

## Job Application Materials

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### It's about promoting yourself!

You are reading this because you are a college student in a junior-level writing course. That means it will be mere months, or at most a year or two, until you graduate and try to move on to a full time career. That career may involve a few intermediate steps into internships, or a trip through a technical training program, or through graduate school, post-doctoral fellowships, etc. You may need financial help along the way, and you may turn to scholarships for crucial support. Success in any of these moves depends on your ability to self-promote. This means that you have to know yourself, your opportunities, and how to convey the best things about you to people you want to accept you and to help you. That is the function of application materials, which means a resumé and letters.

A resumé is an important way to communicate to prospective employers (including people who offer internships or academic training in research laboratories, etc.) about your education and experience, and to highlight any distinctive accomplishments and honors that may be relevant. It is also a means for employers to get a first glimpse at how well you communicate and a first impression of your character. Because all careers involve periodic job changes or advancements, a resumé is a dynamic document, tracking you as you accumulate experience and accomplishments. Once you have written your first resumé, you have only begun a document that you will update throughout your career.

A job application also requires a letter, clarifying what you are applying for and highlighting why it is that you should be considered.

When there are many people competing with you, your letter is the only way the people who are going to decide can get to know anything about you (unless the selection committee includes your favorite uncle, Charley). Your letter must work hard for you, succeeding in selling you, your experience, and your strengths better than any of the other applicants' letters. At a minimum, your letter and resumé need to be good enough to get you one of the few slots reserved for people who will be invited to an interview, the last step before a committee decides. Again, your letter speaks to your character and special qualities. Its importance to you is purely a matter of how effectively it promotes you in the eyes of the selection committee.

### Resumé Vs. Curriculum Vita

A **resumé** is a document designed—and f redesigned—to meet specific and often changing documents education, experience, grants, pub awards, etc., in a tailored fashion to pro strategically most useful, honest portrait of purposes of gaining employment, winning grants, c

A **Curriculum Vita** (CV) is a detailed compilation long experiences. Academics maintain an updated educational, teaching, research, and service accomplishments, usually to demonstrate progress warranting tenure, promotion, or continued employ

### Where to start?

To succeed in applying for a job, you must 1) know yourself, 2) know the job, and 3) write to apply:

- It may seem obvious, but before heading down a career path, a bit of soul searching is in order. It may help to actually complete a strategic plan for your career, one of the options we will explore in a later assignment. Briefly, you need to take stock of what your goals are, how you intend to meet them, what you have going for you and against you, what you really like doing, and what kind of environment you want to work in. You also need to think about where you want to live and the relation you want between work and the rest of life. Many a life has been soured by going down a career path that was borne of parental expectations, for example, and not a path that led from the heart. Take time to think, before it is too late.
- Do all that you can to learn as much as possible about any job, internship, graduate program, etc. Ads and brochures are meant to lure you, but you may have a false picture if you don't look carefully. Look around. Go to job fairs and college career days, and meet recruiters. Large companies sometimes hold such fairs, and if you think you might have an interest, go for a visit. Keep alert to trends in the fields you are interested in. Your professors may be able to tell you about where the opportunities lie, and where they are disappearing.

The Labor Department's Occupational Handbook is a useful source:

- For hundreds of different types of jobs—such as teacher, lawyer, and nurse—the Occupational Outlook Handbook tells you
  - the training and education needed
  - earnings
  - expected job prospects
  - what workers do on the job
  - working conditions

In addition, the Handbook gives you job search tips, links to information about the job market in each State, and more.

- Get ready. Plan and start early, not only on your resumé and application, but also on a portfolio that represents your best work.

