

RESUME AND COVER LETTER WRITING GUIDE

Naropa University
Career Services

Sarah Steward, career services coordinator
Arapahoe Campus ~ Allen Ginsberg Library 6210, second floor
303.245.4863 ~ [ssteward@naropa.edu](mailto:sseward@naropa.edu)
www.naropa.edu/careerservices

It may feel somewhat intimidating to think about putting your skills and experiences down on paper, especially in the form of a resume and cover letter. However, Career Services created this guide to ease that tension and provide you with helpful advice to begin the process of writing about the uniqueness of who you are and what you've done.

What is a resume?

A resume is a self-marketing tool used to get you an interview. It focuses on who you are and the skills, experiences, and talents you have to offer an organization. Your first task is to determine what skills and experiences you have that helped prepare you for the work you seek and identify how you would be an asset to the organization. The document, therefore, focuses on what you can do for the organization rather than what the organization can do for you.

Where do I begin?

To get you started on the process of writing your resume, you should first research information about the organization for which you want to work. In this day and age, you can gain a wealth of information about an organization simply by visiting its website. You might look at its mission statement, review job vacancies, consider the organization's current events or projects, or scan its annual reports. Also, you might speak with people who work in the industry or organization. Visit the Career Services office for further strategies in this area.

Now that you know information about the organization, it is time to consider how your values, interests, and experiences intersect or do not intersect with the organization and the specific position. Consider asking yourself: What educational experiences do I want to include on my resume? Do I have any special training? What jobs have I held that I want to include? Do I want to include any fieldwork, internship, or volunteer experiences? What skills, knowledge, or abilities have I developed that are related to the position I am seeking? What unique experiences (e.g., study abroad, travel, awards, honors, workshops, and presentations) set me apart from other candidates?

The Resume Planning Worksheet on page 2 will help you explore these questions.

Resume Planning Worksheet

Experience	Duties & Responsibilities	Rewards	Skills
List each job or experience (e.g., volunteer, leadership, special project); personal accomplishments; and other achievements.	Describe (using verbs) what you did in this experience and how you achieved your accomplishments.	Name any kind of recognition you received, or any other indication that you performed the job or activity well. Describe your rewards, both intrinsic and extrinsic.	Name some of the skills or competencies resulting from your experience or accomplishments – functions you can now perform.

What resume style do I use?

After completing the Resume Planning Worksheet and researching the organization, it is now time to construct your resume. It is helpful to begin with a basic question: How should I present my resume (style)?

Generally, there are three basic styles of resumes: chronological, functional, and combination. Each is defined by how you organize your experiences. The type you choose is determined by the nature of the position for which you are applying as well as the nature and extent of your past experiences.

Chronological

This is the most common style of resume. Your resume is date-driven, so you structure it by the dates of your experience, beginning with the most recent experience first. Remember to begin with the category that is most relevant to the employer.

Pros

- Employers are used to seeing chronological resumes, and they are easy to follow.
- This may be a good style if: [1] you are staying in the same field as your previous experiences and/or [2] your work history shows significant growth and development.

Cons

- This may not be a good style if: [1] your work history is inconsistent, [2] you have gaps in employment, [3] you are changing careers, and/or [4] if you have no previous related experience.

Functional

This style of resume emphasizes skills and knowledge areas instead of your individual work experiences as the chronological resume does. In a functional resume, you identify several functional or topical headings to highlight your skills, accomplishments, and experiences as they relate to the position to which you are applying.

Pros

- This may be a good style if: [1] you are making a significant career change, [2] you are re-entering the workforce, [3] your work history is inconsistent, and/or [4] you have gaps in your employment history.

Cons

- Employers may not be as familiar with this format and, thus, may scrutinize your resume more.
- This style does not necessarily highlight where and when you gained and developed skills.
- This may not be a good style if: [1] you have performed only a limited number of job functions and/or [2] you want to emphasize your growth or development in a certain occupational field.

Combination

The third general style of resume is the combination. As the name suggests, you might have guessed that it combines aspects of the chronological and functional styles. It emphasizes skills and knowledge areas as well as your chronological work experience.

