Resumes and Cover Letter Guidelines

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**RESUMES and COVER LETTER**

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**What is a Resume?**

A resume is essentially a ***marketing tool***. It demonstrates your relevant education, skills, experience, abilities, training and work history in a way that is efficient to read and understand. It tells a potential employer what you have to offer and why you should be considered for employment.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Why you need a great resume**

A great resume is essential in today’s labour market! It can:

* Paint a picture of what you have done, what you are capable of doing, and how your career has progressed to date
* It highlights your education, skills and experience
* Helps ensure you stand out in a crowd, ensuring your resume won’t blend in with the multitude of other resumes received
* Makes the screening process easier for the employer; measuring your skills with other applicants
* Help refresh your memory on the work you have done and the transferable skills that you possess
* Build confidence

**When to use your resume**

A resume is a vital document to use in securing employment. There are many reasons for sharing your resume, the following is just the beginning of a lengthy list:

* Responding to a job posting
* Applying for unadvertised positions
* When coordinating informational interviews
* When networking

**Resume styles – Chronological and Functional**

There are two main resume styles to choose from when applying for work, Chronological and Functional. What style you use will depend on your skills, experience and the position you are applying for.

A **Chronologica**l resume is the most frequently used format in Kamloops and throughout British Columbia. It lists work experience from the most to the least recent and provides details about each position’s duties. This type of resume should be used if:

* You have experience in the field you are seeking employment in
* Your work history is stable with limited time gaps

A **Functional** resume (also referred to as combination or skill set resume) lists your abilities in ‘skill groups’ focusing on transferable skills and abilities. This is a strong marketing tool for most students as it allows you to highlight the skills you acquired through your education and volunteer experience. This type of resume should be used if:

* You have limited work experience in the industry you are pursuing
* You want to emphasize your transferable skills
* You are making a career change to a new industry or occupation

**Resume sections**

The following resume sections are typical to see in resumes, although not all sections are used. The order of the sections and which headings to use depends on the position you are applying for, employer’s preferences and what will best market your abilities!

* **Contact Information:** This section is mandatory. Include your name, address, phone number and an **appropriate** e-mail.
* **Job Objective:**  A specific statement indicating the position you are applying for is preferred by many employers. The more specific this section the better.
* **Summary of Qualifications:**  A list of the key education, skills, experience and personality traits you bring to this specific position. This can also be named Highlights of Skills and Abilities, Career Highlights, Core Strengths, etc.

***Sample A***

* **Strong work ethic:** completed numerous helicopter planting contracts under extreme terrain conditions
* **Creative:** created graphic design for Recreation Fish and Wildlife graduating class t-shirts
* **Self-Motivated:** accomplished tree planter, achieved personal goal of $350 per day
* **Ambitious**: created an in-depth research project involving the effects of residential development on water quality

***Sample B***

* **3rd year student at Thompson Rivers University (TRU) majoring in Chemistry. Cumulative GPA is 3.3 out of possible 4.0**
* Acquired excellent organization and time management skills from working in a variety of chemistry labs
* Proficient with MS Excel, MS Word and familiar with various database programs, statistical and graphics software.
* Previous instructors and employers have described me as hard working, diligent, reliable and out-going
* **Education:** A list of theeducation you have completed or are currently enrolled in, including the name of the school, location, the program and date of completion (or expected completion). List in reverse chronological order (from most recent backward). Consider itemizing courses relevant to the position you are applying for by including formal names (not course numbers).
* **Employment History:** List job title, business, city and dates.Include the months only if worked at company under one year. If using a chronological resume include a bulleted list describing your duties, responsibilities, special projects or initiatives.
* **Volunteer Work or Community Service:** List names of organizations, the years you were involved, and a title if applicable. If using a chronological resume and you do not have a lot of work experience you can blend this with your work history (however you must clearly indicate if it is volunteer experience).
* **Special Training, Workshops, Seminars, Courses, Professional Development:** List all the *RELEVANT* extra courses you completed, including workshops, seminars, night or summer courses, and special interest courses.
* **Awards and Achievements:** Include any relevant awards or achievements from work, school or community activities (if not already mentioned in the resume).
* **Hobbies and Interests:** Note your spare-time activities, try to ensure the relevance to the position you are applying for. About 50% of employers like to see this information on a resume.
* **References:** Think carefully about appropriate references. Record their proper name, title or position, company, city, telephone and e-mail. Ensure your references know they are on your resume and know what they are going to say about you.

