

Resume & Cover Letters

Handout

Objectives:

- You will know the main principles to prepare a good Resume, including potential headings, content and layout
 - You will understand how to write an effective cover letter
 - You will understand how to tailor your application for the position or prospective employment situation
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Resume¹ & Cover Letter

The Resume and cover letter are the same document! Don't treat your Resume and cover letter as separate documents. They should complement each other and be a targeted expression of your suitability for the role.

The principle underlying effective Resume and cover letter writing is always:

"How can I best let this employer know what I can do for them?"

Think of the document as a marketing tool and the product is YOU. What can your RESUME do for you?

- win you an interview
- structure the interview
- remind an interviewer about you, after you have gone
- provide evidence of your written communication skills

Organisations can be swamped with applications for a job. They may look for reasons **NOT** to interview you. To avoid elimination in the first round you need to give it your best shot. Your RESUME must stand out from the crowd.

Consider whether your most important points will be noticed if an employer scans your RESUME for just 20- 40 seconds.

In the article "What gets Resumes short listed?"² the top 3 reasons HR managers gave for short listing RESUMES:

- Appropriate tertiary qualifications
- Career objectives that were consistent with the applicant's experience and the role
- The applicants included competency statements (an outline of the skills, knowledge and attributes) that matched the role requirements

Top 3 reasons for rejecting RESUMES:

- Not having relevant qualifications
- Insufficient information given in Resumes
- A failure by applicants to promote themselves

When preparing your RESUME try to adopt the employer's point of view and imagine the ideal candidate

¹ In this paper we use the term "Resume" to include "CV".

² Earl, Bright and Adams, Australian Journal of Career Development, 1998.

The key to an effective RESUME

Your RESUME should give clear, straightforward, easy-to-find answers to a very important question: “What are the main things that I have to offer which will benefit this employer and that are relevant for this job?” Base your answers on good research into the employer's needs and interests. Tell prospective employers everything that might interest them, but nothing that will waste their time.

Principles for preparing an effective RESUME

- There is **no one right way** to write your RESUME - There are a variety ways to make it work well for you.
- Have a clear idea of your RESUME and cover letter's central focus. It can be a good idea to explain this in a statement labelled **objective or career goal** in your RESUME or to include these in your cover letter.
- Make your most important information easy to find! Ask yourself: Will the most important points be noticed if an employer scans your RESUME for just **20-40 seconds?**
- **Always include** sections showing your name, essential details for contacting you, your education and your work history. Other personal details are optional.
- Your RESUME should be concise - **between two and four pages.**
- **Organise your information** into separate groups or categories, each with its own suitable heading.
- Be sure that you use **clear, correct language**, without spelling or grammatical mistakes and in consistent style.
- As much as possible, **avoid using the first person** pronouns "I" and "we",
- **Avoid using abbreviations** - write names and titles in full. Avoid use of jargon that may not be understood by everyone.
- **Number each page** and put your name as a header on each page.
- Use an even amount of **white space** above and below headings and between paragraphs.
- There is no need to have your RESUME bound. Most employers prefer a RESUME to be stapled together in the top left-hand corner. White or off white paper of reasonably good quality is recommended. Consider the practicality of handling your RESUME. Will it be easy to photocopy or fax? Will it stay neatly in a folder of applications? **Making life harder for the employer will not help your chances.**

What parts should my RESUME have?

The following are some suggestions for sections or groups of information that you can include within your RESUME. Where you put each section is your choice, and should depend on how relevant they are to your RESUME's central focus.

Personal Details:

This includes your name and contact details (e.g. home, business and mobile phone numbers and email address). You are not obliged to state your gender, date of birth, nationality, ethnicity, marital status or health, etc. You may want to include your residency status if you think this is necessary or helpful.

Highlights:

This section briefly summarises your background and says what you can do for the organisation. Various headings can be used, for example:

Strengths, Areas of Skills & Knowledge, Summary or Highlights.

You can format this section using bullet points or write it as one continuous paragraph. Try to outline what you have to offer that may help you stand out from other applicants. Include what you consider to be the main skills, experience and personal attributes that you believe will make you an ideal candidate for the job.

