through in **less than 30 seconds** and pick out the most relevant facts about you. At least for the initial screening reading of your résumé, most employers do not have time to read carefully and search for relevant information.

Try to keep a nice balance of white and printed space. If you see that you have big, multi-line chunks of text, experiment with formatting (use bullets, spacing, etc.) to break the chunks up visually

With rare exceptions, entry-level applicants should limit their résumés to one page.

- If you have more than a page's worth of **RELEVANT** experience, then your résumé must be at least a page and a half, not a page and a paragraph
- Minimize or eliminate less relevant information in order to keep your résumé to one page

Standard minimum margin all the way around is .7" (1.0" is preferred.)

Standard minimum font is 10, maximum is 12, but you can go up to 14 for section headers

- Your name at the top of the document can be larger, but no more than 18pt
- Avoid using multiple fonts and font colors

Use only white or off-white résumé quality paper, which has cotton content. This paper is usually clearly labeled at Staples, Kinko's, the Bookstore and other stores

Don't lead your descriptions with the dates—this is the least relevant bit of information about your experience!

Top 10 skills desired by most employers

1. Communication skills (verbal and written)
2. Honesty/integrity
3. Teamwork skills (works well with others)
4. Interpersonal skills (relates well to others)
5. Motivation/initiative
6. Strong work ethic
7. Analytical skills
8. Flexibility/adaptability
9. Computer skills
10. Self-confidence

In addition to making sure that you feature relevant and transferrable skills on your resume, it is important to demonstrate that you are actually effective at what you do by showing the outcomes of your activities.

Employers are looking for people who can:

1. Make / Save money for the organization
2. Save time / Make work easier
3. Solve a specific problem
4. Help the organization be more competitive
5. Build Relationships for the organization
6. Build Brand, and Image of the organization
7. Expand the Scope of the organizations
8. Attract New Customers / members
9. Retain Existing Customers / members

Try to make sure that your resume highlights as many of these skills and outcomes as possible. Examples are on the next page.

Power Verbs That Demonstrate....

Leadership, Decision Making, or Management Skills

Allocated funds for various Karate Club projects.
Determined club policy regarding the admission of new members.
Directed a team of five oceanographers seeking the lost city of Atlantis.
Enlisted the support of 20 volunteers to restore a community garden.
Formed a student committee to investigate the abuse of alcohol on campus.
Founded a volunteer organization dedicated to serving the needs of the homeless.

Communication Skills

Acquainted Swiss diplomats with the cultural attractions of New Orleans.
Apprised management of shifts in consumer buying patterns.
Answered callers' questions during an alternative music radio talk show.
Briefed reporters on recent developments in United States foreign policy.
Presented major selling points of the new swimwear collection to sales force.
Reported findings about campus safety the Executive Committee.
Responded to phone inquiries regarding the admissions process.

Ability to Create or Innovate

Authored two articles about psychic phenomena.
Conceptualized a twelve-step program for chocolate addicts.
Created in-store displays utilizing glow-in-the-dark mannequins.
Composed a film score for a documentary on the Russian Revolution.
Devised a direct marketing campaign for a non-dairy frozen dessert.
Established long-term objectives for a national community service initiative.
Invented a solar powered light bulb capable of illuminating a 300-square foot room.
Originated the "Fashion Compassion Ball," an annual fundraiser for battered women.

Ability to Convince or Sell

Arbitrated a settlement between team owners and players.
Convinced owner to introduce daily drink specials resulting in a twenty percent increase in profits.
Dissuaded union members from voting in favor of a walkout.
Encouraged dormitory residents to participate in weekly meetings.

Administrative, Organizational, Follow-Through Skills

Arranged transportation to and from conference site for over 100 scholars.
Assembled press kits and promotional packages for national music tours.
Collected delinquent payments from patients.
Centralized alumni credential files resulting in more efficient file maintenance.
Coordinated seating arrangements at fashion shows for media and retailers.
Catalogued the private art collection of David Byrne.
Distributed a weekly newsletter to 4,000 subscribers.

Analytical or Research Skills

Analyzed blood samples to determine cholesterol levels.
Assessed clients' readiness to return to the workplace.
Audited financial records of the Board of Education.
Identified students in need of remedial help.
Interpreted entertainment contracts and prepared contract amendments.
Interviewed varsity basketball players for a feature articles in The Targum.
Researched the relationship between income level and political affiliation.

Counseling, Helping, or Mediating Skills

Aided the homeless with all aspects of their job search.
Attended to the daily needs of nursing home residents.
Facilitated the installation of a multimedia exhibit honoring female athletes.
Collaborated on the design of a new billing system.

More Useful Power Verbs

Adapted teaching style to meet the needs of inner-city youth.
Attained the level of black belt after three months of intensive karate lessons.
Augmented sales by 25% though extensive phone follow-up.
Awarded the Anderson Medal for superior sportsmanship.
Boosted net retail sales by 50% over the last quarter.
Reconciled out-of-balance expense accounts.
Reduced campus waste by introducing a dorm-based recycling plan.
Revamped the school library, making it accessible to those with impaired mobility.

This is just a guide—one of many formatting options. Employers typically look at resumes less than 30 seconds; put your most relevant and marketable information first! Keep in mind: what about your experience do you think an employer will find useful?

