

# RESUME & COVER LETTER HANDBOOK

Prepared for Azusa Pacific University College



University  
College

# RESUME-WRITING STRATEGIES

## Ask yourself:

- Who are you?
- Who do you want to be?

### 1. Write to the future.

- Don't rehash the past. Write to the job/career path you wish to pursue.
- What is your specific career objective? This will drive the majority of your resume.
- Identify skills acquired through past experiences that drive toward your objective.

### 2. Re-weight skills and qualifications.

- SKILLS not TASKS
- Highlight activities/experiences directly relevant to your objective.
- Put emphasis on strategic skills that apply to the job you seek.
- Use a current job posting to identify the skills/qualifications needed.

### 3. Be inclusive; not exclusive.

- Help enable the employer to picture you and what you offer their organization.
- Create the perception you fit into what they seek.

### 4. Sell it; don't tell it.

- Create demand by highlighting achievements and accomplishments.
- How well have you done something? (Don't just tell what you did.)
- Use quantifiers and qualifiers-numbers, amounts, etc.
- Transform telling to SELLING.

### 5. No Rules, guidelines.

- That's right. There are no rules to resume-writing, just guidelines.
- Your resume should highlight who you are and position yourself for your career objective.
- Write content that reflects your objective in the most appropriate terminology, order and functionality that helps you achieve your goal.

### 6. Keywords are vital.

- What keywords describe the job you seek? What keywords describe you?

#### Hard Skills:

- Job title
- Area of expertise
- Technology proficiency
- Professional skills
- Industry-specific or profession-specific terminology
- Foreign languages
- Years of experience

#### Soft Skills:

- Communication skills
- Interpersonal relationship skills
- Organizational skills
- Personality traits
- Attitude

#### Academic & Training Credentials:

- Colleges
- Degrees
- Certifications
- Course titles
- Training programs

#### General Information:

- Affiliations
- Company names
- Industries
- Locations

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## BRANDING

### What is a personal brand?

- Who am I at my core? What defines me more than anything else?
- What is your objective?
- What do you consider to be your greatest skills, talents, attributes, and contributions?
- What is most unique about you and your success?
- What are your core attributes?
- Identify a cluster of accomplishments that define your brand and value.

## EXAMPLES:

### Information Technology Leader

Advancing strategic business goals in a fast-paced marketplace by delivering agile, flexible technology that is highly responsive to user needs.

### Chief Executive Officer

Growth Catalyst • Market Strategist • Consummate Relationship Builder • Value Creator

### Art Director / Graphic Designer

Translating Vision into Concept into Artistic Design

**A Note About Branding:** Most students will not yet be able to create a personal “branding statement” as you have yet to discover your core attributes and skills. What you can offer now are keywords, phrases, and personal highlights that identify your personality, qualifications, and skills.

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## OBJECTIVE

If used, an objective should integrate keywords relevant to the career goals, job qualifications, and specific skills set. An objective might incorporate the type of position you seek and the skills you offer and want to develop (first example) or an objective might be a brief statement followed by a personal summary (second example).

### EXAMPLES:

Seeking a position in Retail Sales and Management where I can develop my skills in Customer Relationship Management, Revenue Generation, New Product Launch, and Leadership Training.

#### Objective:

Management Training opportunity with an emphasis in Human Resources.

#### Summary:

- Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration with a concentration in Human Resources.
  - Track record of advancement based on proven capabilities, worth ethic, and enthusiasm.
  - Management experience in a fast-paced retail environment.
  - Strength in training and development – chosen to train all new employees for retail store.
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## PROFILE

Titles could include: Career Highlights, Career Profile, Professional Profile, Skills Summary, Professional Highlights. It should showcase relevant information (remember, positioning toward the Career Objective) and use KEYWORDS supportive of the Career Goals. This is the WOW information.

This is the most “loosely defined section. Any format can be used, but choose what is best to effectively communicate the key information. Suggestions include: Headline statement that defines who you are; Summary sentence of yourself and key skills followed by bullet points of accomplishments; Summary paragraph explaining who you are and what you can do.

## EDUCATION

### **CORRECT:**

Bachelor of Science, Communication Studies  
Bachelor's, Communication Studies  
B.S. Communication Studies

### **INCORRECT:**

Bachelors of Science  
Bachelor's of Arts

**NECESSARY INFORMATION:** Major, Minor, Specialization, GPA (3.0 or higher), Years attended.

**OPTIONAL INFORMATION:** Academic Honors, Languages, Computer Skills, Applicable Coursework, Academic Projects (this information might also go in your "Other" section – see below – or in your "Profile" – above).