Personal Statement:

Can be used to describe your personality, skills, knowledge and career goals. Make sure it is about you personally. Avoid using clichés, and don't copy nice-sounding phrases from another person's RESUME. If you can't say anything original leave this section out.

Career Goal:

Brief statement of the role and field in which you aim to work.

Employment History:

Document all the paid work that you have had including part-time and temporary work. Include unpaid and voluntary work if it is relevant to your employer's interests or if you lack paid work experience. Use reverse chronological order, starting with your present or most recent employment. Go back in time from there. State the year and the month you began (and finished, if applicable), your job title and your employer's name and location. (Full address is not essential).

Provide detail when it is relevant to the employer's interests, document what you actually did or were responsible for in the job. Start sentences with an action word e.g. "administered", "organised", i.e. use verbs in the past tense. If you performed better than the minimum requirements, make sure you mention this. If you have had a number of jobs of very short duration, you could summarise them. Avoid simply listing your duties. Be careful to explain why they were short term, e.g. "vacation work".

Example: **Responsibilities; Skills Gained; Achievements**

Education:

Document all relevant education and training. Start with your most recent year of study and work back in time. Provide the correct, official names of each institution in full, as well of degrees, diplomas and certificates that you have completed or are studying currently. The time period you required for each course or qualification should be clear, as well as whether the course was full-time or part-time. You may wish to document courses of lesser relevance in a section which is separate from those of major importance.

How much detail should I give? Provide content details of relevant courses or papers, especially if you think that the employer may not be familiar with them. When giving details of your degree, any major subject(s) should be specified.

If the employer specifies that they would like to see a list all the papers you have completed, do so. List the formal paper titles (to indicate the area of study) and the stage of each paper. You can list papers chronologically or cluster them under sub-headings by subject area. List your grades if your research tells you that the employer is likely to be strongly interested in them. If you want to keep your RESUME short, you could document only a selection of relevant papers, especially if not all of your completed papers seem to be directly relevant. You can also refer the reader to an attached academic transcript for more details.

Awards, affiliations, study abroad and special projects that are relevant to the work you are seeking can be listed within the education section, if appropriate. To focus more attention on these, you could perhaps consider giving them their own separate heading, and documenting the details in a similar way to your work experience.

Secondary education – Employers may be interested in the school you attended and your highest school qualification. However, this will obviously depend on how long ago you attended school. Detailing your secondary education is optional. Some employers like to see evidence of consistency in academic performance from secondary school onwards. Researching the organisation should help you decide whether to provide any details.

Computer Skills:

This is an area of interest to an increasing number of employers. From your research, decide on what details you should document and how much prominence to give these skills. You may list them in a section on their own, or they may be documented amongst your other skills. Try to provide examples of how you have used the programs rather simply a list.

Languages:

List languages that you know if they are relevant to the job you are applying for. State the type and level of your competencies. For example:

“Japanese: Fully bilingual, familiar with Japanese business protocols

German: Conversationally fluent

Spanish: Speak read and write with accuracy; can translate documents.

Korean: Basic understanding of written language”

Interests and/or Leisure Activities:

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Your recreational interests can tell an employer quite a lot about you. Consider including details of club responsibilities or membership and special achievements in sporting or cultural activities. These can provide evidence of desirable abilities like leadership, teamwork, organisation, goal setting and time management.

Referees:

Employers tend to take more notice of verbal than written references. Ask people who know you reasonably well, who will talk positively about you and who communicate well, for permission to list them as your verbal referees. You may choose referees from these categories:

Academic (Ask a professor, lecturer/teacher or tutor),

Work (Ask an employer, or someone in a position of responsibility at a place where you have worked),

Personal - (Ask somebody who knows you from any other situation in your life, e.g., a club, organisation or society to which you have belonged).

Should I enclose written references? – It is optional. One favourable, well-written reference could support your application and may lend credibility to your RESUME, assisting you to gain an invitation to an interview. However, employers do prefer to speak directly with referees as it is unlikely that you would supply a poor written reference. You must anticipate that the employer may contact the person who signed the reference. Presenting the reference is permission to make such a contact.