**Ways to Word Sections**

As your resume is a personal document and will be tailor-made, include only those categories that relate to your specific background and current job target.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Career Goal | Highlights of Qualifications | Academic Background |
| Career Objective | Professional Qualifications | Academic Training |
| Employment Objective | Qualifications | Additional Training |
| Goals | Skills | Professional Development |
| Objective | Summary of Qualifications | Professional Education |
| Additional Experience | Career Highlights | Achievements |
| Employment | Community Involvement | Additional Skills |
| Employment History | Community Service | Computer Skills |
| Professional Background | Professional Activities | Language Skills |
| Related Experience | Related Activities | Personal Achievements |
| Relevant Experience | Volunteer Activities | Professional Skills |
| Affiliations | Volunteer Experience | Relevant Skills |
| Associations | Activities | Special Skills |
| Extracurricular Activities | Activities & Interests | Honours & Awards |
| Hobbies & Interests |  |  |

**Word Phrasing**

It may be important to write some statements that demonstrate your transferable skills. These are skills that you have acquired in various activities such as work, classes, volunteer, hobbies, sports – and are transferable to what you want to do in your next job. Consider the following phrase table:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Verb** | **Adjective** | **Transferable Skill** | **Linking Word** |
| * Demonstrated * Utilized * Exercised | * consistent * strong * excellent | * patience * interpersonal skills * ability to learn | * when… * while… * when… |

Use the above table as a template to develop more detailed statements.

Simple Detail:

* Maintained and prepared reports for manual and electronic files

Adding **quantifiable** and **quantitative** details:

* Maintained and prepared over a dozen reports weekly (using a customized database) for customer files, company inventories and mailing lists

Adding details on **quality** of work:

* Received commendations from president of ABC Company for preparing over a dozen reports weekly (using a customized database) for customer files, company inventories and mailing lists

You may not need a quantifiable, quantitative and quality oriented statement for each bullet. When you use these ‘rich’ statements will depend on what you have to share, the text already in your resume, and what the reader prefers.

Employers can see 100s of resumes for a single job posting, many with similar word phrasing. Wherever possible use ‘*unique to you phrases’* and try to avoid over-used phrases.[[2]](#footnote-2) See the examples below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Over-Used Phrases** | **Unique to You Phrases** |
| * Excellent customer service skills | * Enthusiasm for providing outstanding customer service, balancing administrative and customer greeting effectively. * Handled customer’s enquirers with professionalism, happily providing general information |
| * Work well alone and as a team member | * Results-driven achiever and effective team player with exceptional interpersonal skills. |

Another strategy to make your resume stand out is to be specific and use numbers whenever possible. See the examples to follow.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Unspecific Phrases** | **Specific Phrases** |
| * Greeted customers. | * Greeted over 130 customers daily, with genuine warmth |
| * Spearheaded projects to overhaul computer systems. | * Spearheaded a $150, 000 project to overhaul computer systems, resulting in doubled efficiency in inventory and cost control. |

Another strategy for determining wording for resumes and cover letters is to visit BC Work Futures (<http://www.workfutures.bc.ca>). There is an excellent list of main duties, working conditions, workforce characteristics, future prospects, related titles, etc…

**Why do you need to customize your resume?**

Most employers prefer a customized resume that identifies the specific education, skills and experience you offer their company and the particular position you are applying for. Many go on to say that they can spot a ‘generic’ resume within a few seconds and they don’t usually give generic resumes the time and attention they will a customized resume. A customized resume demonstrates you are serious about **THIS** job, and are not just ‘fishing’ and handing out the same resume to 20 other employers hoping one of them will ‘bite.’ Also, consider that your resume says a lot about you as a potential employee, including:

* Your attention to detail
* Your computer skills
* Your writing ability (wording, grammar, proofreading)
* Graphic design and presentation
* Work ethic and attitude
* How serious you are about this particular job.

If you take the time and energy to do a customized resume the employer will often interpret this into a strong work ethic. And what employer doesn’t want that!

**How to customize your resume**

Customizing your resume takes a little extra time, but the time spent is well worth the effort! If you have a job posting highlight key words from their description, looking for skills, education and job duties they have identified – these are important to pay close attention to! Next, carefully consider how you have the skills, education and experience they are looking for. Develop your resume with this information in mind, making it easy for the reader to quickly see that you have much of the education, skills and experience they are looking for! If you are using a **Summary of Qualifications** section in your resume, this will be a good place to begin the customizing. You can even go as far as using the same words they have used in their advertisement peppered throughout your resume.

