



The Center for Experiential Learning
and Career Development
125 East South Street
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CECD

Center for Experiential Learning and Career Development

SHAW UNIVERSITY

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RESUME & COVER LETTER WRITING GUIDE

**HOW DO I CREATE
A RESUME?**

**Follow the guide in
this book and we will
show you how.**

OBJECTIVE

EDUCATION

EXPERIENCE

SKILLS

HONORS

ACTIVITIES

Résumé Writing Guide

When writing your resume, it is important to remember your goal: to get hired! To do that, you must prove that you are the best candidate and capture the interest of the employer. One way to do this is to have an effective, professional resume, which will help you obtain an interview.

Choosing a Format

There are three types of resumes: **chronological**, **skill-based**, and **combination**. Use the chart below to help you decide which would be the most effective type for you. Keep in mind that a different resume format may be best for each position you are seeking.

	Chronological	Skill-Based	Combination
Characteristics	Presents all work experience, starting with your most recent position and working back in time 10-15 years	Summarizes your professional skills and minimizes your work history	Uses aspects of the chronological and skillsbased styles best suited to the position you're seeking
Focus of Resume	Experience	Skills and strengths important to employer	Both experience and skills
When to Use	- Seeking position in same field - Career path shows steady progress (increasing responsibility) - No gaps in work history	- Changing careers - Entering job market for the first time or after long absence - Varied or unrelated work experience	- Varied or unrelated work experience - Short work history - Highlight relevant internships or volunteer positions
Benefits	Creates a concise picture of you as an employee for employer	Emphasizes relevant skills and strengths for employer	You choose the most effective features of chronological and skill-based resumes
Drawbacks and Cautions	Applicable transferable skills can be difficult for employer to see	No detailed work history	Pressure on <i>you</i> to fit the format to your objective and logically organize information



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Résumé Writing Guide: Choosing a Format (cont.)

Two Sample Versions of the Same Resume

Here are two sample resumes representing the same person. Ivanna is using the chronological resume on the left to apply to a teaching job, and the skills-based resume on the right to apply for a lobbying internship.

Chronological	Skills-based
IVANNA SHAW 123 Alpha Street Raleigh, NC 98225 919.555.5555 EDUCATION Bachelor of Science, Major: Marine Ecology, Shaw University (SU), Raleigh, NC. PROFESSIONAL HISTORY Writing Assistant at SU Career Center— Sept. 2004-June 2005 • Peer tutored SU students individually in writing • Responded to resume drafts submitted to Shaw University's Career Center Online Writing Lab • Facilitated Blackboard online discussions Interpretation Intern at Channel Islands National Park—June-Sept. 2004 • Interpreted marine ecology through presentations and guided tours to help visitors understand, appreciate, and care for the islands • Researched and wrote interpretive brochures and park manual • Assisted park rangers with projects EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND HONORS Huxley College Outstanding New Student in the Environmental Science Department—Fall 2005 Bellingham High School Science Tutor—Fall 2005-Spring 2006 SU Jazz Band—September 2003-June 2004	IVANNA SHAW 123 Alpha Street Raleigh, NC 98225 919.555.5555 EDUCATION Bachelor of Science, Major: Marine Ecology, Shaw University (SU), Raleigh RELEVANT EXPERIENCE Communication Skills • Responded to resume drafts submitted to Shaw University's Career Center Online Writing Lab • Peer tutored SU students individually in writing • Interpreted beach ecology to help visitors to Channel Islands National Park understand, appreciate, and care for the islands • Facilitated Blackboard online discussions Writing Skills • Researched and wrote interpretive brochures and marine ecology park staff reference EMPLOYMENT HISTORY Writing Assistant, S U Career Center, Raleigh, NC—Sept. 2004-June 2005 Interpretive Intern, Channel Islands National Park, Ventura, CA —June-Sept. 2004 ACTIVITIES AND HONORS Huxley College Outstanding New Student in the Environmental Science Department—Fall 2005 SU Jazz Band—Sept. 2003-June 2004



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Résumé Writing Guide: Getting Started Writing

General Skills—When you're writing, remember to keep your resume concise and focused on highlighting your strengths. All employers, regardless of job field, look for general skills in recent college graduates. These are good skills to highlight in your resume and cover letter. Here are some of the top skills employers look for in applicants:

Communication (written and oral)	Motivation/Initiative	Technical skills
Problem solving/analytical skills	Flexibility/Adaptability	Leadership skills
Academic achievement	Interpersonal skills	Honesty/Integrity

Transferable Skills—Employers also seek skills that are valuable even outside the context in which they were learned which might include jobs, class projects, student clubs, and volunteer activities. Here are some examples of transferable skills:

Organizing/Planning	Giving presentations	Writing/Editing	Customer service
Counseling/Advising	Supervising/Managing	Sales/Marketing	Teaching/Training

Presenting Skills Effectively—Use the frame below to represent your skills:

Action Verb + Object + Results

The action verb is whatever action you performed on the object to achieve your results.