Name

_____ Permanent Address _____
_____ Phone & Email (make sure email is professional) _____

Objective ____ (It's stronger to use a cover letter INSTEAD of an Objective. If you use an objective, specify the job you want and one or two qualities you possess that qualify you for this job.) _____

Education (list the most recent first, then the next most recent by your JR year, no longer list high school)

__ School, Town, State, Month & year of graduation _____

__ Degree, Major / Minor, maybe GPA _____

Optional Sub-headings in this section; only list what will be useful to this employer

- __ Relevant Courses (no more than 3 highly relevant courses!) _____
- __ Marketable Skills/ Computer Skill s _____
- __ Language Skills (your speaking and listening proficiency, not how many classes you've taken!) _____
- __ Certifications (Red cross, etc.) _____

Relevant Experience (reverse chronological order, the most recent first)

__ Position title, Organization, City, State, _____ approximate Dates _____

- __ (skills, tasks, accomplishments Begin each phrase with an action verb) _____
- __ Try to word this so that the employer will see how this experience is useful to his needs _____
- __ Try to mention the **outcomes** of what you did _____

__ Position title, Organization, City, State, _____ approximate Dates _____

- _____
- _____
- _____

__ Position title, Organization, City, State, _____ approximate Dates _____

- _____
- _____
- _____

Other Experience

__ Position title, Organization _____

- __ (skills, tasks, accomplishments. Begin each phrase with an action verb) _____
- __ Less detail than in the Relevant Experience category, but demonstrating experiences and skills this employer might find useful _____

Activities/Honors

Chronological Example

Tremaine Wilson

CS Unit 0000, P.O. Box 8793
Williamsburg, VA 23186-0000
(757) 221-3240 twilson@wm.edu

3414 W. Collet Avenue
Richmond, VA 23235
(804) 346-0987

EDUCATION

The College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA May 2015
Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, GPA: 3.4 in major; 3.0 overall
Relevant Courses: Research Project Senior Year: Voter Participation in the Inner City,
Economics of the Public Sector, Human Resources, Management and Organization, Industrial
Psychology
Computer Skills: Microsoft Word, Access, Dreamweaver web design

EXPERIENCE

- Student Assistant*, Swem Library, College of William and Mary 2014-present
- Provide reference assistance to library patrons and shelved books.
 - Train five new employees.
 - Work 15+ hours per week while attending classes full-time.
- Intern*, Housing Partnerships, Inc., Williamsburg, VA Fall 2013
- Researched potential fundraising resources, including state and federal government agencies.
 - Established a Microsoft Access database to track donors. Analyzed information and developed conclusions and recommendations for targeted fundraising efforts.
 - Assisted in writing grant proposals to secure funding for improved housing which resulted in the organization being awarded a \$100,000 federal grant.
- Sales Assistant*, Suburban Shoe Company, Richmond, VA Summers 2012-2013
- Compensated by salary plus commission.
 - Increased personal sales volume by 25% during the second summer.
 - Developed promotional advertising for newspaper. Regularly worked more than 50 hours per week.
- Head Lifeguard*, Camp Ash, Hanover, VA Summer 2011
- Supervised three lifeguards.
 - Scheduled work hours for all staff and resolved personnel problems.
 - Managed the 8-10 year old swim team.

ACTIVITIES AND INTERESTS

- Assistant Treasurer of Student Association's 2008 Book Fair: Managed account of \$3000+.
- Manager of Swim Team: Assisted coach in organizing clinics for 50 high school students.
- Active Member of the African-American Male Coalition: Organized a mentoring program for teens.
- Active as a campaign volunteer for local and state elections.

Cover letters & Other Job Search Correspondence

Why and When Do You Need A Cover Letter?

The purpose of a cover letter is to persuade an employer to review your résumé/application and consider granting you an interview. *Every time you make an initial contact with a potential employer — either applying for a position or inquiring about a position—you should include a cover letter (EXCEPT when attending a career fair, because you are already physically present).* Whether you are following up on a phone conversation, writing to inquire about employment opportunities or responding to a job announcement that states “send résumé” you must include a carefully written letter. Your cover letter should *highlight* your strongest qualifications, not simply restate information from your résumé.

What Should It Look Like? What Should It Say?

- Keep your letter to one page; three to five paragraphs are the ideal length.
- Letters should always be addressed to a specific person whenever possible--this may require research or phone calls.
- Personalize each letter to reflect how your skills and experience match the skills and experience the employer is seeking.
- **Explain why you want to work for this organization especially. Do not send out generic looking cover letters!**
- Refer to the source where you found the job announcement (i.e. the name of the newspaper, the web address, etc.) as well as name of position to be filled.
- Your cover letter should be professional in appearance.
- Use quality paper and envelopes, preferably the same as your résumé.

PARTS OF A COVER LETTER

The addressee: Always address your letter to the hiring manager. If you do not have a contact name, call the organization to find out the name and title of the person who is doing the hiring (be sure to get the correct spelling of the name). If you are not able to find out the contact person, use “Director of Recruiting.”

Salutation: The salutation should begin with “Dear Mr.” or “Dear Ms.” Also, you should never use a first name in the salutation. Avoid salutations like “Dear Gentlemen,” “To Whom It May Concern,” and “Dear Sir.”

First paragraph: State your purpose for writing the letter and include the name of the position you are applying for and what makes you the best candidate for this position (ex: I am submitting my résumé for consideration for the position of Research Assistant at Cambridge Associates. I am confident that my academic background in Sociology, work experience and language skills qualify me for this position). If you are responding to a classified ad, be sure to mention the publication and the date the ad appeared. Keep the first paragraph short and powerful.

Second paragraph: Provide details on how you gained your skills and experience and how they match the qualifications of the position you are applying for (ex: My academic background in Anthropology and independent study has prepared me with solid research and writing skills which I believe will be an asset to your team).

Third paragraph: Mention your interest and knowledge in the organization and in the industry in which you are applying (ex: I would welcome the opportunity to work at ABC Environmental Group and to be part of a team committed to reducing toxic waste).

Closing paragraph: Close your letter by thanking them for their consideration. If you wish, you may also suggest a plan of action. If so, tell your potential employer what you plan to do (ex: I will call you next week to schedule a mutually convenient time to meet).