Pros

- This may be a good format if: [1] you have limited experience and/or [2] you are changing careers.

Cons

- Employers may not be as familiar with this format and, thus, may scrutinize your resume more.

What information should I include on my resume?

Now it is time to ask, “How should I organize my resume (format)?” The following content areas are typically seen on most resumes. The categories are meant to give you an idea of resume content, but based on what style of resume (i.e., chronological, functional, or combination) you choose, they may appear in a different order than presented here.

Contact Information

On the top of your resume you should always include the following contact information:

- Name – *make it big and bold, so it stands out*
- Current address and/or permanent address
- Telephone number and/or cell phone number – *make sure your voice message is professional*
- Email address – *again, make sure your email address is professional (anne.anderson @ gmail.com is better than ilikecookies @ yahoo.com)*

Objective or Summary of Qualifications

Objectives can add focus to your resume as long as they address the position of interest and the skills you have to offer the organization. An objective can include one or more of the following:

- Position type or title you wish to obtain
- Skills you offer
- Field or industry you wish to work

Pros

- Multiple positions may be open within an organization, and an employer can easily identify what position you are seeking in an objective.
- The resume logically flows from what you seek in the objective to how you are qualified to do what you state in your objective.
- An objective can bridge an inherent time gap. The employer's concern is the job that needs to be done (future); most of your resume represents what you have done (past).

Cons

- It can be exclusive and eliminate you from other jobs you would consider within the organization.
- It can be vague and meaningless if not written well.
- It can be selfish, reflecting only what you seek from the job instead of what you can offer.

In lieu of an objective some people include a Summary of Qualifications to emphasize their unique skills, qualifications, and experiences. This section has 3 to 5 brief statements that summarize your relevant experiences, personality traits, and skills and/or achievements. It conveys the “big picture” of your skills and experiences. Headings may include: *Summary of Qualifications, Qualifications, Strengths, Experience Highlights, or Profile.*

Education

In this section list the schools you are attending and/or have attended, beginning with the most recent. If you are a current or recent college or graduate student, this section will likely be towards the top of your resume. Note: Employers read resumes from the top down; therefore, state what is most relevant to the position first.

Under this section you should include the name of the school, location, degree, and program. Some people choose to list their GPA in this section. If your GPA is less than a 3.0, you may omit it or choose to include your major GPA, which is often higher. This is also a good section to include academic concentrations, special training, research, honors, and study abroad experiences. You may also choose to include training under a separate section.

If you are applying for an internship experience, you may choose to include relevant coursework under this section or a section of its own and list the courses that provide you the theoretical foundation for your work in the internship experience. If space becomes an issue, this may be the first section to eliminate.

Experience

The experience section is often daunting for students and recent graduates because you may feel that you do not have any, but YOU DO! Beyond paid experiences, you can include volunteer work, internships, special projects, or positions you have held in student groups that showcase your most related work. Skills and characteristics (e.g., communication, creative, interpersonal, analytic, problem-solving) are transferable, meaning those used in one setting are applicable in many other settings.

Now is a good time to refer to the *Resume Planning Worksheet*, review its content, and add more. When you list your experience include the position title, the organization, city and state, dates worked, and 2-5 descriptive bullet points highlighting your responsibilities, the skills you gained and developed, and any achievements or awards.

Avoid using personal pronouns in your descriptive statements and instead use action verbs to describe your experience. A list of action verbs is on page 7. Try to develop statements that relate the skills you gained and used during a particular experience with the skills necessary in the type of position you are pursuing. Quantifying (and qualifying) your experience is good and making statements results-oriented is also a plus. See the resume templates and samples at the end of this guide for more tips and examples for describing your experiences.

Additional Headings

In addition to the headings we've discussed, the following headings may help you personalize your resume and demonstrate individual experiences. Choose from the following or create a heading of your own if you have something unique to highlight.

Additional Experience	Presentations
Certifications (or Licenses)	Professional Organizations (or Associations)
Clinical Experience	Related (or Relevant) Experience
Computer Skills (or Knowledge)	Relevant (or Related) Coursework
Counseling Experience	Research (or Publications)
Dance and Theatre Experience	Special Projects
Education and Training	Special Training
Environmental Experience	Student Teaching Experience
Exhibits	Study Abroad
Internship (or Practical) Experience	Volunteer Experience
Language Skills	Writing and Editing Experience
Leadership Experience	_____ Experience

What else should I consider?