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## VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE (Detailed Format)

This format could actually be used for Christian/community service or even a practicum or job shadowing opportunity. Volunteer/Community Service may also be summarized and itemized as listed in the Steven Z. Sample. This detailed format allows you to elaborate on a volunteer experience that could be vitally relevant experience toward the career goal. IRRELEVANT experience should not be emphasized as such.

**Copy Writer, Yearbook**, Azusa Pacific University

August – December 2010

Volunteer part-time position to research, interview, and write creative stories that accurately depicted campus events and people. Managed all aspects of story production while adhering to strict deadlines. Actively recruited volunteers for quotes and special features to reflect a variety of perspectives while maintaining accuracy and an objective writing style.

- Active contributor with more than 10 articles and submissions for the nationally-ranked, award-winning production.\*
- Regular consultant with editorial staff to offer input and provide story ideas.
- Member of Associated Collegiate Press and attendee of the College Media Advisers conference.

\* You didn't do this, but it's a great way to ADD this as a highlight/credential, making the experience that much more worthwhile.

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## OTHER

This category could be a number of things – or eliminated altogether. Titles could include: *Accomplishments, Affiliations, Skills, Honors, Awards, Leadership...* It should be the "other" things you can't fit elsewhere but still add impact to your career goals. You might consider leadership roles, awards or honors, special projects, oversea travels, special computer skills, etc.

## EXAMPLE:

### LEADERSHIP

**Resident Assistant**, Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, CA 2010 – 2011  
Provided peer counseling, crisis management and intervention, communication, and direct supervision and leadership for 50 resident students.

- Advised weekly peer management groups and facilitated regular accountability and leadership training.
  - Attended more than 100 hours of leadership training seminars, meetings, and sessions to develop management skills.
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## WRITE RIGHT

### Parallel Structure

Use parallel word structure for smooth flow of information. To write in parallel, choose the same word form for every item in a list or sequence.

- INCORRECT: Led teams in needs definition, creating project plan, plan implementation, tests, and troubleshooting.
- CORRECT: Led team in defining needs, creating and implementing project plan, testing, and troubleshooting.
- CORRECT: Led teams in needs definition, project plan creation, implementation, testing, and troubleshooting.

### Word Tense

- Past tense for previous jobs
- Present tense for current jobs

### Punctuation

- Commas: Include a series comma to eliminate confusion (writing, reading, and arithmetic).
- Periods: Include a period at the end of bullet points to complete the thought. (optional)

### Whatever you decide, BE CONSISTENT!

- OK to use digits rather than spelling out numbers to draw attention to important numbers.
- OK to eliminate a, an, the for a tighter writing style.
- OK to capitalize/bold/italicize certain words for emphasis.

### Questions To Ask

When preparing your resume, think about your audience. Understanding the company you're applying to and the position you're applying for, will help you identify **KEYWORDS**. These are usually relevant to the qualifications they seek and the skills you possess. You should write to your audience of the potential employer.

#### General Questions About the Company:

- What is the company's primary line of business?
- What are their annual revenues? Have those increased/decreased in the past year?
- What markets or customers do the company service/supply/support?
- Is the company local, regional, national or international?
- What is their mission statement?

## General Questions About the Position (Have you researched the job posting?):

- What is the scope of responsibility – the daily business functions for which you'd be responsible?
- Would you have any management/leadership responsibilities?
- What challenges might be associated with the position?
- What opportunities (advancement, leadership, project initiative) are associated with the position?
- With whom would you work on a regular basis? Who is the direct supervisor? Colleagues?
- What job qualifications are they seeking?

## How Do You Write?

It's sometimes hard to come up with those powerful, impact statements that will "WOW" an employer. These questions are to help get you started in the process of thinking through the skills you've developed through previous jobs or experiences. Don't tell them what you did; tell them the kind of employee you will be for their company.

