

The page features a decorative design with three large, overlapping orange circles of varying sizes. Two thin orange lines intersect at the top left, extending diagonally across the page. A large orange circle is partially visible at the bottom right corner.

# Resume & Cover Letter Writing

## A Quick Guide

The most fundamental principle that you should bear in mind when crafting your resume and cover letter is to always display your skills, competencies and experiences in the most relevant manner to show the employers why they should hire you. This guide will show you some quick tips on improving your resume.

## **Guide to writing resumes and cover letter**

The most fundamental principle that you should bear in mind when crafting resumes and cover letter is to always display your skills, competencies and experiences in the most relevant manner to show the employers why they should hire you. This would encompass the format of your CV and resume to how information is being arranged and written to even the number of pages.

This guide will show you some ways to start crafting your resume and cover letters. However if you are looking for more in-depth and/ or personalized training, we would advise you to attend the Resume & Cover Letter writing workshop or a Career Advising Session.

### **Resume: What to include**

These are the key contents that are usually included in most resumes.

- Name
  
- Contact details
  - Contact number
  
  - Professional e-mail (Avoid [piggylove@gmail.com](mailto:piggylove@gmail.com) etc. instead stick to emails with your variations of your name)
  
  - Address
    - Provide alternate address if you will be overseas in the near future
  
  - Nationality
    - If you want to clarify work permit status for international students
  
  - Career Objective
    - Good for fresh graduates
    - Objective should be kept brief and broad- one or two sentences to say who you are and what type of work you are interested in)
  
- Education
  - List your most recent qualification (school name and degree in full) in reverse chronological order. It is necessary to place your university and JC/Polytechnic in. You may remove your primary or secondary schools if there is not enough space.
  
  - List your GPA score for NTU as well as a summary of your A-Level or Polytechnic scores. List down expected date of graduation.
    - You may list down some modules taken if you think they are relevant to the job you are applying for and if you have the space to. You can arrange them in accordance to relevance or grades (highest first).
  
  - If you have participated in an exchange program, you may wish to add the name of the university, length of stay and possibly how you fared there.

- If you have participated in a research program or something similar, you can add it into this section as well. This is especially relevant if you are applying for a technical or research positions.
  - Give details on the type of research done and your role in it. If possible share the results, achievements or implications garnered by your work.
- List scholarships received if any.
- Work Experience
  - List down your work experience in reverse chronological order. You may wish to include internship, paid work, working for family and friends and/or other kinds of relevant experiences working. Voluntary work may be placed under a different section called 'Other Activities'.
  - Essential information for this section includes the name of the company, job title, duration of employment and most importantly, what you achieved in the job.
  - To know exactly what to write into this section, assess what are the skills and competencies the employer is looking out for by carefully reading the job advertisements. It is imperative that you know which experiences to highlight that can best showcase your skills and competencies and which are the closest match to the employer's needs. Also try to demonstrate that you have a wide range of skills and competencies and in a wider range of contexts.
  - Avoid providing basic job descriptions. The best way to write your resume is to showcase how you had used your competencies to improve something or carry out the job more successfully. Thus instead of writing "Answered customers' queries over the phone" which is a basic job description, we would advise to highlight the skills and competencies used in carrying out the job i.e. "Provided good and prompt customer service daily by keeping updated on latest trends in the company as well as approaching customers with a positive mindset to help". This showcases good customer handling skills, initiative and motivation to learn and a positive mindset.
  - Please utilize action verbs such as "Led", "Coordinated", and "Analyzed" etc. Also try to quantify achievements in measurable terms, like "Oversaw reduction in expenditure and increase in profit by XX%".
  - Do note that even if your experiences are largely not relevant to the position you are seeking, it can still provide the employers a look at your transferable soft skills such as work ethic, creativity, dedication etc.
- Co-Curricular Activities
  - Arrange your CCA by reverse chronological order first then by their relevance to the job. If you have plenty of experiences to choose from, be selective by choosing only the more relevant ones to insert in.