Curriculum Vitae (CV) versus Resume

CVs are typically used in scientific, academic, and medical environments that require advanced and doctoral degrees. CVs generally follow a chronological format, but are credential-driven rather than accomplishment-driven; it lists experiences rather than using descriptive sentences or bullet points. Furthermore, CVs feature education and degrees earned, followed by medical or academic posts, research, publications, presentations, awards, appointments, committees, and other professional activities. They are not generally used by college students. However, some graduate schools request a CV. The CV of professionals with work experience may exceed 10 pages. It is more typical for college students applying to graduate school to have a CV of 1-3 pages.

Email and Upload

If you email your resume, the simplest and easiest way to send it is as an attachment. Using standard word processing software (e.g., Microsoft Word) is probably your best option to ensure the end user can open the attachment. Avoid using a template because it may appear differently on the recipient's computer. An even better option is to save it as an image file (e.g., PDF), which ensures the end user will see exactly what you see.

In recent years, some organizations have stopped accepting resumes as attachments due to the influx of viruses. If you experience this, then you will have to put your resume in the body of the email, using *plain text* formatting. When creating a *plain text* resume, you may want to start with your normal resume in Microsoft Word, "Save As" a different file name (e.g., "Plain Text Resume"), and make the following changes:

1. Left justify all content, including your current and permanent addresses. Nothing should be centered or right justified.

2. All fonts should be the same type and size; ALL CAPS may be used as section headings.
3. There should be no **bold**, *italics*, or underlining in the document.
4. Finally, you should replace bullets with asterisks (*) or dashes (-).

Several organizations have created online application systems where you can upload your resume. In this case, you simply need to have an electronic copy of your resume, or the actual “.doc” or “.pdf” file. When the site asked you to “upload” your resume, use the “browsing” feature to identify and select your resume file. You may need to label your resume. Once you have selected your resume, you will need to finalize the process, typically by clicking “Submit,” “Upload,” or “Finish”. If the online application system asks you to submit your resume in a text block, you should use the strategies above for a *plain text* resume.

If submitting your resume online, you may also consider including a “Key Word” section. Many employers will keep your resume in their databases for an extended period of time. During that time, they may execute a “key word” search to help them identify candidates with particular skills and experiences. Thus, in this section, you may include nouns and industry jargon.

Basic Resume Guidelines

- Good resumes show how your qualifications fit the requirements of the jobs for which you apply.
- Good resume objectives focus on the employer’s needs, not your needs.
- Tailor your resume for each occupation or job. Use language found in the position description.
- The rule of thumb for the length of resumes is to keep it to one page. If you do use two pages, be sure to print them on separate sheets of paper and include your name on each page.
- Put the important information which supports your objective first.
- Bulleted points are helpful in calling attention to important information. It also helps move the reader’s eye down the page.
- Quantify (and qualify) your accomplishments where possible. Highlight results that happened because of you.
- Be consistent in your style, verb tense, spacing, highlighting, and underlining. Do not mix too many font styles and sizes.
- Proofread your resume carefully and have other people read it! Spelling errors or typos may take your resume out of consideration.
- Do not overcrowd your resume. Leave sufficient white space and margins. Avoid long paragraphs.
- Do not include personal information such as height, weight, sex, age, social security number, partnered status, or number of children. *Note: Federal Job Applications require that you include your social security number on your resume.*
- High school information is generally left off the resume once you have reached your junior year of your undergraduate education.
- Print your resume on quality bond paper. Use the same color and stock of paper for your cover letters as you do for your resume. *Note: Quality bond paper is available for purchase at the Naropa University Business Services Center.*

Action Verbs

The following list of action verbs can be used in describing your experience(s).

