



Standing Out With Your Cover Letter and Resume

When you're looking for a job, your resume is your calling card. But it's not easy to put together a document that succinctly encapsulates your entire career. Here are our best tips for showcasing what you can offer a potential employer.

CHOOSING A RESUME FORMAT

Of the three most common resume formats, most senior executives prefer the chronological approach. Here is a brief description of each:

Chronological. A chronological resume is the most popular with hiring managers. With this type, you list your work experience in a reverse-chronological sequence, with the most recent position first. The principal advantage of this format is that it gives employers an easy-to-follow snapshot of your work experience and professional accomplishments.

[Click here to view a sample.](#)

Functional. A functional resume is organized according to your skills and other attributes. Although this format can be beneficial in certain situations — if you are re-entering the workforce after a long absence, for instance — you run a risk that interviewers may find the layout confusing or hard to follow.

[Click here to view a sample.](#)

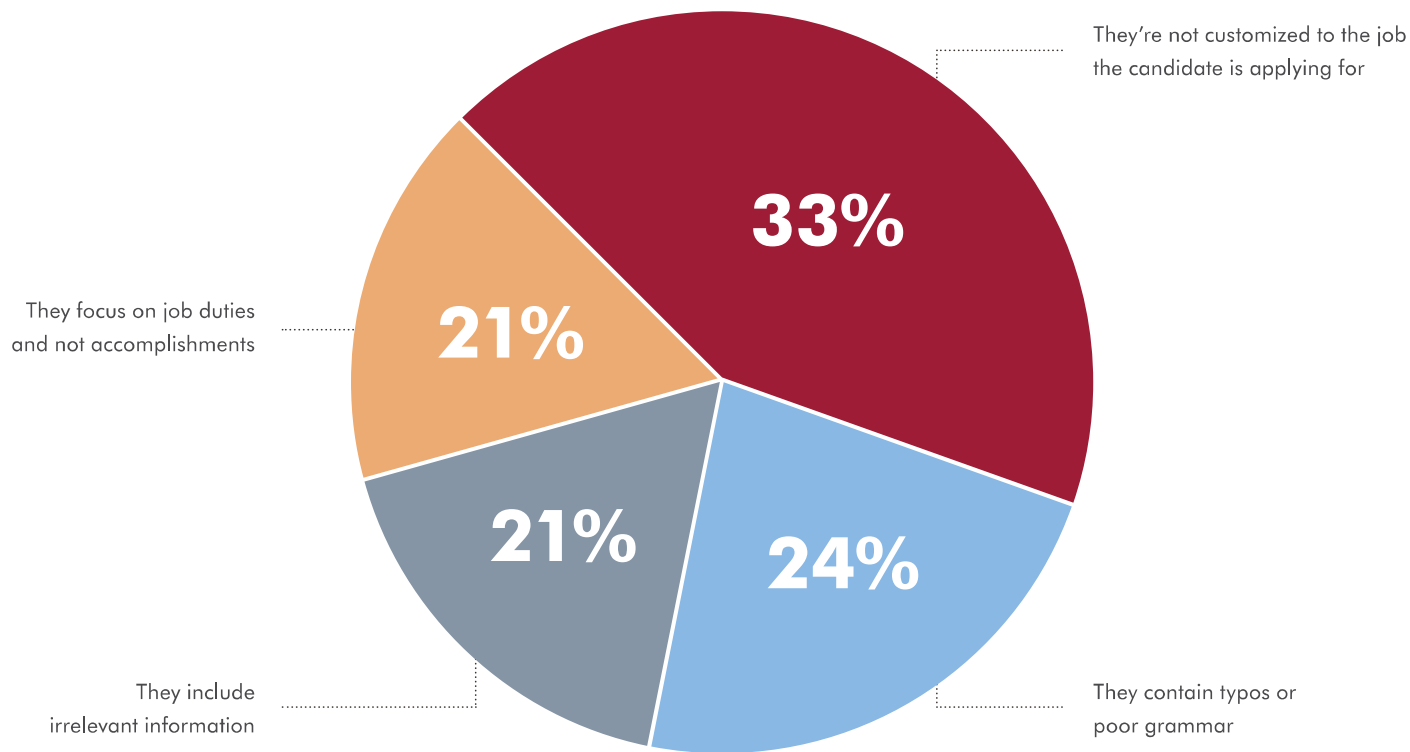
Combination. A combination resume showcases your skills and accomplishments and features an abbreviated version of your work history, including dates of employment and the names of companies you've worked for. Because of this, a combination resume can be an effective way to emphasize your skills without obscuring your work history.