- **The Job.** What responsibilities did you have? What skills did you develop through these responsibilities?
- **The Money.** Did you contribute to profits, gains, revenues, high volume, sales? Did you help make or save the business money? Anything quantifiable (numbers) shows impact.
- **The Budget.** Have you had any experience with financial records, managing the budget?
- **The Projects.** Were you involved with any new projects? Did you implement new initiatives? What were the results?
- **The Challenges.** Did you face any conflicts, problems, challenges? What action did you take? How did it affect the company/business/staff?
- **The Production.** How did you contribute to the overall success and accomplishment of the organization?
- **The Leadership.** Did you hold any leadership role or responsibility? Were you in charge of any staff – training, supervising.
- **The Accomplishments.** What sets you apart from other employees? What are you known for at work? What were your performance goals? Did you meet them? How did you contribute to saving time or money? How did you contribute to the bottom line? What did supervisors say about you? Performance evaluations/reviews?

## Support Statements for Accomplishments

(Consider for internship or support staff positions, non-leadership roles)

- Contributed to...
- Aided in...
- Helped with...
- Member of ...-person committee/team that...
- Collaborated with department manager to...
- Participated on committee that...
- Supported a...
- Company-wide efforts led to...
- Departmental efforts led to...
- Selected for national team that...
- Partnered with...
- Instrumental in...

## Compile information for your resume

(Abbreviated – see complete worksheet below):

1. Position/Career Objective
2. Long-Range Career Goals
3. Briefly summarize any experience you've had in this field (include number of years and career advancement).
4. What skills do you possess that you want to highlight?
5. Relevant Courses/Seminars/Workshops (include names, dates, places, sponsoring organization).
6. Certifications, Professional Licenses (dates received)
7. Professional Organizations/Affiliations (include offices/positions held, dates)
8. Computer Skills
9. Foreign Languages
10. Community Service (include name of organization, years involved, positions held)
11. Work Experience: Describe your duties, responsibilities, level of authority. Use numbers, percentages, quantify any results.
12. Describe accomplishments in your position.

## Resume/Interview Method:

### C-A-R:

**Challenge:** What challenges, problems, conflicts, issues did you face?

**Action:** What actions did you take in response to the challenge?

**Results:** What were the results? What resolution, solution, occurred?

Use this model for work, volunteer, project experience. This helps to identify ways you went into action and utilized problem-solving skills to contribute. Also allows you to elaborate on a situation or scenario that might not necessarily be highlighted otherwise (assuming the result was positive and impactful). This is also an effective interview strategy to demonstrate your skills.

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## COVER LETTER

### What is a cover letter?

- A cover letter accompanies the resume, and tells the employer the type of position you're seeking - and exactly how you are qualified for that position.
- A cover letter highlights the aspects of your experience that are most useful to the potential employer, and you can earn points for knowing what those aspects are.
- Also known as a letter of introduction, letter of application, transmittal letter, or broadcast letter.
- No smart job-seeker should send his or her resume without a cover letter. Few employers seriously consider a resume for a full-time position that is not accompanied by a cover letter; thus, a dynamically written cover letter needs to be part of your job-search strategy.

## Why is a Cover Letter so Important?

- Employers get hundreds of resumes, especially when they advertise a choice position. Employers are also very busy. Often the person screening resumes skims each for only a few seconds. Your cover letter can call attention to the skills, talents, and experience the employer is looking for.
- Your letter can explain things that your resume can't. If you have large gaps in your employment history or you are reentering the job market or changing the focus of your career, a cover letter can explain these circumstances in a positive way.
- A cover letter can serve the same function as the "objective" on your resume, and expand upon it. Cover letters give you the opportunity to target your experience and skills to the specific position you are applying for and should, therefore, be unique to each position you apply for.
- Finally, a cover letter is a little window into your personality. A good cover letter can suggest to an employer, "I'd like to interview this person; she sounds like someone I'd like to get to know better. This seems like just the kind of dynamic person this company needs."

*Adapted from: Quintessential Careers (www.quintcareers.com) and an excerpt from the 3rd edition of Dynamic Cover Letters.*

## Cover Letter Format

- Use business letter format when writing any job search correspondence, including your cover letter.
- Start with your address at the top of the page.
- Skip a line and add the date.
- Skip a line and add the employer's name, the company name and the company address.
- Skip a line and include your greeting. Start with "Dear" and use the employer's name, the appropriate title and a colon (e.g., Dear Mr. Anderson:, Dear Ms. Williams:, Dear Dr. Lloyd:).
- If you do not know the employer's name, you can use a generic greeting such as "Dear Sir or Madam:," "To Whom It May Concern:," or "Dear Recruiter:." *These generic greetings are very impersonal so another option is to omit the greeting so that your letter appears more like a memo.*
- Left justify each line (i.e., do not indent paragraphs) and skip a line between paragraphs.
- Include three or four body paragraphs.
- End with a professional closure such as "Sincerely," "Regards," or "Yours truly."
- Skip four lines for your signature and type your name.
- Skip a line and type "Enclosure" or "Enclosures" to indicate that you have enclosed your resume and any other requested documents