Sentences with this structure create a scenario and emphasize what you did, rather than what you were required to do.

Example: Interpreted forest ecology through presentations and guided tours to help
(**action verb**) visitors (**object**) to the National Park understand, appreciate, and care for
the forest (**results**).

Here are some examples of action verbs, arranged by skill category.

Clerical Skills	Communication Skills	Creative Skills	Financial Skills	Management Skills	Research Skills	Teaching Skills
Catalogued	Developed	Conceptualized	Analyzed	Analyzed	Collected	Advised
Compiled	Edited	Created	Budgeted	Coordinated	Examined	Coordinated
Operated	Interpreted	Designed	Calculated	Evaluated	Identified	Facilitated
Prepared	Moderated	Developed	Marketed	Organized	Organized	Guided
Purchased	Publicized	Integrated	Projected	Planned	Surveyed	Instructed



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Résumé Writing Guide: Formatting

Use this guide to compose and format your resume. All resume formats have the information in section 1; the parts that are different for each format are in section 2; and optional information for all three formats is in section 3. Arrange your information so it makes the most sense—see the sample resumes for ideas. Keep in mind that this layout is only a guide, not the set-in-stone standard!

Section 1: Information for All Resume Formats (Chronological, Skill-Based, and Combination)

Contact Information (top of the page)

Name, address, phone number (make sure your voicemail sounds professional), and e-mail address (use a professional-looking address)

Education and Training

- Type of degree(s), major, minor(s), university/colleges, location, date of degree(s)
- Optional: topic of thesis, relevant courses, study abroad programs, GPA (usually only if greater than 3.5), honors and awards

Section 2: Information Different for Each Format

Chronological	Skill-Based	Combination
Professional History • Include: position title, employer, location, & dates in a consistent order • For each position, list 3-5 bulleted accomplishments, duties, & skills • List jobs in reverse chronological order • Do not include supervisors' names and organization addresses here	Relevant Skills • Divide your relevant work, volunteer and educational experiences into subheadings (ex: "technical skills" or "interpersonal skills") • For each subheading, list 3-5 bulleted accomplishments, duties, & skills from previous jobs and experience • Do not specify where you gained each skill except when listing specific accomplishments Employment History • Include: position title, employer, location, & dates in a consistent order • List jobs in reverse chronological order	Relevant Professional Experience • Include: position title, employer, location, & dates in a consistent order • For each position, list 3-5 bulleted accomplishments, duties, & skills • List jobs in reverse chronological order • Do not include supervisors' names and organization addresses here Other Work Experience • Format like Relevant Professional Experience • Include work experience that is not relevant to the position you are seeking



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Résumé Writing Guide: Formatting (cont.)

Section 3: Optional Information for All Resume Formats (Chronological, Skill-Based, and Combination)

Objective (directly beneath contact information)

- Level of the position you're applying for
- Skills you hope to attain in the position
- Title of the position and its functions
- Field or industry you hope to work in

Activities and Memberships (last)

- Clubs, committees, sports, special events, & community service
- For each, provide dates of participation and titles of any positions you held

Research & Publications

- Senior Thesis, research projects & published papers
- Posters/presentations at academic conferences (e.g. Scholar's Week)
- Letters to the editor; newsletter articles; poetry, short stories, and essays published in school magazines; etc.

Relevant Coursework

- Courses directly pertinent to the position
- If it will not be apparent to employers why a course is relevant, write a one- or two-sentence description explaining how it's applicable

Honors, Awards & Scholarships

- Departmental and University honors, including Honor Roll
- Merit-based scholarships
- Academic, organizational, and community awards

Licenses & Credentials

- Pertinent certifications (sometimes employers will specify required certifications and licenses) such as CPR, first aid, EMT, WFR

Remember, each job has a different required and desired skill set, which means you will have to prepare a separate resume for each position you're applying for!



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Résumé Writing Guide: Revising Your Resume

Read your resume through several times, looking for different things each time. The first time, focus on content. Pretend that you are the person hiring for this position—are you impressed with this resume? What do you want to know more about? What don't you understand? Then run through the questions outlined below, under "Revising your resume's content." Next, think about stylistic and grammatical problems—look back at the section on "Writing your resume" for suggestions on sentence structure—and consider the questions under "Revising your resume's style."