It also reasonable to write *“referees will be provided upon request”*. This has two benefits, it tells you that the employer has an interest in you and it also allows you to brief the referee about the likelihood that they will be contacted as well as provide them with information about the position.

Preparing A Covering Letter That Works!

It is vitally important to have an effective covering letter to accompany your RESUME. Together with an effective RESUME it will be a key factor in determining whether you are invited to an interview. Each letter should be **tailor-made** for each application. Always avoid sending a standard letter. Be especially careful to avoid copying directly from models of covering letters that you think look good.

Your covering letter can enhance the contents of your RESUME by linking your skills, qualifications, experience and accomplishments to the organisation's needs. You will be able to do this only if you have researched the company from the job advertisement, from a job description if available, (try phoning), and from information on the company (E.g. brochures and annual reports) or from the news media.

It is important to keep your letter to one page. Always try to find out the name of the actual person you are writing to and address your letter to this person by name. Ensure that you include their correct title(s) and spell these details correctly, e.g. The Staff Officer, Ms Yvonne Bagshaw. If you can, avoid sending your application to a position or title in the company without stating the person's name. Even if the advertisement says something like "Apply to the Human Resources Manager / The Staff Recruitment Manager/ The Centre Manager (without giving their name), it can be worth your effort to find out the actual name of the person to whom you are writing.

Remember to date your letter (below your address near the top of the page)!

Always keep a copy of everything you send when making a job application. This is often useful later, e.g. during your interview preparation.

Always ask someone who is skilled at communicating in good written English to proof-read your letter, especially if English is not your first language!

The covering letter should make clear from the beginning your interest in the company and motivation to get the job

Begin by explaining the purpose of your letter. Name the position that you are applying for including the job title and vacancy number if there is one. Do this briefly, perhaps as a subheading, highlight the specific aspects of your background that relate to the position advertised, and link these to the requirements of the job and the organisation or company. Demonstrate that you have done some research about the company so that you can portray a genuine interest in it, based on factual information. Write about your motivation to work for the organisation and in the particular kind of role that was advertised, based on what you have discovered through your research.

A Checklist for Cover letters For Job Applications

Here are a number of points against which to check your Cover letter.

Part one- content check

Addresses and salutation

- Applicants name and contact details located top left
- Date below applicant's name
- Position or designation of contact person
- Contact person's first name or initial's and last name
- Employer's/organisation's address
- Salutation: Dear Dr, Mr, Ms or Mrs + family name
- Salutation avoids first name
- Salutation avoids Dear Madam or Sir
- States subject "Re:.....(position name and reference number)

Opening paragraph indicates:

- Position applied for including where/when advertised
- Reason for applying including motivation
- If a speculative letter, states purpose of writing including interest in company and type of work

Main body of letter:

- Links employer's requirements to what applicant offers
- Highlights potential in relation to position/company
- Details relevant educational and other qualifications, skills, aptitudes, experience, achievements, gained form education and employment
- Details other relevant transferable skills, achievements and qualifications gained in other settings, e.g. sporting, cultural, interest related, travel, etc.
- Refers to Resume for further details
- States what applicant knows about the company and how they will fit with the organisation

The conclusion communicates:

- Enthusiasm for working in the organisation/job
- How to contact the writer (optional)

Cover Letter Example (Beware! - Do not copy without careful thought!)

Susan Jane Smith
1855 Sandringham Road
Caboolture
Brisbane

Ms Joan Fairweather
Human Resources Manager
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry
PO Box 2222
Canberra

<Date>

Dear Ms Fairweather,

Re: Application for Conservation Officer position, Australian, 9/12/2003. Reference: 00422

I wish to apply for the position of Conservation Officer. I aim to work in a position that allows me to develop my environmental knowledge and help promote sustainable environmental practice. In November this year I completed a Masters of Science degree at QUT. My major subject, Environmental Science, reflects my interest in the environment and is supported by my research into environmental issues. As you will note from my attached RESUME, I have demonstrated my commitment to the environment and to conservation by devoting much of my spare time to voluntary conservation activities.