Business					
administered	contracted	executed	increased	planned	reviewed
analyzed	coordinated	expanded	managed	prioritized	scheduled
assigned	delegated	handled	motivated	produced	strengthened
chaired	developed	hired	negotiated	proposed	supervised
conducted	directed	improved	organized	recommended	trained
consolidated	evaluated	incorporated	oversaw	reorganized	
Financial Management					
administered	audited	computed	estimated	managed	projected
allocated	balanced	controlled	forecasted	marketed	reconciled
analyzed	budgeted	detailed	handled	maximized	researched
appraised	calculated	developed	increased	planned	revamped
Social Sciences					
advised	clarified	diagnosed	facilitated	motivated	represented
advocated	coached	educated	familiarized	presented	supported
assessed	counseled	evaluated	guided	referred	trained
assisted	demonstrated	expedited	interpreted	rehabilitated	
Education					
adapted	coached	developed	explained	informed	planned
adopted	communicated	designed	facilitated	instructed	persuaded
administered	conducted	enabled	focused	lectured	set goals
advised	coordinated	encouraged	guided	motivated	stimulated
clarified	created	evaluated	individualized	organized	tutored
Communication					
addressed	convinced	edited	lectured	produced	spoke
arbitrated	corresponded	enlisted	mediated	promoted	translated
arranged	developed	formulated	moderated	published	wrote
authored	directed	influenced	negotiated	reconciled	
collaborated	drafted	interpreted	persuaded	recruited	
The Arts					
acted	developed	founded	interpreted	originated	
conceptualized	directed	illustrated	introduced	performed	
created	displayed	initiated	invented	planned	
customized	established	instituted	mastered	revitalized	
designed	fashioned	integrated	modified	shaped	
Sciences					
analyzed	controlled	examined	interpreted	reviewed	surveyed
catalogued	diagnosed	extracted	interviewed	structured	systematized
clarified	documented	identified	investigated	studied	tested
collected	evaluated	inspected	organized	summarized	
Information Sciences					
arranged	computed	fabricated	operated	repaired	
assembled	designed	implemented	overhauled	set up	
built	devised	launched	programmed	solved	
calculated	engineered	maintained	remodeled	upgraded	
Clerical					
approved	compiled	filed	monitored	processed	routed
arranged	coordinated	generated	operated	purchased	screened
catalogued	dispatched	implemented	organized	recorded	tabulated
classified	executed	inspected	prepared	retrieved	validated
Quantitative					
accelerated	demonstrated	expanded	increased	reduced	simplified
achieved	earned	founded	instituted	resolved	transformed
attained	eliminated	improved	pioneered	restored	

Resume Rubric

The following rubric outlines what constitute a poor, average, and excellent resume. Review these guidelines prior to writing your resume or use them in evaluating your first and subsequent drafts.

