



Tips for the Entry-Level Resume and Cover Letter

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AfterSchool Career Workshops

www.succeedafterschool.com

A resume and cover letter are powerful marketing tools for getting that all-important first job. They must be able to speak for you to a hiring manager or potential contact when you're not there. Make sure yours are superior with these tips that will help distinguish you from other entry-level job seekers. You'd be amazed how refreshing good covers and resumes can be to someone who may read dozens at a time. Never overestimate the tolerance of hiring managers!

A brief note:

Before you start anything get thee Strunk and White and keep them ever by your side. As we BRB and LOL our way down the path away from actual grammar *The Elements of Style* will separate you from the large steaming pile of its, it's, they're and there.

THE RESUME

Yes, Mistral is a pretty font and pink is a pretty color.

Leave your design skills at home, no funky fonts, wacked out layouts or colors. Organize your information and deliver it. Use the body of your resume to impress, not show off your Intro to InDesign class. I once received a resume/cover with glitter, which was in and around my desk for a year. The resume was not.

Where might you be found?

Make certain you list your school address as well as a future permanent address if possible, even if it's your parents' address. I once lost a great candidate when I revisited her resume six months after she graduated but with only school contact info listed. This is also a great place for your LinkedIn URL. You might also create an email address with just your name and used only for job searching. Employers are not happy about responding to princesskatie@yahoo.com. Also, if you will be utilizing voice mail on either landline or cell phone make your message brief and most of all professional. Hearing your impression of anyone on "Family Guy" won't cut it.

What are you about?

What can you do for a potential employer? This is not the place to ask for a "well-paying" anything, not a "chance to contribute" donuts or play-lists. Write out a series of

sentences about why you would be good for the open position. Combine them into a short concise sentence and read it again. Come back to it later as you complete your resume and see if it still fits. If there isn't a particular opening but you're sending your resume in case of a future opening you should still be specific. It used to infuriate me when an objective statement said something like "whatever I would be qualified for" as if I'm supposed to carve out their career path. Thanks but no.

You-in a nutshell.

This is a great place for a few brief bulleted overviews of your talents.

- Summa Cum Laude graduate in XXX
- Interned at Big Company Z
- President of Degree Related Group
- Special Olympics Volunteer

A summary of your talents, accomplishments and qualifications can quickly inform a potential employer of your qualifications and get noticed immediately.

What you learned and where you learned it.

Your degree will appear before your work history. As your career progresses, you will change the format of your resume to a reverse chronological. You may consider listing your GPA if it's 3.0 or better and some folks will even tell you don't add unless it's at least 3.5. Employers vary on their consideration of GPA and may ask if you've left it off. Be prepared to answer truthfully.

A few of your favorite things.

If you were on the dean's list, graduated with honors, received a scholarship, attended workshops, were a member of any professional associations, played sports or participated in other activities, let people know. If you worked on a project that received notice in a class or developed a campaign that won an award, make sure that you get that down on paper. These accomplishments can set you apart from the competition because it says you like to get involved, are curious and eager to learn new things and meet people.

Internships, Internships, Internships!

Hopefully you've had at least one good internship so show it off. If there was any kind of competition involved to get in definitely mention it. Briefly highlight what you learned, projects you were involved with and their results and how it contributed to your conviction that this career path is right for you.

Tribe of Mic-O-Say could get you to Mic-ro-soft.

Don't forget about your less glamorous summer activities. The fact that you were a camp counselor or scout leader may not seem like a big deal to you, but it shows a potential employer that you were out there honing your communication, relationship-building and leadership skills. Also include any volunteer work. And if you worked full time while going to school definitely mention it. That's not an easy thing to do and will say a lot about your dedication to getting your education and willingness to sacrifice.

Just ask the Dean of Admissions at MIT.

When you're staring at a resume that could be written on a Starbucks napkin it's easy to consider stretching the truth, maybe add a little padding. Believe it or not, a resume is considered a legal document, and if you get caught in a lie you can be terminated with no questions asked and potentially ineligible for unemployment benefits. And karma will make sure the real president of the marketing club at the University of Really Far Away will be your new co-worker. Don't risk it. Oh, and in 2007 the Dean of Admissions at MIT resigned after it was discovered she faked her resume. See?

Proofread Your Resume, Proofread Your Resume, And Proofread Your Resume.

Then have your friend, your mom, your dad, your neighbor and the postman proofread it. And then proofread it again! A mistake on your resume may make you a candidate for the delete button; some employers automatically trash them. And don't think spell-check is going to catch all of your mistakes. Applying for an account manger may be a good idea at Christmas but anyone hiring an account manager won't forgive you. Did you catch that?

Your name is not Resume.

When sending an electronic resume put your last name first, first name and the date in the file name! Do you think you're the only one who ever sent a resume named "MyResume"? It saves the hiring manager the time to rename and save it and it's another example of your professionalism. And the date will help if you ever resend a revised resume later.

First unzip the files, and then look for the third PDF, or maybe it's the fourth.

Keep electronic files of your work ready to send out in an organized fashion. If you're sending individual files make sure your last name and date are in the file name, not just pressrelease.pdf. If possible include one PDF with several samples and include your resume again. If you need to send a zipped file you're sending too much stuff. If sending a CD make a presentation out of it, not just with your name scrawled on it in Sharpie and a bunch of random images or documents. Don't make anyone work very hard to see your stuff. Because they won't work very hard to see your stuff.

Remember; anything you send is a comment on you, your work ethic, attitude, maturity and communication skills. This ain't the time to misspell your own name. Yes, people have misspelled their own names on resumes.

THE COVER LETTER

Cover letters provide additional crucial information about you beyond what's on your resume. But please keep it short and to the point.

Dear "Your Name Here".

Find out the name of the hiring authority and address the cover letter to that person directly. This proves to the reader that you have done your homework, making a positive first impression. Even addressing the head of human resources is better than nothing. If

at all possible make the cover letter an individual document for each employer. If you really need to blast your resume out with a one-size cover at least pick the dozen companies you'd like to work for and personalize the contents. A generic letter says you'd work there just to get a job. And you'll leave as soon as you get a better offer.

What would you say if you were briefly trapped with the hiring manager?

This is the best shot you are going to have at developing any type of relationship without a face-to-face meeting. It is a key component in getting that all-important interview and eventually the job. Who you are, a recent graduate with a degree in X, why you would be the perfect candidate for the position because you have done A, B & C or because you are especially interested in certain aspects of the job. Allow your personality to peek through while still remaining professional. Mention recent news you've heard about the company or other information that directly relates to the organization. It shows that you've been paying attention and are interested in them as a company and not just any old job. Do your homework on them; it's what Google was born for. That and apparently Turkish soccer news.

Close with an open end.

End with good wishes on filling the open position, indicate again how much you are interested and that you will follow up with a call in the next few days. If there isn't a specific position you are applying for you ask for an informational interview if possible. Let them get to know you without the pressure of an open position.

Keep in mind that you are a qualified candidate and that perfect job is out there waiting for you. Confidence is just as important as credentials. Looking for a job will be harder than any job you ever have so make sure you surround yourself with positive people, stay optimistic and take a proactive approach to your search. Things will seem dismal at some point so when that happens go to a movie. And then come back and try again. Good luck!

AfterSchool Career Workshops are targeted job search seminars for college seniors and recent graduates. We go beyond the resume and focus on the critical tools and techniques that make the difference between a successful job search and well, one that's not.

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