Besides reading your resume yourself, ask two or three trusted colleagues or friends to critique it. Additionally, the Career Services Center and the Writing Center can help you!

Revising Your Resume's Content

Focus Your Resume

- Whether or not you have used an objective, your resume needs to be targeted towards your goal: getting a certain job. Is there irrelevant or redundant information? Read through your resume, asking yourself, "How does this pertain to the job I'm applying for?" Cut out unrelated achievements, even if you're proud of them.

Evaluate the Content and Structure

- Which accomplishments and skills do you get the strongest sense of from your resume? Stress your most relevant strengths by presenting them first.
- In what order would the information make most sense?
- Are keywords from the job description included in your experiences and skills?
- Does the information present a clear picture of what you have to offer? How can you quantify your accomplishments to give the reader a sense of your capabilities and past responsibilities?

Look for Gaps in Your Qualifications

- Compare the requirements and duties of the job you want to the skills highlighted in your resume. What's missing? If you have the skills required, make sure to include them in your resume!
- Does the job you're applying for require the use of special equipment or techniques? Specialized fields, particularly scientific and computer programming fields, often necessitate specific procedures, equipment, or programs. Check the job description for specific experience required or recommended, and be sure to include it in your resume if you have that experience.
- Be specific—your potential employer will not assume anything. For example, if they ask for experience with Microsoft Excel, do not state, "experience with office software packages." Make it easy for the reader to see you are qualified!



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Résumé Writing Guide: Revising (cont.)

Revising Your Resume's Style

After you're satisfied with your resume's content, check for grammatical and stylistic issues. One revision strategy is to read your resume out loud to yourself—this forces you to slow down and helps you catch little words you might have accidentally omitted, like “to,” and “for,” as well as makes you hear the rhythm of the writing and spot areas where it fumbles. To revise for grammar and sentence structure, one method is to read your resume backwards, sentence by sentence—read the last sentence, then the second to last sentence, then the third to last sentence.

Use Effective Language

- Make EVERY WORD work for you! By using Action Verbs in your resume, you create a sense of enthusiasm and a “can do” attitude. What action verb would best fit each of your skills? Where can you use stronger words?
- Use a thesaurus to find synonyms to improve word choice and avoid repetition.
- Consider whether headings are appropriate and represent your information and achievements. For example, “Work History,” “Professional Experience,” and “Relevant Experience” are all headings for work experience. Section headings stand out in the reader's mind, so make them work for you!

Be Concise (But Not Modest!)

- Consider this: the average employer will spend 35-40 seconds scanning your resume. Eliminate extraneous words that could distract a reader.
- Circle the 5 points you think are most likely to help you get the job you want—then look at everything that isn't circled. What could you omit or shorten?
- If your resume is too short, you may not be giving yourself enough credit for the experiences and training you have had.
 - Ask yourself, “How did I improve the places I have worked?”
 - Look through job performance reviews and job descriptions from your previous experience to remind yourself of your accomplishments.
 - If your work experience is limited, consider emphasizing your coursework, activities, or volunteer experiences that demonstrate skills such as teamwork, punctuality, accuracy, or leadership.



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Résumé Writing Guide: Sending Your Resume

You have on your computer a beautifully worded résumé geared towards a specific job, and you are ready to send it to your potential employer. Before you send it in, double check this list!

Read Your Resume One Last Time

- Proofread! See if you catch any spelling errors or missing or incorrect punctuation. There is no faster turn-off in a resume than misspellings and grammatical errors.
 - Identify your own patterns of error and check for those first.
 - Read your resume out loud.
 - Get someone else to read your resume.
 - Let time elapse between drafting and editing your resume.
- Double check phone numbers and email addresses. Check your own contact information as well as your references.
- Make sure all relevant information for the job is included, and make sure all the include information is relevant! Every resume needs to be targeted towards a specific job, and that means a certain amount of rewriting and editing each time you submit your resume.

Make Your Resume Visually Effective and Appealing

- Avoid using a “resume wizard” because it is difficult to customize.
- Make your resume easy to read—design it to be powerful even when skimmed.
- Visually balance the text with white space. Use at least 1” margins and put space between sections within the resume.
- Be uniform with style; headings, tenses, and fonts should be consistent.
- Use at least a 10 point font, though 12 point is better. Do not use fancy fonts—the standards Arial and Times New Roman are easiest to read.
- Avoid abbreviations. If you use abbreviations, spell the word out the first time you use it, followed by the abbreviation in parentheses. Example: Shaw University (SU). State names may be abbreviated.
- Avoid personal pronouns like I and you.