CATEGORY	POOR	AVERAGE	EXCELLENT
Contact Information	Contact information is unclear and contains typographical mistakes. Does not contain all necessary information (full address, phone number, and e-mail. Inappropriate e-mail address (e.g., SuperStud@...)).	All contact information is present and is easy to read and understand. Present and permanent addresses and phone numbers are given, as well as a current, professional e-mail address.	
Objective	Objective is focused on the needs of the applicant and is vague and unclear. This type of objective provides little to no useful information to the reader.	Objective is concise, but the exact career goal could be more clear and targeted.	Objective is clear and concise and targeted toward a specific career goal. It is reflective of the needs of the organization to which the resume will be given.
Education	Education section is incomplete and lacks the necessary details to inform the reader of the type of education you are receiving.	Education section is clear and includes all of the necessary information including: name of institution, degree, graduation month and year, name of major(s), city and state of institution, and GPA (if appropriate). If relevant courses are listed, they are appropriate for the type of position for which you are applying. Some individuals elect to make their "Related Courses" a stand-alone section.	
Descriptions of Experience	Descriptions of the writer's experience (employment, internships, volunteer, etc.) lack useful information and details. They do not convey the roles and responsibilities the writer held, nor do they convey the knowledge, skills, and abilities that the person developed while in this position. Portions of the following information are present: name of the organization, person's title, dates of employment, and the geographic location of the organization	The descriptions adequately describe the nature of the experience in terms of roles and responsibilities and each experience lists the name of the organization, the person's title, the dates of employment, and the city and state of the organization. The descriptions could be improved by quantifying experiences where appropriate ("Supervised X people...") and tailoring the statements to the type of work for which the resume will be submitted.	The descriptions convey both the roles and responsibilities of the position, as well as the person's accomplishments and the skills they developed. Additionally, the statements reflect careful thought and analysis in terms of conveying the skills, experiences, and abilities of interest to the targeted employer or type of position. The name of the organization, dates of employment, title, and the city and state of the organization are all present and easy to read.
Co-curricular Activities	If listed, co-curricular activities are listed by the name of each organization. No relevant details are provided.	Co-curricular activities are listed by the name of each organization and the dates of involvement (if appropriate) are also listed. Some additional details are provided, but nothing substantial.	Co-curricular activities are listed including one's position within the organization, the name of the organization, as well as the dates of involvement (if appropriate). Additionally, depending on the type of position for which the student may be applying, additional details of his or her role, responsibilities, accomplishments, and skills developed are also provided.
Skills	If listed, skills are a random list of keywords that may or may not be relevant to the type of position for which the student will apply.	Skills are listed in an orderly and clean fashion that demonstrates to the reader that the student has carefully considered the key skills that would be desirable for the position he or she is seeking. Additionally, if appropriate, skills are broken into subcategories (Computer, Language, Certifications, Soft Skills, etc.).	
Format	Formatting is inconsistent and reflects little thought and intention. Specifically, font, font size, verb tense, listing of dates, state abbreviations, and the overall layout lack organization.	Layout is organized and easy to navigate, but there a number of inconsistencies in terms of font, font size, listing of dates, state abbreviations, or other aspects of the overall layout.	The resume is neatly organized, and consistent in all ways including: font, font size, listing of dates, state abbreviations, and all other aspects of the layout.
OVERALL	Overall resume has a poor layout, and reflects little thought and intention. There is no discernable career direction given the content.	Resume is neatly organized and easy to read. Reader must dig to find applicable information and career direction is somewhat vague but some skills are presented.	Resume is professional and reflects careful thought and analysis about one's background and experiences and how she or he possesses the skills needed to contribute to the targeted organization.

What is a cover letter?

A cover letter, as the name suggests, covers your resume. Just as the resume gets you an interview, a cover letter does as well, but it also gets your resume read. Many employers have stated that cover letters are just as or more important than a resume. To write an effective and original cover letter takes time and research, and the letter should be tailored to each employer and demonstrate your knowledge of the skills they need.

Where do I begin?

Research! The more you know about the organization and position, the better your cover letter will be. You might begin to ask yourself: What qualifications do I want to highlight that seem vital to this position? What academic, professional, or other experiences do I want to write about that expands on what is on my resume? Do I need to explain anything (e.g., lower GPA, gap in employment, lack of direct experience) that the employer might question in my resume? This is your chance to tell your story, showcase your written communication skills, and get your resume read.

Are there different cover letter types?

In general there are two types of cover letters: application and prospecting.

Application

Application cover letters are written in response to a specific position within an organization. This is a letter you write to formally apply for the position and indicate how your qualifications match the positions, expand on aspects of your qualifications or experiences your resume does not allow you to cover in-depth, or address any concerns the employer may have about your resume. Use the position description and your research of the organization to write an effective letter that demonstrates your uniqueness.

Prospecting

Prospecting cover letters are written to inquire about possible job openings within an organization. This letter is typically used for long distance searches or when you have identified an organization of interest to you that does not currently have job openings. Like the application cover letter, you will want to highlight your qualifications; only you should relate them to the broader organization rather than a specific position.

What information should I include on my cover letter?

There is not one way to write a cover letter, but these basic areas may help get you started. Above all, you should focus on what makes you an ideal candidate for the position by highlighting unique and distinct aspects about you. Give the employer a reason to interview you.

Introduction

Immediately come to your point and reveal your purpose for writing. Identify the position of interest to you and how you discovered it. If someone you know referred you to the position, ask that person if you can use her or his name in the letter. Networking can be beneficial to you. The introductory paragraph can also be an opportunity to express what interests you about the organization as well as your enthusiasm for applying to the position.