### Looking for positions

Here are some possible starting points for finding job openings:

- **URI Career Services**—<http://career.uri.edu/>, which offers the following services:
  - resumé and cover letter review
  - Confidential career assessment and evaluation
  - Confidential career counseling appointments\* and walk-in service
  - Job and internship search assistance
  - Career workshops on resumé writing, interviewing and other career topics
  - On-campus interviews
  - Job and career fairs, including Engineering and Technology, Summer, Internship, Nursing, Government, Fall and Spring Career and Job Fairs
- Placement bureaus. These private agencies offer services similar to the URI career services office, but may also be working for companies seeking people with your interests. There will be a charge for services, but if a company is seeking employees, the company may pay.
- Published ads in newspapers or trade magazines, professional society bulletins, etc. Your professors may help you locate the latter.
- Organizational web sites.
- Internet job boards
  - **Monster.com**—<http://www.monster.com/>
  - State job bank (e.g., **EmployRI**—<https://www.employri.org/>) | ([Click here for other state job banks—http://www.jobbankinfo.org/](http://www.jobbankinfo.org/))
  - **Careerbuilder.com**—<http://www.careerbuilder.com/>
  - **flipdog.com**—<http://www.flipdog.com/>
  - **aftercollege.com**—<http://www.aftercollege.com/> (includes some internships)

Before posting a resumé on an internet site, make sure that you know who can see it (and does this include your current boss who may not know you are looking elsewhere...ouch!), whether there is a charge for updating, and how will you know if someone requests your resumé.

- Write an unsolicited letter to a company you would like to work for. There may not be current openings, but you may be able to find a contact or to be made known to a company human relations person who may keep you in mind for a later possibility. If you have something special to offer, who knows: they may even create a position for you!
- Networking. There is no substitute for old-fashioned connections. Go to meetings of trade associations or professional societies and try to meet people. There are often student employment rooms at larger meetings, precisely to create points of contact between organizations and people looking for opportunities (jobs, graduate assistantships, internships, etc.).

### Your Resumé

Your resumé is a *personal* statement, best prepared and maintained by you (rather than by an agency). The content and look are individualistic, reflecting your own sense of importance and your unique style. Resumés are also flexible documents, and you are likely to adjust and recast your resumé for strategic reasons as you use it for varying purposes with different targets.

**Importance of resumé appearance (first impressions count):** The content of your resumé is vital, but the look—achieved through careful consideration of page layout, typography, white space, etc.—can serve you well as you try to make a first (non-verbal) impression. We'll return to page layout later; for now I merely suggest that you pay attention to the look of your resumé by studying others as models. That is, look at qualities that make the resumé attractive, neat, and professional. Think about messages that appearance alone can convey—hip, organized, modern, classical, avant-garde! This can be conveyed through choices you make about margins, type (and the printer that produces it), indentation, balance of print on the sheet of paper, and organization (again, suggested by white space, the portions of the page that do not contain content but instead allow the reader's eye to rest, influencing the sense of degree of clutter and business). For paper copies, even the choice of paper (rag content, weight, texture, color are all yours to choose) makes a subtle statement about you.

The information in a resumé must communicate effectively, and this is its most important function. What you say must also be honest, and any misstatement or misrepresentation of credentials can be professional suicide, possibly

costing you a job before you get started, or worse, later. Count on employers to check on things, including past employment, academic records, and claims of significant accomplishments. The resumé must have **no** errors; you can not proofread enough, and you cannot impose on your best friend too much, as you have the resumé checked for accuracy. Finally, the resumé must give clear, specific information, in a neutral tone. The resumé presents facts; you can elaborate or highlight or "sell" these in any light later, in your letter or your interview (and through statements made by your references). Length is arbitrary, but early in your career you will probably have a one or two page resumé, weighing the need to be concise (a sign of organization and the ability to set priorities) against the need to include pertinent detail.

You have a choice of two basic styles of resumé—**chronological** and **analytical**.

**Chronological resumé:** This style focuses on history, with each section arranged by time. Employment, for example, lists previous positions held, including dates and a brief description of what you did and the company you worked for. Usually, you will include sections for contact information, a statement of job objectives, summaries for previous education and employment, and possibly other experience relevant to your purpose. Label these sections (with the possible exception of contact information). Remember to write in an *active voice* throughout; make yourself visible as the agent of specific, valuable *actions* (**I** built this!) and the possessor of *unique* credentials (Look at the sites I built with my *wicked good* web skills!).