I feel that my undergraduate studies as well as my postgraduate experience give me a sound background and preparation for this work. My knowledge of statistics will help me to be effective in analysing data collected in the field. My general background in Environmental Science, good understanding of conservation issues and related legislation, plus my biology studies will help me to interpret the data appropriately.

Voluntary work with Greenpeace has sharpened my awareness and knowledge of the public debate on environmental issues and helped me to develop effective public speaking and writing skills. This gives me confidence for talking with the public at your visitors' centre and I am sure that my skills and experience will be of value to the Department generally.

I have long admired the work of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry in protecting the natural and historic heritage of Australia. It is very much in keeping with what I value most.

I believe that my knowledge, skills and experience could be of value to you and would welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you further. I am most readily contacted on my mobile phone, 0411 111 111.

Yours sincerely

Susan Smith

Resume Example

SUSAN JANE SMITH

1855 Sandringham Road
Caboolture
Brisbane
Phone: (07) 3333 5555 (home)
0411 111 111 (mobile)
Email: Suejay@notmail.com.au

CAREER GOAL

To embark on a career focussed on providing sustainable, environmental service.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Sound grasp of environmental and conservation issues: Bachelor of Science (Geography), Queensland University of Technology.
- Commitment to making a personal contribution to the environment: three years of active voluntary work with conservation-oriented organisations.
- Strong presentation skills: designed and taught a conservation module for secondary school students.
- Skilled in researching and writing: excellent report writing skills, competent with word processing and computer-based statistical applications.

EDUCATION

2001 – 2003	<u>Queensland University of Technology, Masters of Environmental Science</u> Researched into the quality of downstream water properties close to outlet from a major coal power station.
1998 - 2001	<u>Queensland University of Technology, Bachelor of Environmental Science</u> Relevant courses studied <u>Environmental Science</u> Resource & Environmental Management Research Methods in Physical Geography Coastal and Marine Geography Geographic Data Analysis Processes in the Natural Environment <u>Statistics</u> Advanced Data Analysis Advanced Statistical Theory Statistical Theory Data Analysis

POSTGRADUATE CAREERS

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Introduction to Operations Research

Biology

Ecology

Plants: Their Biology and Importance

1994 - 1998

Somerville, Brisbane

University "B" Bursary

Geography, Biology, Mathematics (Stats), English, History

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

1999 to present

Waitress (part-time, ten hours per week)

Upmarket Restaurant and Bar

New Farm, Brisbane

Responsibilities

- Serve up to 60 customers per evening.
- Reconcile till each evening
- Second in charge to maitre-de

Skills Gained

- Effective communication
- Ability to work under pressure
- Developed excellent memory
- Exceptional time management skills

Nov. 1998 -

Feb. 1999

Office Clerk

Electrical Services Ltd.

Darra, Brisbane

Responsibilities

- Recorded technicians' work in computer accounting programme
- Responded to customer phone and written enquiries.
- Mailed invoices

Skills Gained

- Sound administration skills
- Excellent customer service skills
- Organisational skills

CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES

2001 – 2003

Member of **University Geographical Society**. In Oct. 2002, presented to members the findings of my research project entitled: "The effects of increased tourist traffic on the environment in Australian national parks".

1999-2001

Volunteer for **Greenpeace**. Designed and taught a conservation module for secondary school students - presented this at ten schools. Assisted with maintenance of Greenpeace library and organised six monthly clean-ups of islands in the Whitsundays for two years.

COMPUTER SKILLS

Skilled in all applications in Microsoft Office version 2000, having written a 10,000 word thesis. Excellent keyboard skills, competent with SPSS version 7. Typing speed 60 wpm.