Send Your Resume Professionally

- Print your resume on heavy bond paper (16-25 lbs, white or off-white).
- Do not fold or staple your resume; if possible, mail it in a 9”x12” envelope.
- ALWAYS include a cover letter! Use the guide on the next page to write your cover letter.
- The Center for Experiential Learning and Career Development can assist you.



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BASIC RESUME ELEMENTS

There are many different ways to present your relevant skills to an employer. We strongly encourage you to visit the Career Services Center's library and/or to go online to view a variety of resume examples. You should always tailor a resume to highlight experience and skills relevant to the job. However, these are the common elements or sections of a resume:

NAME

Make your name stand out by using all caps, bolding, and/or a larger font size

Address

Phone number(s)

Email Address (use a professional-sounding address!)

HIGHLIGHTS OF QUALIFICATIONS (or SKILL SUMMARY or STRENGTHS)

- Bulleted, targeted statement listing specific skills and experience that qualify you for a specific job.
- Use the job announcement as a guide for what to include.

EDUCATION

Degree, major/minor, university/community college name(s), dates listed in reverse chronological order. Usually include your GPA only if it is above 3.5. If it is lower, consider using your major GPA instead. Detail special coursework if pertinent. Do not include high school.

RELEVANT EXPERIENCE (for Skill-Based Resume Format)

- Bulleted statements highlighting your relevant work, volunteer, educational, or life experiences. Carefully select and target these to show an employer that you are qualified for the job.
- List most relevant information first.
- These may be divided into experience subcategories (see resume samples in this guide).
- Under each subcategory, list 3-5 bulleted accomplishments, skills, duties/responsibilities.
- Start each phrase with an action verb (see list in this handbook for suggestions).

WORK HISTORY (or PROFESSIONAL HISTORY)

- List the position title, employer, location and dates in reverse chronological order (starting from the most recent and working back). Do not include addresses or supervisor names.
- In the Chronological Resume Format, under each position, list 3-5 bulleted accomplishments, skills, duties/responsibilities. Start each phrase with an action verb (see list in this handbook for suggestions). List your most relevant information first.
- In a Skill-Based Resume, the details of your work experience are given in the Relevant Experience section (see above). This section is merely a list of employers, locations and dates.

OPTIONAL SECTIONS

Sections such as Objective, Activities and Memberships, Honors, and Interests may be included only if the information is pertinent to your field.



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LETTERS WRITTEN IN SEARCH OF OPPORTUNITIES

Cover Letters/Letters of Application. This is written in response to a specific, advertised job opening. The goal is to get your resume read and generate a job interview. A successful letter demonstrates how your qualifications match the job requirements. At the very least, you must research the organization and study the position description carefully. Organize your letter as follows:

- **Seize Attention:** In one, short, bold sentence, tell them what you want, why you are writing.
- **Pique Interest:** Describe your qualifications as they relate to the position requirements, providing evidence of your related experiences and accomplishments. This is where you would mention a referral if you can use their name.
- **Get Down to Business and Show Your Stuff:** Convince the employer that you have the personal qualifications and motivation to perform well in the position.
- **Wrap it Up:** Indicate your availability for an interview.

Letter of Inquiry. This letter seeks out possible openings and generates, if not a job interview, at least an initial information interview. Because many positions are not widely advertised, letters of inquiry are used extensively in job searches. It is structured similarly to the letter of application (see above). An effective letter of inquiry reflects a knowledge of the organization and communicates how you can contribute to its needs and goals. Organize this type of letter as follows:

- State why you are particularly attracted to the organization; indicate the areas of the organization that interest you and the type of position you are seeking.
- Highlight your qualifications as they relate to your stated interests.
- Ask to be considered for existing or anticipated openings suited to your qualifications.
- Ask to meet with someone to further discuss your interests and qualifications. Because this is an un-solicited letter the person will probably not call you, so tell them you will follow-up and specify when.

Networking Letter. Use this letter when someone has referred you to a person as a contact for an information interview. Usually, it begins with: "Professor Soandso suggested I contact you regarding information about becoming a language interpreter."

LETTER FORMAT

Introductory Paragraph

Explain why you're writing (application, inquiry, and networking).
Describe how you heard about the position or company.
Capture the reader's interest.

Body of the Letter

Relate your background to the job qualifications. Give examples. Use their terminology and language.
Share why you're interested in them. Show enthusiasm!

Closing

Be direct. Ask for an interview or job.
Let them know you'll follow up. Be specific about how and when you'll be in touch.
Provide them with your phone number and email address. Let them know dates and times when you're available.



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PRACTICE RESUME WORKSHEET