

Creating Résumés *and* Cover Letters



Out of clutter, find simplicity. From discord, find harmony. In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.

Albert Einstein



SUNY CANTON
CAREER SERVICES
Press play on your future

Résumés, Cover Letters & References...

Oh My!

When applying for jobs the three most common requirements are a cover letter, résumé and list of some number of references. Of those three, résumés get the most discussion, but underestimating your cover letter and overestimating your references can be a costly mistake.

Résumés:

Résumés are not an exhaustive list of everything you have done. Studies have shown that employers spend only 5-10 seconds reviewing a résumé! Therefore, you need to think of a résumé as a commercial about you. Additionally, just as Coke or Pepsi creates different ads for audiences on MTV versus the Discovery Channel, you need to create different résumés FOR EACH job to which you apply.

Cover Letters:

Always include a cover letter with your résumé (unless an ad requests résumés only). Your letter is your opportunity to expand on one or two of your characteristics that relate to the qualities a prospective employer is looking for in a successful candidate. In short, a cover letter is an opportunity to sell yourself. However, don't just talk about yourself. Show that you have done your research on the company, that you know what they are looking for and how you are the right fit.

References:

The people you ask to be your references should be the people who believe in your abilities and can talk about all of your best characteristics. Usually, employers will ask for three references, and, by convention, the first name listed on your reference page (yes, you have a separate page for references) is your most recent direct supervisor.

This handout is going to give more details about all three of these elements. Take the creation of your career documents seriously...your future depends upon them!





Keep a Career Journal



The first step in intelligent tinkering is to save all the pieces.

Aldo Leopold

You can lessen the stress of writing a résumé if you have saved all the pieces from your work history in one place. In a journal or computer file, you should keep the following information about all of your jobs: company name, department, supervisor, start and end dates, starting and ending salary, dates of promotions, dates of raises, and descriptions of your starting job responsibilities and how they change whenever they change. You should also write down any awards or recognitions you are given no matter how small.

When you can, record specifics and quantities. If you were asked to create a new system that changed the way your company does business write down by how much money you saved or what percent you increase efficiency or profit. Numbers and quantifiable results make impressions in résumés!

Résumé Formats

There are two basic formats for résumés: chronological and functional. The first is essentially a list of jobs at which you have worked in reverse chronological order. The résumé at the right is a sample of a chronological résumé. The second presents information according to broad skill headings and serves to deemphasize job titles and employers' names. These 'functional' résumés can help sell a candidate who may have employment gaps, is changing careers, where one's work history doesn't apply to the job being applied for or when there is a lack of experience.

A third résumé combines elements of both and is called, creatively enough, a combined chronological and functional résumé. Combined résumés can be used to highlight skills or technical training while maintaining a relevant work history.

Image is Everything

The graphic look of your career documents is important, and using a similar look across all of them gives a sense of attention to detail and an impression of professionalism.

The 'letter head' you develop as part of your résumé, which consists of your name and contact information, can be copied and used at the top of your cover letter and your reference page. Use the same fonts across the three documents.

You can and should look at a number of examples of résumés. Some great resources are online.

- www.canton.edu/career
- www.quintcareers.com
- www.Monster.com

Remember, your résumé is your personal marketing effort. Mistakes and sloppy formatting can speak louder about your work habits than the substance of your experience.

Résumé Guidelines

- Margins of 0.5" to 1" on all sides of your resume
- Simple, readable font.
- Font size between 11 pt and 12 pt.
- Use only one font style.
- Be intentional about emphasis (bullets, bolding, etc.). If you try to emphasize too much nothing will stand out.
- Consistently format for each entry. Bold a job title? Then, all titles should be bold.
- Résumés should be one page until you are at least 5 years into your career. Even then you should ask "is it worth the page turn?"
- Make sure!!...it is free from grammatical, punctuation, spelling, and typographical errors.
- Print with a quality laser printer on cream or white bond paper (no colors!). Send it in a matching envelope.



Jane B. Caring

321 Main Road • Helping, NY 22222 • caring@canton.edu • (555) 555-5555

QUALIFICATION SUMMARY

Organized student leader and volunteer with excellent time management skills. Works well independently and in teams. Experience working with a diverse range of youth and adults.