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STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

INTERESTS

Tramping – enjoy regular social tramps with friends
Aerobics – attend University Gym aerobics classes
Independent travel – have back-packed in Asia and Europe
Jazz – member of University jazz ensemble

REFEREES

Academic

Professor Lahar Vulcana
School of Life Sciences
QUT
(07) 3864 0000

Work

Ms. Radiant Spark
Manager
Electrical Services Ltd Telephone:
Newmarket
Telephone: (07) 5555 2222

Academic CURRICULUM VITAE - example

Name: Sandra Johnson
 Date of birth: 06/06/1966
 Address: 444 Princes Street, Parkway, Victoria 3333, Australia
 Tel. number: (H) (03) 9999 8888
 (W) (03) 8888 4444
 Email: scwilson@unimelb.edu.au

Academic qualifications:

- Dec. 2002:* **PhD** awarded. Griffith University.
 Thesis title: Title
 Supervisor: Associate Professor Fredrick Winston.
Examiners reports available upon request.
- 1997:* **DEA** in *littérature française*.
 Université de la Sorbonne nouvelle-Paris III, France.
 Title of *mémoire*: Marie Bashkirtseff, lectrice.
 Supervisor: Ms Gerard Pontiac
Mention: Très bien.
- 1990 :* **MA** in *Langue et Littérature françaises*
 Toronto University, Ontario, Canada.
 Thesis title: Title
 Supervisor: Dr. Brain Jones
- 1988 :* **First Class Honours** in French Language and Literature.
 University of Melbourne.
 Thesis topic: Title
 Supervisor: Prof. David Jones.
- 1987 :* **BA** University of Melbourne. Major: French.

Scholarships and prizes:

- 1998:* Graduate School Research Travel Award (Griffith University)
1996 : French Government Scholarship
1995: Australian Postgraduate Award
1988 Canadian Commonwealth Scholarship
1987: J.G. Cornell prize, best student Honours French (University of Melbourne)
1986: Summer Vacation Research Scholarship (Australian National University)
1985: J.E. Jenkins Scholarship (University of Melbourne)
1985: Elisa Gentilli prize for best student in Italian (Edith Cowan University)
1985: Edith Puddy prize for French (University of Melbourne)

Teaching Experience:

- 2004:* **Fixed term Senior Tutor (level A)**, Monash University

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STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

- Coordinator and teacher of Honours French Language I (sem. 1)
- Tutor, discussion and textual studies, French I, post VCE (sem. 1)
- Tutor, French II, post VCE (sem. 1)

2003:

July-Dec: Part-time lecturer in second-year French Studies course (Contes, Maupassant, Flaubert)

Feb.-June: Teacher, beginners' French (four groups).

Material: *Contacts*. University of Otago, New Zealand

Teaching evaluations available

July – Dec. 2002

Temporary lectureship in French (level A), Griffith University.

Coordinated and taught three units:

- First year accelerated French language (course designed for students who have spent a year in France. Students introduced to concept of register and genre through use of film and short textual extracts).

Course and teaching evaluations available

- Second year Reading and Writing course for ex-beginners (course designed to facilitate their merging with post-secondary stream)

Course and teaching evaluations available

- Academic writing for Honours students

April – June 2002

- Tutor, first year post-secondary French language (course based on screen play and films *Au Revoir les enfants* and *Milou en mai*)

- Tutor, beginners' French. Material: *Reflets 1* (Hachette)

Griffith University

Teaching evaluations available

Feb. – Nov. 2001

- Tutor, beginners' French. Material: *Reflets 1*

Queensland University of Technology

- Teaching assistant, French autobiography course for accelerated students (Sarraute, Perec, Barthes)

Griffith University

2000 – 1998 and

Feb.1995 - June 1996

Tutor of French language in the Department of Romance Languages, Griffith University. Taught at first and second year level. Methods included Capretz (*French in Action*), and the use of video and film. All teaching based on the communicative approach.

Teaching evaluations available

2001 - 2000

Instructor of level 1 (beginners), level 2 and level 5 (advanced) French at the Institute of Modern Languages, Griffith University, Brisbane.

Jan. – Jul. 1991:

Full-time instructor of French as a second language to Canadian federal public servants under the auspices of a program in bilingualism set up by the Canadian government. Teaching method based on the communicative approach.

Canada.

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- 1991: Simultaneously with above, part time evening course instructor of French as second language to adults at the New Brunswick Community College, St John.
- 1987, 1986: French Tutor, Student College, University of Melbourne.