- Similar to 'Work Experience', it is insufficient if you just provide descriptions of your duties. Instead this is the best place to highlight your achievements and soft skills gained such as leadership, interpersonal communication, management etc. This means that, rather than listing down what sort of experiences you had in your internship or CCAs i.e. "Head of Dinner and Dance sub- committee to organize a D&D for 500 hall residents. In charge of logistics.", you have to edit the sentences to showcase how you had used your competencies to improve something or make an event more successful. i.e. "Led a team of 5 in my subcommittee to provide exceptional and timely logistics support for Hall's Dinner and Dance which in turn ensured the event ran smoothly without a hitch". Note that we had used the term 'more successful'. This means that you have to highlight your achievements and contributions, without which the event would turn out very differently or with no improvement from the previous time.
- Please utilize action verbs such as "Led", "Coordinated", and "Analyzed" etc. Also try your best to quantify achievements in measurable terms, like "Oversaw reduction in expenditure and increase in profit by XX%".
- Again, assess what are the skills and competencies the employer is looking out for by carefully reading the job advertisements and see which experiences you could use to highlight your skills and competencies and which are the closest matches to the employer's needs. Use this section to cover the other skills you are unable to showcase under 'Work Experience' or use it to reinforce the skills mentioned before.
- Awards/ Achievements
  - List any awards or achievements achieved in the past along with the year obtained.
- Skills
  - Please state only hard skills in this section such as programming knowledge (C++, Mat lab etc) or Microsoft Office or foreign or local language ability etc. It will be good to qualify your level of competence in these skills.
  - You can also add in any certifications or licenses you had attained i.e. driving license or use of specialized machineries.
- Interests
  - This is the ideal place for employers to further understand what kind of person you are outside of work. How you choose to spend your free time may reveal some interesting information on you, your personality and other evidence of your capabilities.
  - Listing two to three interests should be sufficient.

## **Resume: How to present**

There is no fixed format to a resume. How you present it and arrange the information depends largely on the job and industry you are applying for. For example, somebody applying into a creative industry may wish to layout his resume in an infographic format and present it to the employers via a video presentation.

For the majority of CVs however, there are some guidelines that are usually followed and which are recommended for fresh graduates:

- Your paper resume should be kept within two A4 size pages. Anything beyond the 2 pages may cause the employer to lose interest in reading.
- As the resume has to be kept within 2 pages, please select and priorities the information based on its relevancy to the job you are applying for. Also prioritizing information means that the more outstanding information about a particular experience should be shared first followed by other more routine duties i.e. "Helped your retail manager increase sales target by 15% with innovative sales idea", followed by "Ensuring cleanliness of store".
- Have a logical structure to your resume. Use headings, subheadings and bullet points to help segment your information. Also ensure that your layout is clear and consistent (i.e. font size to be consistent between text, heading and sub headings; font style to be consistent throughout resume and cover letter; consistent spacing between bullets and sections etc). For more information on formatting, you are encouraged to visit the Career Resource Centre at Student Services Centre, Level 4 where we have resources to help you with the formatting of the resume.
- All information has to be made in concise yet comprehensive points. Each point should not exceed more than three lines.
- Use active verbs to show that you approach things actively rather than passively i.e. "I was leading..." [passive] versus "Led" [active]. These verbs should be used at the start of every bullet point. The internet is a rich source of reference for action verbs.
- Check and double check your resume for any grammatical or spelling errors. Some employers use this as a gauge to see how detail oriented and careful you are as a person. Do not let one small mistake affect your chances for an interview.
- If you are submitting in your resume electronically, remember to convert the word document into a pdf file so as to preserve any complicated formatting. It is also good to name your pdf file with your name and job title you are applying for as it makes it easier for the HR recruiter who has to handle a large volume of resume every day.
- Please combine your cover letter and resume together on the same document.

## **Resume: Other things to take note of**

### Target your resume

Understand what the employer is looking for, assess yourself to see if you have experiences and skills that match to what they are seeking and place them into the resume. Let go of other information that may not be of much interest to the employer in the resume even if you had spent a substantial time on it. Alternatively, you can place it in to illustrate other transferable soft skills not covered, however prioritize such that the more relevant experience is showcased first.

### Be honest

Do not overemphasize or underemphasize your contribution and achievements. Avoid blatant bragging as many employers have vast experiences interviewing potential new employees and hence would be able to pick up if you are twisting the truth. On the other hand, do not discount yourself or the achievements you had obtained. Give yourself credit where credit is due. These are areas where you have produced outstanding results and thus would differentiate you from the rest of the hundreds of candidates being interviewed for the same position.

### Emphasize personal contribution

One of the key things that employers look out for is the ability to work in a team. While showcasing this skill is important, you have to take note to avoid grouping yourself in the team too many times and negating your effort in the team. Employers want to see how you are able to contribute to the team and not an explanation of your team's activities. Using "we" makes it difficult for the employers to know exactly what your contributions to the team was i.e. "We analyzed our research findings to find the possible solutions to the problems" versus "I allocated roles among the team members, and took charge of the analyzing of research findings. I then met with the group to brainstorm for possible solutions."