- **Contact information:** Provide your full name, address, phone number, and email. our name is important, so make it a bit larger and perhaps use a boldface type. Your purpose here is to make it possible for an employer to reach you during the day or evening, electronically or by mail, so make sure that you've provided the details (telephone area code? zip code? apartment number?) (Remember that there is a difference between a paper resume that you send to a particular target and a resume that may be posted on the internet: be aware and do not discount *identity theft* concerns in any online materials.)
- **Statement of objectives:** This is a concise statement of what you are seeking, if you are using your resumé to apply for a job. Make it *specific* and forward-looking. Tailor it to the purpose at hand: I am seeking a job / career as ... to match the position you are interested in.

Note that it is ethically correct to be altering this statement to fit different situations. You are not focused on a singular career track; you want to be able to choose among alternate paths. At the time you submit a resumé, you are seeking a particular objective. It is fine to restate this objective, and to have a set of resumés that make different claims about your objectives. This is not being deceptive or hypocritical; it is merely clarifying that you are aware that this resumé will be evaluated in the light of your desire to reach a particular goal within the organization that is considering you.

Note that not everyone agrees that you should have a statement of objectives. Discuss this with academic advisors, think about the impact of the statement on your target, and use your own judgment: this is, in the end, your call and yours alone.

- **Education:** This section marks progress in formal education. State your degree(s), abbreviated, and list your major and any minors. Identify the institution (spell it out...there are many MSU's, but only one in Michigan, and outside of Fargo no one really knows about NDSU). Write the date of graduation, or anticipated graduation. Also list schools or training programs which you attended, even if you did not receive a degree or certificate from them.
- **Employment:** The basic employment history should point to job title, dates, company name and location, and a brief specific statement of what you did. The latter should be as specific as possible, without aggrandizement or misdirection. You washed dishes; you were not a serving media sanitary engineer. The less relevant a job is to your purpose, the less you need (and want) to say. For more relevant jobs, provide more.

For example

- *Writing.* Were you the author of reports, manuals, web sites, computer applications? ("If you've got it, flaunt it!" as one airline used to advertise).
- *Clients.* What kinds of people did you engage in your job?
- *Skills.* What technical competencies did you *practice*? ("Oh, *YOU* were the one who organized the accounting data base?!")
- *Equipment.* What proficiencies (especially those involving computer or biotechnical skills) did you *use* on the job?
- *Money and personnel.* Does the amount of cash or the number of people speak positively about the degree of responsibility and trust you had?
- **Other experience:** You may, at your discretion and always mindful of strategic purposes (how will this help me get this job?) also include a section of additional experiences. In general, these should attest to your

maturity, good nature, team spirit, leadership ability, citizenship, etc., serving to deepen your self-portrayal as a good person who is going to be great to have sitting at the now-empty desk someday. Things for you to consider include

- *Computer skills* (hardware, software, operating systems, etc.)
- *Military experience* (described as a job, reflecting your maturity, people and leadership skills, initiative, etc.)
- *Language skills* (ready for that overseas assignment in Paris?)
- *Willingness to relocate* (you know, that Paris that is really, *really* far from home?)

### Examples of chronological resumes

Dr. Logan's extended resumé (CV length. Note use of active voice and neutral statements of fact.)

Katrina Jane Goodsoul (student)

**Analytical resumé:** This style emphasizes relevant skills, talents, and accomplishments by including, in addition to the sections listed for the chronological resumé, a separate section, usually placed near the top of the resumé. The skills listed depend on your purpose, but clearly you want to highlight those attributes that are of most interest to your potential employer. These might include management and leadership roles, communication and writing abilities, teaching or instructional competencies, and, of course, a litany of specific, leading-edge, technical abilities. When you are still a student or have not yet acquired experience through internships or summer jobs, you may also include a list of specific courses in which you have done well, again selected with consideration of how they are relevant to the task at hand (i.e., how will they impress *this* employer). Your employer will most probably also want to see an official transcript, which will confirm that you have coursework background and verify grades, but the resumé is your chance to highlight these as part of your initial impression building.