## Cover Letter Outline

Your Street Address or P.O. Box  
City, State Zip Code

Current Date (Month 00, 200\_)

Employer's Name  
Title  
Company/Organization  
Address  
City, State Zip Code

Dear (Dr./Mr./Ms./Mrs.) Name:



Write what position you are applying for and where you found the position (newspaper, website, etc.) Ex: I am writing in response to the Sales Coordinator position posted on www.salesjob.com. Next comes what your degree is in and when you graduate(d). Ex: I will receive my Bachelor of Science in Chemistry this May.

In the second paragraph, this is your chance to tell the organization why you're interested. Show that you've done your research on them by referencing specifics on what you are impressed by. Ex: I was very interested to see this position posted because your organization has an excellent reputation for providing exceptional service to its customers as demonstrated by winning the Sales Leader of the Year Award for three years in a row. Sales Company #1 has the values that I admire and is an organization that I would love to be a part of.

Next, take the position description and for each skill/quality they want, list why you have that or how you've done that in the past. The more your cover letter mirrors the position description's needs, the better. Let's say the position description requires someone with excellent interpersonal skills, experience in customer service, and someone with initiative. Ex: I have worked as a waitress for the past four years and during that time I have learned what it takes to deliver quality customer service. Having a positive attitude, a listening ear, and being flexible have aided me in better serving my customers. In addition to that, I have enhanced my interpersonal skills. I serve many customers from a variety of backgrounds and I am able to please my customers by tailoring my service to their needs. I often go above and beyond what is asked of me in order to help the restaurant to be as successful as possible. For example, the other day I noticed a problem that was not in my area of responsibility, but went ahead and fixed it when I had the chance because I knew it would help my coworker and the restaurant.

In the last paragraph, you want to reiterate your interest, give your contact information and say how you will follow up. Ex: I am very excited about the possibility of working for Sales Company #1. I may be reached at (626) 555-1234 or via email at student@apou.net. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to further discussing my candidacy with you.

Sincerely/Warmest regards/Cordially/Yours truly,  
(Skip four lines here & DON'T FORGET TO SIGN YOUR NAME! If you are e-mailing your cover letter, skip only one line and type your name instead of skipping four lines for a signature.)

Azusa P. Student

Enclosure: Resume (You type this whenever you are enclosing something else, like your resume. Delete this if you are emailing your cover letter because your resume will be attached, not enclosed.)

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## REFERENCES

Use the same header on your references as you do on your resume for continuity. Also, if your reference page gets separated from your resume, then the employer has your contact information. If you don't have room for all of that, at least put your "Name, References" in the top, left-hand corner so they know who the references belong to if separated.

**A.** Always put some sort of descriptor here. There is nothing more embarrassing for a reference checker than insulting the person they are about to have a conversation with. Ex: "Hi, is Ms. Knight there?" "This is DOCTOR Knight." Do your homework and find out if they have their doctorate or whether they are married (for women). If you do not know if a woman is married, Ms. is appropriate and professional.

**B.** Optional. This just gives the person checking your references a feel for who he or she is about to speak to when calling. Ex: Mr. Jones supervised me while I worked at Number One Sales Company.  
Ex: Dr. Smith taught me Chemistry 101 and Biology 302. He has known me for two years.

- A.** (Dr./Mr./Ms./Mrs.) Name
- Title
- Organization
- Address
- City, State Zip
- (Area Code) Telephone Number
- E-mail address (if he/she has one)
- B.** Relationship

### Important Reminders about References:

1. Most organizations want three to five references. You would use the same outline for each reference as shown above.
2. Print your reference page on resume paper too. You want your cover letter, resume, references and an application (if applicable) all to match.
3. ALWAYS ask someone to be a reference ahead of time. If someone calls that person out of the blue, he or she may be upset with you and give you a poor reference. He or she could also be upset because he or she was not more prepared to speak about your skills and abilities. So always ask first.
4. Avoid using “character” references. These are people like a sports coach from high school, someone from your place of worship, a parent, or a family friend. These are OK if the organization needs to check out your character (Ex: The FBI, the police, law enforcement positions, etc.), but for the most part, organizations want professional references—people who can speak about what you are like at work or in class. So think of supervisors, co-workers, professors you have a good relationship with, etc.
5. After you have an updated copy of your resume, offer to send an e-copy or drop off a hard copy to each of your references. By sending them a copy of your resume, you enable them to stay up-to-date with what you’ve been up to and it also helps