EDUCATION & CERTIFICATIONS

Bachelor of Science in Applied Psychology (anticipated) SUNY Canton, Canton, NY GPA: 3.5	May 2017
First Aid and CPR Certified American Heart Association, Canton, NY	Current

EXPERIENCE

Resident Assistant Office of Residence Life, SUNY Canton, Canton, NY	August 2014 – Present
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Oversee residential floor of 100+ students from diverse cultural backgrounds• Mediate conflicts between student-residents• Maintain confidentiality when discussing residential issues with staff• Enforce rules and regulations to ensure a safe and secure residential environment• Administer emergency first aid and summon medical assistance when necessary• Plan and implement residential programs on academic success, health, and sexuality• Monitor students during nightly rounds	
Cashier Burger Barn, Helping, NY	Summers 2013 – 2014
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prepared customer orders in a timely and efficient manner• Followed OSHA standards to maintain a safe and healthy work environment• Accounted for cash and credit transactions	
Child Care Provider Private Family, Helping, NY	Summers 2011 – 2013
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Created a safe and educational environment for children ages 5-7• Supervised children during recreational activities	

ACTIVITIES & COMMUNITY SERVICE

Secretary Habitat for Humanity, SUNY Canton, Canton, NY	August 2014 – Present
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Document minutes for weekly club meetings• Organize bottle drives to raise funds for travel to building sites• Build homes for families in need• Deconstruct homes and materials for re-sale at relief stores	
Volunteer Free Will Meal Program, Canton, NY	January 2014 – May 2014
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Served nutritious meals• Communicated with members of the local community	

Have your résumé critiqued by everyone

There are lots of books on successful résumé writing and even more opinions on what makes a good résumé. Recall that résumés get looked at for 5-10 seconds, so a very good test of a résumé is to give someone 10 seconds with your résumé and see what they get out of it.

Give your résumé to someone (a bunch of people!) and give them 10 seconds. Then, ask them what they noticed. If they didn't get past "something weird" or some odd piece of formatting, you have a big problem. If their eyes got lured to a less than significant area of your résumé you need to think about ways to use formatting to draw a reader's eyes to the best parts.

After the 10 second test, let them finish proof reading your résumé. Note their feedback. Some may be helpful; others may simply be a matter of taste or stylistic elements.

Things that should always be changed are spelling, grammar and sloppy formats.

Stylistic elements are up to you, but always be thinking "simple and elegant." A straight-forward business résumé is always the best way to go.

There are many websites with valuable information for your job search, not the least of which is your SUNY Canton Career Services site. www.canton.edu/career

Creating *Experience* Statements

Experience statements are the bulleted items you list under each job title listed on a résumé. Most people take a wrong approach to writing experience statements: they write down their job responsibilities.

For example:

Waitress/Bartender
Bob's Place, Canton, NY

- Cooked hamburgers and french fries
- Cashed out customers

Employers don't care if you can cook a burger. What they want to know is what skills you learned or developed that are transferable to their business. Cooking food commercially requires cleanliness and organization (we hope!). Or, again commercially, one must cook food according to company standards. Saying that you "Prepared products according to procedure", is better than saying you 'cooked burgers.'

Many students have had cashier jobs and will list 'cashing out customers' on their résumé. The problem is that phrase is jargon and it also does not sell the transferable skill. Cashiers are front line accountants! At the end of the shift, they have to check that their sales equal the cash in their drawer. That's accounting! An experience statement may sound something like "Reconciled end of day sales with cash on hand."

Each job you list should have at least two or three statements that BEST connect your skills at a former job to the one for which you are applying. They should begin with an action verb that is present tense if you are still in the job, and past tense if you no longer work there.

Your career journal can be a big help in writing your statements. If you don't have a journal, start by brainstorming a list of the tasks you did at each job. Think about the job for which you are applying and the qualities that prospective employer is seeking. Pick out the tasks that match. Now, go find an action verb that describes the skills you used for each task. Use the categorized list of verbs in this handout for help.

If you need help, there are lots of résumés on-line that you can look to for ideas about how to word things. The Career Services web page has sample resumes for your use: www.canton.edu/career.



Action Verbs

Communication/ People Skills

- Addressed
- Advertised
- Arbitrated
- Arranged
- Articulated
- Authored
- Clarified
- Collaborated
- Communicated
- Composed
- Condensed
- Conferred
- Consulted
- Contacted
- Conveyed
- Convinced
- Corresponded
- Debated
- Defined
- Developed
- Directed
- Discussed
- Drafted
- Edited
- Elicited
- Enlisted
- Explained
- Expressed
- Formulated
- Furnished
- Incorporated
- Influenced
- Interacted
- Interpreted
- Interviewed
- Involved
- Joined
- Judged
- Lectured
- Listened
- Marketed
- Mediated
- Moderated
- Negotiated
- Observed
- Outlined
- Participated
- Persuaded
- Presented
- Promoted
- Proposed
- Publicized
- Reconciled
- Recruited
- Referred

- Reinforced
- Reported
- Resolved
- Responded
- Solicited
- Specified
- Spoke
- Suggested
- Summarized
- Synthesized
- Translated
- Wrote