Teaching Awards

- 2004 Nominated twice as Most Effective Teacher by students for teaching in semester 2, 2003. Griffith University

Other relevant positions held:

- 2003: Research assistant. Work involved locating instances of cross-cultural negotiation/conflict in internet fora of major French newspapers.
- 1993 - 1991: Project Manager in translation department of company specialising in cross-cultural communication. Responsible for coordination of translation projects from the initial *devis* through to completion.
Involved liaising between and negotiating with clients and out-house translators on translation projects that often involved several different languages. Also translated and edited various professional documents from French into English.
France.

Publications (*Copies/manuscripts available upon request*)

Articles:

4 Provided

In circulation:

1 Provided

Review:

1 Provided

Papers presented at conferences:

5 Provided

Professional affiliations

Member of the Australian Society of French Studies
Member of the American Association of Teachers of French

Referees:

3 Provided

Tips for on-line Job Applications: Facts & Tips

- If you attach/upload your RESUME, it may not always arrive intact on the other end. One way around this is to copy and paste a text version of your RESUME in the body of the e-mail instead of only in attached format.
- Having a version of your RESUME in text format can also be useful for 1) pasting into fields provided on online applications, 2) providing a suitable format for employers who copy and paste RESUME's into their own databases. A text RESUME should still be visually appealing. Use boldface, capitals, dashed lines etc to achieve this
- In addition – if you do attach your RESUME, attach it as a Word document. Ensure the file size is relatively small so it won't take long to download. Check online forms for file size limitations.
- When setting up your RESUME for submitting online – keep in mind that due to the large number of applications, employers often rely on software to scan RESUME's for key words. If yours does not contain the desired keywords – it will not be short listed.
- Key words are typically nouns instead of verbs or adjectives. Include relevant buzzwords such as applicable education (degrees, majors, course work), standard job titles, names of profession-specific tools, software and hardware, techniques or equipment, industry and professional organisations, trade shows or conferences attended, and classes of employers who offer applicable services.
- RESUME's for online applications (even those attached/uploaded in standard Word format) need to be less decorative in order to ensure efficient functioning of the above scanning software. Avoid tables, boxes, unusual fonts, italics and underlining
- Assess your suitability for each vacancy carefully before applying. If you often don't, you run the risk of being blacklisted – in which case your applications may be routinely screened out in the future.
- Always check whether, in filling in the on-line form, you are applying ONLY to a single job, or agreeing to go on to a database
- General guidelines for completing a form online are:
 - Use a computer with Internet browser IE version 4 and above that supports 'File Browse and Upload'
 - Explore the site. There may be specific guidelines on time limits, a help section or a section to do with advice or FAQ's about the completion of the application form.
 - Keep a printed and electronic copy of your RESUME handy as well as any other relevant documents, such as the advertisement or job description.
 - Download the form. This can be done by either copying and pasting, printing or doing a screen dump. Some forms have sequential pages so you need to enter dummy data in order

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to access the full form, download it, prepare your answers and then re-enter and complete the full form online

- Keep in mind timing. Some sites time-out after a certain fixed period and won't allow you to re-enter the application form after it has timed out. Presume that this feature is built in. Cut and paste to save time.
- Certain fields can accept only a maximum number of characters. Check that you have succeeded in pasting all the information
- Check which are mandatory fields and ensure that you have completed these. Try to avoid going back to a previous screen before saving it, as information may be deleted.

Extra help

How to write Selection Criteria, improving your chances of winning a job – Dr Ann Villiers. Mental Nutritionist Publications, isbn 0-9757561-0-9.

Resumes that get shortlisted, proven strategies to get the job you want – Jim Bright & Joanne Earl. Isbn 1-875680-83-7.

Write a winning job application, a guide to responding to selection criteria – Lloyd White. Vanguard Press. Isbn 0-9581040-0-7

Resumes, everything you need to know about using electronic resumes to tap into today's job market – Susan Britton Whitcome & Pat Kendall. McGraw Hill isbn 0-07-136399-8