## SAMPLE RESUME WRITING QUESTIONNAIRE

*Adapted from Career Management Alliance Forms Factory & Resume Writing Academy worksheets*

**Name:**

**Address:**

**City:**

**State:**

**Zip:**

**Home Phone:**

**Mobile Phone:**

**E-mail:**

**URL (web portfolio):**

Position/Career Objective: List top three job title choices in order of preference:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Long-Range Career Goals

Purpose of Resume

Briefly summarize your experience in this field (include number of years, career advancement, internships, job shadowing, mentoring, etc.):

What are some terms (keywords) specific to your line of work?

What skills do you possess that you want to highlight?

**Education**

(list all degrees, certificates, diplomas received, dates received, school or college, and location of school or college). Begin with the most recent and work backwards.

College/Univ: \_\_\_\_\_ City/State: \_\_\_\_\_  
Major: \_\_\_\_\_ Degree: \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_ GPA: \_\_\_\_\_  
Honors: \_\_\_\_\_

College/Univ: \_\_\_\_\_ City/State: \_\_\_\_\_  
Major: \_\_\_\_\_ Degree: \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_ GPA: \_\_\_\_\_  
Honors: \_\_\_\_\_

Relevant courses/seminars/workshops: (include names, dates, place, sponsoring organization, etc.)

Certifications:

Professional Licenses:

**Military:**

(include branch of service, locations, position, rank achieved, years of service, honorable discharge, key accomplishments, special recognition, awards, etc.).

**Professional Organizations/Affiliations/Clubs:**

(include offices held)

**Computer Skills:**

(include hardware, operating systems, software, programming, design, etc.)

**Foreign Languages:**

(fluency — verbal/written)

Hobbies/Activities:

**Community Service:**

(name of organization, years involved, positions held)

**Use the following pages to describe your work experience.**

- As you consider each position, ask yourself: “How is this company better off now than when they hired me?”
- Did you increase sales? If so, by what percentage or amount?
- Did you generate new business, bring in new clients, or forge affiliations?
- Did you save your company money? If so, how much and how?
- Did you design and/or institute any new system or process? If so, what were the results?
- Did you meet an impossible deadline through extra effort?
- What difference did this make to your company?
- Did you bring a major project in under budget?
- How did you make this happen?
- How were the dollars you saved used?
- Did you suggest and/or help launch a new product or program? If so, did you take the lead or provide support?
- How successful was the effort?
- Did you take on new responsibilities that weren’t part of your job? If so, did you ask for the new projects or were they assigned to you?
- Did you introduce any new or more effective techniques for increasing productivity?
- Did you improve communication? If so, with whom and what was the outcome?
- How did your company benefit from your performance?

Begin with present employer / project — include self-employment, volunteer or unpaid work if it applies. **List different positions at same company as separate job.**

Name of company:

City/State:

Dates of employment:

Your title or position:

Who do you report to (title)?

Number of people you supervise:

Their titles or functions:

Briefly describe the size of the organization (volume produced; revenues; number of employees; local, national or international?, etc.)

What it is that they do, make, or sell?

Where do they rank in their industry in terms of their competitors?

Briefly describe your duties, responsibilities, level of authority. Use numbers (size) and percentages, quantify budgets, state with whom you interacted, etc.:

Why were you hired (or promoted or selected)? What was going on at the company? Was there a particular challenge or problem you were brought on to solve? Did you have specific performance measurements? (If so, please describe them as specifically as possible.) Where was your company headed? Why did they need you?

Describe four to six **accomplishments** in this position. Give facts and figures.

**Previous employment:**

Name of company:

City/State:

Your title or position:

Who do you report to (title)?

Their titles or functions:

Size of the organization

Dates of employment:

Number of people you supervise:

What it is that they do, make, or sell.

Where do they rank in their industry

Briefly describe your duties, responsibilities, level of authority.

Why were you hired (or promoted or selected)? What was going on?

Describe 4-6 **accomplishments**

For the following categories, consider your **entire work and academic history.**

**Personal Strengths:**

**Achievements** (things that you feel are your greatest accomplishment in the workplace / school / community).