**A Note on Electronic Resumés:** Your resumé, of course, can be attached to an email and forwarded electronically, and this is common. You may also have the skills to develop an online web version of your resumé, as above. Let me repeat: **Be careful in posting any personal information online, always mindful of the possibility of identify theft.** I would advise that any web versions **not** include home address, phone, or home email. Use a work address and email (yes, I know...but I'd do this anyway); consider renting a postal box (\$52 for a year in Kingston, payable a half-year at a time) for regular mail.

Further Reading (These are **really good!**):

- "The Ultimate Guide to Resumes." Barbara Safani, AOL jobs (web site), Jan. 25, 2011.  
*Notice in Safani's article the central **focus on the person reading the resume**. This is about what **they** want, and there are useful ways to improve a resume through focus on the **reader**.*
- "A Resume Checklist: 13 Things to Do Before You Apply for the Job." Selena Dehne, AOL jobs (web site), Jan. 7, 2011.

### Your Application Letter

Your letter will be the first thing a screening committee sees of you. You don't want it to be the last. If you are one of dozens of applicants, impatient selection committee members may be looking for any excuse to toss you into the not-considered pile. You need to write clearly and effectively, tailoring the letter to the individual company, being thoughtful of the people who will be your readers.

Application letters are written for one purpose. You want to be the person who gets offered the job, ahead of all possible competitors. You need to sell yourself, effectively and convincingly making it clear that you are the best. The application letter isn't a time for exaggeration or self-aggrandizement, but it is also not a time to be modest.

One key to success is to select your best material. That has to be done from the perspective of the employer. Read the job description carefully. Understand what they are looking for. Outline responses that address the goodness of fit between their wants and your capacities. Match the best of your abilities to the greatest of their wants. Make it easy for them to see that you are terrific and just right; at least, do all you can to make them believe that **you have** to be invited for an interview.

Be certain that the letter contains **complete addresses** for the **recipient** and for **return** to you. Get titles and name spelling correct! If you can't tell from the job description, call the company and get the name of the person who will be reading this, usually the head of a search committee. Let them know that you care about a personal touch!

The length of the letter is up to you; you again need to select what you want to highlight, to balance specificity against conciseness, and to respond to the reader's needs more than your own desire to tell a story. Basic components depend on the details of the description, but at least include a clear highlighting of how you meet the core requirements, and a selective summary of how you also meet preferred requirements.

- **Introduction:** Identify the position you are applying for and the source of your information about this

position. If you are writing a general letter without a specific position in mind, simply ask if a position is available or likely in the future (e.g., within the next year). Choice of words here is important as a mechanism for setting tone for what follows

- **Education:** You want to highlight specific aspects of your education that are relevant to this job. Certainly, state that you have the degree requirements (e.g., a BS in chemical engineering) as listed in the job description. Match the degree of specificity (versus versatility) that you find in the job description to specific examples from your background, demonstrating how well you fit the profile they are looking for. Point to advanced coursework or specialized training (e.g., certification programs).
- **Employment:** Again, target your comments on previous experience so that you complement the desired attributes outlined in the job description. In addition to technical experience, look for opportunities to demonstrate leadership, teamwork, or public relations competence, for example.
- **Conclusion:** This paragraph or two does a lot of work. Point to your resumé (or do this in the introduction). Request an interview, at the employer's convenience. If needed, clarify how to reach you during the day or evening, or make it clear that you communicate frequently with your email address.
- Double check: Address? Return address? Date? Salutation? Signature? Spellcheck? Proofread? Envelope and stamp?

#### References

- **Mike Markel. 2004.** Technical Communication. 7th ed. Bedford/St. Martins. 699 p.