Body or Middle Paragraphs

The body of the letter is your opportunity to tell the employer what is unique about you and sets you apart from other candidates. Outline your strongest qualifications that match the position description. You might mention aspects of your experiences, activities, or coursework that are relevant to the position. Remember a cover letter is not verbatim of your resume, so you might reference the reader(s) to your resume for more information or expand on elements of the experience that your resume did not allow you to do. Show how the experience helped you develop skills necessary for the position. It comes down to convincing the employer you are qualified for the

position. Finally, you may need to take a sentence or two to explain any red flags (e.g., lower GPA, gap in employment, lack of direct experience) to the employer.

Closing

In closing, express your interest in obtaining an interview. You might want to show an action plan, indicating that you will follow up with the reader to speak with her or him further and ensure that she or he received your cover letter and resume. Other people take a less direct approach, and provide the reader with the best way (e.g., phone, email, both) to contact them. Finally, express your sincere appreciation to the reader for her or his time and consideration.

How do I format my cover letter?

You should format your cover letter in a standard business format, which means formal headings, single-spaced typing, and block paragraphs.

Return Address

Just like a resume, you should include your name, address, phone number, and email address on a cover letter. You could even transfer the heading of your resume to a cover letter to make it aesthetically consistent.

Date

Include the month, day, and year you typed the letter right under your return address or with one space after your heading if you transferred it from your resume. Leave three blank lines between the date and inside address.

Inside Address

Include the name, title, department, organization, and address of the person to whom you are writing. Leave one blank line between the inside address and salutation.

Salutation

Type an opening greeting such as Dear ____: End with a colon. Leave one blank space between the salutation and introductory paragraph.

Message

This is the body of the letter which we discussed earlier. Paragraphs should be in block form, single-spaced with no indentions, and one space between paragraphs and the complimentary closing.

Complimentary Closing

Include a parting phrase such as Sincerely, Sincerely yours, or Cordially. Leave three blank spaces between the complimentary closing and the writer's identification.

Writer's Identification

Type your name. Leave one blank line between writer's identification and enclosure notation.

Enclosure Notation

This is a reminder that an enclosure (e.g., resume) accompanies the letter. Examples of how it may appear are as follows: Enclosure, Enclosures, Enclosure: resume, or Enc.: resume and transcript.

DON'T FORGET TO SIGN YOUR LETTER!

How should I send my materials?

You may send your cover letter and resume through mail, email, fax, or hand deliver them. Most often, people mail cover letters and resumes, but in this electronic era, employers may ask you to upload or email your materials. For advice in this area, please refer to the resume emailing and online application section on pages 5 and 6.

If emailing your cover letter, combine your cover letter and resume in the body of the email message unless the organization indicates a different preference. In all cases follow the organization's directions. Cover letters sent via email are typically shorter in length than traditional paper versions and include keywords for possible database searches.

Basic Guidelines

- Address your letter to a specific person by name and title. If you do not have this information, call the organization and ask the name and correct spelling of the appropriate person. Use nonsexist and appropriate social titles (e.g., Ms., Mr., and Dr.). If a name is not available, use a gender-neutral title such as Employment Representative, Search Committee, or Director of Human Resources.
- Each letter should be an original. Duplicated, generic letters are not appropriate.
- A good cover letter will communicate your potential contribution rather than your current needs. Design your letters to be work centered and employer centered, not self-centered.
- Use standard business letter format, with equal margins on all sides. (Avoid handwritten cover letters).
- Keep the letter to one page. Your letter should be an introduction to your resume, not a review of it.
- Your letter should be free of typing or grammatical errors. Proofread and have others review it.
- Use quality bond paper that matches your resume paper. *Note: Quality bond paper is available for purchase at the Naropa University Business Services Center.*
- Do not fold or staple any of your materials if sending them through the mail or hand delivering them.
- It is good practice to keep a copy of all correspondence with employer for future reference.

If you have any questions or would like someone to review your cover letter and resume, please contact the career services coordinator, at 303.245.4863 or at [ssteward@naropa.edu](mailto:sseward@naropa.edu).

Also, please visit www.naropa.edu/careerservices for more resources and information