



Writing Résumés for Results

The role of a résumé is to win an INTERVIEW. No more, no less.

The difference between you winning an interview and getting a rejection slip is about two minutes¹. That's how long it takes employers to read a résumé before deciding whether to consider you as a potential candidate. That means **first impressions** are critical.

Here are some practical ideas to help you.

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¹ Australian Human Resources Institute

Some tips to get you started:

- **Know what you can offer the employer.** Before you write, ask yourself the key question: “What can I do to directly or indirectly help the company *profitably get and keep customers?*”²
- **No such thing as “one size fits all.”** A generic résumé is likely to get a generic response of “silence”. The more you target the résumé to meet the needs of the interviewer/employer, the more successful you will be.
- **Give them the punchline first!** When deciding how to structure a résumé always consider, “What will be *most* interesting to the interviewer/employer?” And put that first.
- **Know your product.** The “product” is YOU! Invest time in understanding your strengths and weaknesses. Highlight your strengths.
- **Keep it relevant.** Omit any information that doesn’t build your case personally or professionally for the job you are applying for.
- **Keep it timely.** Focus on the past 5-8 years. They’re not interested in what you did 20 years ago (sorry!).
- **Don’t waffle.** Less than 2 pages is likely not enough. But 4 or more pages is probably too much. Less is usually more.
- **Be “creative,” but don’t lie.** You can stretch, creatively position, or imply great importance to your experience, but never lie.
- **Use facts, not fluff.** Employers want facts. Use them. It can be embarrassing for the interviewer to read statements like, “Has passion for people from all walks of life”. Instead, say, “Created and implemented HR systems and training for 100 people—from management to warehouse clerks.”
- **Avoid jargon or abbreviations.** Eliminate organisational and industry-specific language. Who knows that “ARPU” means “Average Revenue Per User”? Not everyone. Use plain English.
- **Avoid the word “I”.** Write in the third person (“John did X”), not the first person (“I did X”). Cover letters, although written in the first person, should minimise the word “I” and use “you” as much as possible.
- **Skip some stuff.** Some things that are generally unnecessary and better omitted³ are: date of birth, marital status or spouse’s name, children, religious or political affiliations, and membership of unrelated organisations, including sporting groups.
- **Content first, presentation second.** Focus first on getting the content right. THEN spend time on the presentation.

² Jeffrey Fox. How to be a Rainmaker – Unexpected rules for success

³ Robin Henry, Desert Wave Enterprises – Writing a Winning Résumé

Presenting your résumé:

Above all, follow the KISS [Keep it Simple Simon] principle.

- **Follow a logical order.** Structure the content in order of the “most recent to least recent” and “most interesting to the least interesting.”
- **Choose clear headings.** Stick to simple, easy-to-understand headings (e.g. Career History, Technical Skills). That way the reader can easily find what they need.
- **Avoid fancy fonts.** Use one, easy to read, font. Verdana, Arial or Times New Roman always win. Information with the same “weight” should be in the same font and size.
- **Avoid fancy design.** Use bold, underline, indented paragraphs and text boxes sparingly and purely to make the layout easy on the eye. Bullet points can help abbreviate content and make the layout look cleaner. Pages need white space, so don’t crowd them.
- **Do a test print.** Always print the résumé out before you email it to test it looks as good on paper as it does on screen. The employer, after all, may print it, so it needs to shine in both states.

Writing a punchy cover letter⁴

A good cover letter is:

- To the point
- Clearly links experience with the role advertised
- No more than 3-4 paragraphs, or one page, long
- Positive, upbeat and enthusiastic
- Whets the reader's appetite for the résumé

The cover letter should NOT:

- Be a summary or repeat of the résumé
- Be a uniform letter that is sent with all job applications

The four key elements of a cover letter:

1. **Show interest.** Demonstrate to the reader that you have read the job ad carefully and you are truly interested in that particular job.

Dear Mr Smith,

I am writing in response to your advertisement seeking a customer services manager to run XYZ Car Dealership's service centre.

2. **Make the link for them.** Match what they need in the role with what you can offer. (Also, the cover letter should always refer to the resume and other enclosures.)

As you will see from my enclosed/accompanying résumé, my skills and experience are a good match for the position you are trying to fill. Especially relevant are my five years' experience working in a similar role and the award I received for excellence in customer service.

Show understanding and enthusiasm. Demonstrate an interest and empathy with what they are trying to do as a business.

I'm aware of the high value XYZ Car Dealership places on service, and believe we share the same philosophy of customer care.

3. **Be confident.** Finish on a positive note.

I look forward to meeting you to discuss how I can contribute to your team.

Yours sincerely,

Joe Bloggs

⁴ Adapted from Kate Southam - Career One. How to write a cover letter