**Skills Headings and Action words**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **FUNDRAISING**  Research  Analyze  Identify  Propose  Present  Develop  Coordinate  Acquire  Contact  Motivate  Raise  Strategize  Promote  Market  Create | **MARKETING**  Review  Assess  Survey  Analyze  Quantify  Identify  Develop  Announce  Promote  Advertise  Advance  Boost  Improve  Campaign  Support | **PUBLIC RELATIONS**  Assess  Prepare  Coordinate  Present  Negotiate  Publicize  Strengthen  Promote  Handle  Participate  Facilitate  Troubleshoot  Broadcast  Pronounce | **MANAGEMENT**  Coordinate  Facilitate  Plan  Schedule  Delegate  Mediate  Evaluate  Strategise  Develop  Listen  Consult  Monitor  Supervise  Spearhead  Lead | **ORGANIZING**  Classify  Plan  Assist  Maintain  Support  Systemize  Schedule  Coordinate  Streamline  Simplify  Manage  Prioritize  Categorize  Sort  Arrange |
| **ACCOUNTING**  Record  Assess  Audit  Prepare  Maintain  Forecast  Calculate  Estimated  Appraised  Verify  Analyzed  Examined  Finance  Budget  Allot | **HOSPITALITY**  Serve  Assist  Troubleshoot  Present  Maintain  Help  Coordinate  Prepare  Create  Welcome  Enhance  Anticipate  Greet  Generate  Receive | **LEADERSHIP**  Create  Empower  Motivate  Inspire  Encourage  Manage  Organize  Listen  Connect  Interpret  Envision  Lead  Direct  Implement  Chair | **RESEARCH**  Assess  Review  Interpret  Discern  Discover  Infer  Illuminate  Clarify  Synthesize  Quantify  Conclude  Present  Compile  Draft  Collect | **INTERPERSONAL**  Speak  Present  Communicate  Empathize  Address  Convince  Translate  Advocate  Convince  Report  Represent  Inform  Verbalize  Encourage  Correspond |
| **EDUCATING**  Create  Tutor  Develop  Stimulate  Perform  Model  Entertain  Inform  Instruct  Teach  Challenge  Advise  Facilitate  Train | **COUNSELLING**  Listen  Sense  Assess  Analyze  Align  Understand  Inform  Facilitate  Help  Advocate  Coach  Mediate  Guide  Empathize | **TECHNICAL**  Design  Analyze  Troubleshoot  Inspect  Locate  Edit  Link  Coordinate  Implement  Construct  Modify  Operate  Upgrade  Program | **WRITING**  Conceive  Create  Construct  Draft  Describe  Interpret  Capture  Abstract  Express  Inform  Summarize  Conclude  Publish  Revise | **MECHANICAL**  Design  Analyze  Construct  Craft  Troubleshoot  Manipulate  Balance  Coordinate  Repair  Engineer  Align  Restore  Assemble  Build |

**Personal Characteristics List**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| * Accurate * Achievement oriented * Appreciative * Adept * Adventuresome * Alert * Assertive * Astute * Authoritative * Calm * Cautious * Charismatic * Competent * Contagious * Cooperative * Courageous * Creative | * Decisive * Deliberate * Dependable * Diligent * Discreet * Driven * Dynamic * Effective * Energetic * Enthusiastic * Exceptional * Exhaustive * Experienced * Expert * Firm * Flexible * Humanistic * Impulsive | * Independent * Innovative * Knowledgeable * Loyal * Methodical * Objective * Open-minded * Outgoing * Outstanding * Patient * Penetrating * Persevering * Persistent * Pioneering * Practical * Professional * Punctual * Quick | * Rational * Realistic * Reliable * Resourceful * Responsible * Responsive * Safeguarding * Self-motivating * Self-reliant * Sensitive * Sophisticated * Strong * Supportive * Tactful * Thorough * Unique * Unusual * Versatile |

**Skills set headings (For Functional Resumes)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * Accounting * Administration * Advertising * Advocacy * Budget management * Business development * Client relations * Community planning * Computer operations * Conflict resolution * Counselling * Customer relations * Customer service * Customer support * Engineering * Equipment maintenance * Equipment operation | * Equipment setup * Facilitation * Field work * Financial management * Forklift operation * Human Resource Management * Interpersonal * Inventory control * Inventory tracking * Lab skills * Leadership * Mapping * Marketing * Mechanical repairs * Media relations * Mediation | * Menu preparation * Office management * Product design * Product inspection * Product instillation * Product repair * Project management * Public relations * Quality assurance * Recruiting * Research * Service delivery * Software development * Supervising * Teaching * Volunteer recruiting * Writing |

**Follow Up**

After leaving a cover letter and resume with a prospective employer, you should follow-up three to four days later. At this time, ask to speak with the person responsible for hiring and politely ask if they have had the chance to review your resume and if they have any questions. Few applicants actually conduct this follow-up, yet most employers see this contact as a positive sign of initiative.

**Frequent Resume Questions**

**Question:** How long should my resume be?

**Answer:** That depends on what you are applying for. If you are looking for some extra Christmas money and want to work part time at a retail store on weekends a one-page resume might work well. If you are applying for a marketing position with Sun Peaks a 2-3 page resume will market your abilities much more effectively.

**Question:** Should I include personal information such as my Social Insurance Number or marital status?

**Answer:** Many years ago this used to be common information to share. However as time changes so does what employers like to see in resumes. This is information they DO NOT need to see in a resume, nor are they expecting to see it. Only once you are hired is your Social Insurance Number required.

**Question:** What font size do you recommend?

**Answer:** Employers want to see a resume that is quick and easy to read. That means using a font they don‟t have to strain their eyes for. A 10-12 font is usually a good choice. Also consider making your resume easy to read by using lots of white space, bullets and a consistent format.

**Resume Example**

1. **The information in this package is derived from information shared with us from employers in Kamloops, BC and across Canada.**  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Be careful not to use too much text, a little can go a long way! [↑](#footnote-ref-2)