Creative Skills

- Acted
- Adapted
- Began
- Combined
- Composed
- Conceptualized
- Condensed
- Created
- Customized
- Designed
- Developed
- Directed
- Displayed
- Drew
- Entertained
- Established
- Fashioned
- Formulated
- Founded
- Illustrated
- Initiated
- Instituted
- Integrated
- Introduced
- Invented
- Modeled
- Modified
- Originated
- Performed
- Photographed
- Planned
- Revised
- Revitalized
- Shaped
- Solved

Data/

Financial Skills

- Administered
- Adjusted
- Allocated
- Analyzed

- Appraised
- Assessed
- Audited
- Balanced
- Budgeted
- Calculated
- Computed
- Conserved
- Corrected
- Determined
- Developed
- Estimated
- Forecasted
- Managed
- Marketed
- Measured
- Netted
- Planned
- Prepared
- Programmed
- Projected
- Qualified
- Reconciled
- Reduced
- Researched
- Retrieved

Helping Skills

- Adapted
- Advocated
- Aided
- Answered
- Arranged
- Assessed
- Assisted
- Clarified
- Coached
- Collaborated
- Contributed
- Cooperated
- Counseled
- Demonstrated
- Diagnosed
- Educated
- Encouraged
- Ensured
- Expedited
- Facilitated
- Familiarized
- Furthered
- Guided
- Helped
- Insured
- Intervened
- Motivated
- Prevented
- Provided

- Referred
- Rehabilitated
- Represented
- Resolved
- Simplified
- Supplied
- Supported
- Volunteered

Management/ Leadership Skills

- Administered
- Analyzed
- Appointed
- Approved
- Assigned
- Attained
- Authorized
- Chaired
- Considered
- Consolidated
- Contracted
- Controlled
- Converted
- Coordinated
- Decided
- Delegated
- Developed
- Directed
- Eliminated
- Emphasized
- Enforced
- Enhanced
- Established
- Executed
- Generated
- Handled
- Headed
- Hired
- Hosted
- Improved
- Incorporated
- Increased
- Initiated
- Inspected
- Instituted
- Led
- Managed
- Merged
- Motivated
- Navigated
- Organized
- Originated
- Overhauled
- Oversaw
- Planned
- Presided
- Prioritized
- Produced
- Recommended
- Reorganized

- Replaced
- Restored
- Reviewed
- Scheduled
- Secured
- Selected
- Streamlined
- Strengthened
- Supervised
- Terminated

Organizational Skills

- Approved
- Arranged
- Catalogued
- Categorized
- Charted
- Classified
- Coded
- Collected
- Compiled
- Corrected
- Corresponded
- Distributed
- Executed
- Filed
- Generated
- Incorporated
- Inspected
- Logged
- Maintained
- Monitored
- Obtained
- Operated
- Ordered
- Organized
- Prepared
- Processed
- Provided
- Purchased
- Recorded
- Registered
- Reserved
- Responded
- Reviewed
- Routed
- Scheduled
- Screened
- Submitted
- Supplied
- Standardized
- Systematized

- Updated
- Validated
- Verified

Research Skills

- Analyzed
- Clarified
- Collected
- Compared
- Conducted
- Critiqued
- Detected
- Determined
- Diagnosed
- Evaluated
- Examined
- Experimented
- Explored
- Extracted
- Formulated
- Gathered
- Inspected
- Interviewed
- Invented
- Investigated
- Located
- Measured
- Organized
- Researched
- Reviewed
- Searched
- Solved
- Summarized
- Surveyed
- Systematized
- Tested

Teaching Skills

- Adapted
- Advised
- Clarified
- Coached
- Communicated
- Conducted
- Coordinated
- Critiqued
- Developed
- Enabled
- Encouraged
- Evaluated
- Explained
- Facilitated

- Focused
- Guided
- Individualized
- Informed
- Instilled
- Instructed
- Motivated
- Persuaded
- Simulated
- Stimulated
- Taught
- Tested
- Trained
- Transmitted
- Tutored

Technical Skills

- Adapted
- Applied
- Assembled
- Built
- Calculated
- Computed
- Conserved
- Constructed
- Converted
- Debugged
- Designed
- Determined
- Developed
- Engineered
- Fabricated
- Fortified
- Installed
- Maintained
- Operated
- Overhauled
- Printed
- Programmed
- Rectified
- Regulated
- Remodeled
- Repaired
- Replaced
- Restored
- Solved
- Specialized
- Standardized
- Studied
- Upgraded
- Utilized



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The original article can be found at:
http://www.quintcareers.com/action_skills.html

Cover Letters

Cover letters are your opportunity to make a clear and well-written case as to why you should be the successful candidate for the job for which you are applying.