### Keep it clean

Formatting of the resume is extremely crucial especially if the hiring manager has to sieve through hundreds of resumes. They may use their first impression of the resumes (i.e. if the resume is easy to read with clean layout) to make the first cut before delving into the content. Do not give them a chance to throw away your resume even before they read it. The format of your resume is equally as important as the content to appeal to the hiring managers. A messy resume with complicated layout, inconsistent font style, size and spacing, unclear sections, many lines, boxes and shading may make the resume difficult to read. Thus aim for a resume with

- Clean layout
- Use spacing to denote sections
- Bold or increase font size for headings
- Consistent font size and style
- Clear bullet points
- Sufficient margin space.

There are more tips on producing a resume with clear and clean layout in resource books located at Career Resource Centre.

### Photo

Photos should be kept to the cover letter. Ensure that you are wearing a good suit and that you appear neat and tidy on the photo. Go for a haircut if necessary and ladies might want to apply some makeup to look fresher in the photo.

### **Cover Letter: What to include**

A cover letter is essentially a business letter and thus should follow the protocol of a business letter.

Your cover letter should consist of whatever the job advertisement requested for, example if they ask for a photo or photocopy of IC please add it to the cover letter or if they are looking for specific competencies, please list them all in the cover letter.

The cover letter is also where you have to validate that you have the competencies they are seeking in the job advertisement and substantiate with evidence/experience. If you have the space, it is good to provide more competencies that you think might be important for the job which they did not ask for. Avoid fabrication.

Keep the letter relevant. Ensure you are able to mention how you will and can use your competencies (substantiated with evidence) to contribute to the job.

Always share in the cover letter what position you are applying for, what is your status now (working or studying and where at), and where and when did you view the job advertisement.

Always conclude with a request to meet i.e. "I am keen to meet up with you to share with you more on what I can contribute to your company at your most convenient time." After that, please ensure that you have left your contact number and email for easy reference.

### **Cover Letter: Other things to take note of**

Keep the tone of the letter professional and befitting of the expectations of the employer.

Ensure the letter is easy to understand and read. Avoid using jargons or acronyms. If you are using acronyms, always state out its full title before adding in brackets the acronym to facilitate easier understanding in subsequent paragraphs i.e. Nanyang Technological University (NTU). Do read through your cover letter a few times (preferably not immediately) to look out for spelling or grammatical inaccuracies.

Ensure that your cover letter has the same font size and style as your resume text. Do not let it go beyond one A4 page.

Place your cover letter and resume in the same document to make it more convenient for the hiring manager to view and print.

Below is a guide to writing a cover letter. However for more in-depth information on writing the cover letter such as formatting etc, please either attend the Resume & Cover Letter writing workshop or proceed to Career Resource Centre (Level 4, Student Services Centre) to refer to the relevant books.

### **Sample Cover Letter**

[Your name in full as reflected in resume]

[Address Line 1]

[Address Line 2]

[Date]

[Name of Hiring Manager]

[Designation of Hiring Manager]

[Name of company]

[Company Address Line 1]

[Company Address Line 2]

Dear [Salutation] [Surname of hiring manager],

RE: Application for XXX Position

#### Paragraph 1

This paragraph should introduce you to an employer in a relevant way. Try to find a good ‘hook’ by stating how you can be relevant and contribute to the job. It could also start with why you are interested in the job or company and what interests you i.e. impressed with the opportunities they offer. State where you had found out about the job (i.e. online [where], newspapers, mutual contact etc) and the date which the advertisement was dated. Make the opening strong and positive.

#### Paragraph 2

Explain in this paragraph what you can offer to the job in terms of your previous skills, interests and qualifications. Back them up with the relevant experience. Explain to the reader what makes you the best person for the vacancy. To understand what they are looking for, carefully read and understand the job advertisement. Ensure you are able to cover most of the competencies and skills they have stated in the advertisements.

#### Paragraph 3

Bring in other competencies and skills (backed up with experiences) that are not requested in the job advertisements but would help complement the skills listed above i.e. teamwork skills, customer service etc.

#### Paragraph 4 (if there is space)

Explain why you are interested in the job and company. Research on the company and share how you view the job will fit your plan, interests etc. This is where you share with them that you want the job.

#### Last Paragraph

Use a positive closing statement, saying what you would like to happen next i.e. “schedule a meeting at your most convenient time to share with you how I can best contribute to your company”.

Remember to add in your contact information here (email and contact no.)

Yours sincerely,

[3-4 lines in between]

[Your Name]

Enclosed: Resume



## **References**

Ann Starkie (2009) *Winning cover letters for first-time job hunters* (1<sup>st</sup> ed.) Trotman Publishing

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<http://www.careers.manchester.ac.uk/media/services/careersandemployabilitydivision/careersservice/crcpublications/startingpointseriesofhandouts/a4/Writing-a-great-CV-from-Scratch.pdf>

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