



COMPETING FOR A JOB: THE RESUME AND COVER LETTER

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A good resume and cover letter are at the very heart of a successful job search. The first step of an employer's hiring process is to collect resumes from applicants. Employers are looking for the education, experience, skills and abilities that will predict successful job performance. Only the most qualified candidates are asked to interview, the next step on the way to being hired. If you need help with your resume or cover letter, assistance is readily available from the trained professionals at the Workforce Development Center. Please visit the Resource Room at the Workforce Development Center, 1717 Taylor Avenue or call 638-6430.

It is extremely important that your resume tells your story accurately and well. Otherwise, how will the employer know if you are qualified? How will you compete with all the other candidates who also want that job?

A good starting point when writing a resume is to look at several advertisements for the kind of job you want. Those ads will usually indicate the qualities employers think are most essential. Make a list of what the employers are asking for in terms of education, experience, and specific skills. Make sure that your resume includes the same factors. In a sense, the job announcement asks the question, "Do you have what it takes to do this job?" Your resume needs to shout, "Yes!"

Work History: When writing a resume, spend some time thinking about your work experiences in detail. What things did you do each day on previous jobs? What were your responsibilities? Was productivity or quality a factor? What were the names of the machines you operated or the software you used? Can you place a dollar value on your work, in terms of productivity, profits, or savings to the company? Did you receive any kind of recognition? The more detail you can provide, the more believable your resume is. Ask yourself, "What is important to the employer?" Specific details in a resume build credibility, and you have a huge problem if your resume lacks credibility.

Education: List your High School and Post-Secondary Education, either technical school or college. In addition, be sure to include relevant on-the-job training.

Highlights: After completing your Work History and Education, summarize the most important things you have to offer in a section titled "Highlights." If your list is long, you can organize the information into two sections, such as "Skills Summary" and "Accomplishments." Keep in mind the kinds of things the employers typically ask for when they advertise the job.

Employment Objective or Job Goal: Never put "Anything" or "Open" in this section. Employers expect you to apply for a specific job or career field, and they expect you to be qualified for the work. Otherwise, you are most likely wasting your time and theirs. Phrases such as "permanent job," "interesting or challenging employment," "potential for advancement," etc. are not particularly helpful, because these statements are about what you want; and not what is important to the employer. It is much better to focus on the kind of work you are qualified for and to suggest very briefly that you have the background to perform well after being hired.

Consider your first resume a starting point, a rough draft. Improve your resume by getting assistance at the Workforce Development Center, where you can attend a workshop on resume editing or have your resume reviewed by Resource Room Staff. Use what you learn to improve your resume.

Cover Letters: Many employers require a cover letter to apply for a job, although some do not. It is always preferable to include a cover letter. Unfortunately, many Job Seekers think a generic version is more efficient, because the same letter can be used over and over again. The trouble with that approach is that the employer may view this as a lack of effort - not the impression you want to create if you want to be hired.

The best approach is to write a specific cover letter every time you apply for a job. This gives you an opportunity to show, in a very specific way, that you are well qualified for the particular job (through brief mention of your most important abilities, skills, or accomplishments), and to show interest in the company. It will also make you look much better than your competition.