Do your research, read through the job listing a few times, read their website, talk to people about the company. Find one or two qualities that seem most important to the employer AND that match qualities that you have. You can use qualities that are not in your résumé. If a company is looking for organization skills you can talk about running your high school band bake sale. If they are looking for teamwork skills you can talk about being on a sports team and a big game at which you were all successful.

Your cover letter should begin with your name and address, just like your résumé. In fact, your letter should match your résumé in margins, heading, and font. Similarly formatted career documents will look like a single professional presentation rather than a collection of required documents. A cover letter's format is in a traditional business style called a "Modified Block Business Letter." See example format ...

A cover letter has the following format:

Paragraph one:

Tells the employer why you are writing and delivers the main point of your letter: you are the best candidate for the following reasons.

Paragraph 2-3:

Each reason you list in paragraph one gets its own paragraph in which you can expand and describe the particular quality and the benefit to the company.

Closing:

Thank them for their time. Do not include your phone or email (that is in the heading). If you are comfortable you can also tell the employer that you will be contacting their office on a specific date to ask about an interview or simply the status of the search.

Giving STAR answers

The STAR technique is an acronym used often in interviewing, but can also be used in a cover letter to make sure you have told a story with all the important details.

S = Situation

T = Task

A = Action

R = Result

Begin with the context of your story, the situation. Perhaps your high school no longer had money for band uniforms and the old ones were in bad shape. Next, you illustrate the challenge or task that came before you: without raising \$25,000 for new uniforms the members would not be able to march and compete. What you did to handle that challenge is the action: you and 10 others coordinated a series of fundraisers. Finally, you describe the results. What happened: the band raised \$30,000, new uniforms were purchased and the morale boost helped you to win the state band competition.



Bob Simpson

12 Main Road, Canton, NY 13617
(555) 555-5555
simpson@canton.edu

July 17, 2014

John C. Smith
Director of Human Resources
OBOYO Corporation
555 Main Street
Syracuse, NY 13202

Dear Mr. Smith:

Your advertisement for a facilities manager fits my qualifications perfectly, and I am writing to submit my application and express my enthusiasm for the position. From my research on OBOYO Corporation, the building projects that are taken on are large in scope and technical in nature which is precisely the kind of construction at which I excel.

Your ad stresses the need for a facilities manager able to coordinate many technical details. During my time at Betty & Cartoon International I was moved from basic installation to more and more complex installations. But it was my installation for a chemical research company that illustrates best my management ability.

We had won the contract and were in the beginning phase of construction when an incident at another site required most of the managers. I was left with the engineers and site planners to coordinate the build. I created 'to do' lists and detailed schematics with clear labels for all my technicians to know exactly where we were in the build process. I provided daily reports to our central office, and even documented the process with pictures. We finished the build by the deadline. I learned later that the next phase of construction had anticipated a late finish. By finishing early, we helped save our customer \$50,000 in building costs. I am looking for a company that will allow me to continue to expand my project management skills and challenge me with similar projects. I believe OBOYO Corporation could be that company.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my application. I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Bob Simpson

Enclosures

References

Asking someone to be a reference or to write a letter of reference can be intimidating. The consequence for approaching the wrong person or in not being specific that you want a ‘good’ reference can be costly.

You want your references to be your cheerleaders: the people who believe in your abilities and are willing, if not eager, to tell people to hire you. Therefore, be explicit when you ask someone to be a reference and ask “would you be comfortable being a positive reference for my job search?” Not only are you specifying the quality of the reference (you want them to speak well of you), but you are also asking a question about their comfort in doing so. If you sense any hesitation, be cordial, but look for another reference.

Once you have their agreement ask for their formal title and how they would like to be contacted. Email may be helpful if your reference gives permission to include it.

Just like your cover letter, your reference page should begin with your name and address and match your résumé in margins, heading, and font.

List your references’ name, title, company and contact information. Having their title and company listed allows an employer to cross reference with your résumé and determine how they know you. Avoid using personal references: friends and family. Employers generally will disregard those references. If you have to use a personal reference label them as “Personal Reference” and list them last. By convention, the first reference is your most recent direct supervisor.



Sample Career Documents

Note the use of the same heading on all three documents. The heading includes your name in large font, address, phone number and email.

While living on campus you can list two addresses and phone numbers; one current and the other permanent. Generally, you want to list one address, one phone number (one that you will answer or has an answering machine or voice mail that is regularly checked), and one email (be sure to include a professional email – i.e. janecaring@gmail.com).

For any questions about your career documents visit Career Services or email careers@canton.edu.

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REFERENCES

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