[Click here to view a sample.](#)

Rather than creating a standard document you submit to every company that interests you, tailor your resume to each opportunity. In a recent Robert Half survey, 33 percent of CFOs, who were asked what they think is the most common mistake candidates make in their application materials, said, "They're not customized to the job the candidate is applying for." Use the job ad as your guide, emphasizing your background and abilities that most closely match what the company is looking for. This may mean placing more focus on your certifications and strong presentation skills for one prospective employer, for example, while playing up your self-directed nature and proven ability to be effective with minimal supervision for another.

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In a recent Robert Half survey, more than 2,200 CFOs were asked **“What do you think is the most common mistake candidates make in their application materials?”** Their responses:



* Total does not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

DETERMINING LENGTH

No hard and fast rules here. The length of a resume should be dictated by the depth of your experience. If your career spans 20 years and includes positions with increasing responsibility, don't be so concerned about brevity that you gloss over your credentials — going to two or three pages is fine. On the other hand, if you're still in the early stages of your career, don't make your resume longer than necessary to appear more qualified.

CLEARING THE CLUTTER

While starting your resume off with an objective section was once the rule, many job seekers now omit this or opt instead for a succinct summary section. The same goes for including your home address — it was once an absolute must, but today your email address is much more essential. Stating “References available upon request” is also out of style — and unnecessary; hiring managers assume you'll provide these when asked. And instead of describing every single task you performed in previous jobs, write a one- to two-sentence overview of your role, followed by a bulleted list of your most important duties and noteworthy achievements. Don't clutter your resume with extraneous personal information, either. Some job hunters meander off track by including hobbies or interests that have little or no relevance to their professional pursuits. Before sending your resume, review each point and ask yourself, “Does this add value?”

USING KEYWORDS

Many resumes are first evaluated by software that scans documents for specific keywords. You can help your resume make the cut by incorporating terms from the job description, which are typically what the software is looking for. (This assumes they accurately describe your skills and experiences, of course.) For example, if the job ad seeks someone who is “knowledgeable in billing, collections and payroll,” consider changing your wording from “experienced in all aspects of accounting and financial management” to specific mentions of these areas.

REMAINING ERROR-FREE

Typos in a resume continue to spell failure for a job seeker. Some managers will reject a candidate based on a single typo, since they figure the applicant will bring the same lack of attention to detail to the job. And don’t rely exclusively on computer spell-check. Even with this feature there are certain types of errors that can go undetected. Be sure to proofread your document multiple times (and ask a friend to take a look, too) to make sure it’s error-free.

EMAILING AND POSTING ONLINE

When applying for a position through a company’s website or online job board, make double sure you’re attaching the correct document. This may sound obvious, but it’s surprising how easy it is to click on the wrong attachment from files with similar-sounding file names. When emailing your resume, follow the job posting’s requirements, which could specify pasting it into the body of the message or including it as a Word file or PDF attachment.

CONSIDERING THE COVER LETTER

Yes, including a cover “letter” is still a good idea even in an online age. A resume shows where your career has been — a cover letter shows where you want your career to go. Although many hiring managers still prefer cover letters, online application systems don’t always offer the option of including one. Or, sometimes, job seekers are specifically instructed not to include one. In these situations, it’s best to forgo the cover letter. But often you can paste a short paragraph or two within the body of an email or in the space allotted for “comments” in an online application.

Assuming you can submit an e-cover letter, do so. Cover letters give you another opportunity to set yourself apart from other job applicants. Hiring managers like them because they offer insights into a candidate’s personality, communication skills and other attributes or qualifications that may not be immediately obvious from the resume.

Here are some guidelines for creating a cover letter that will make a hiring manager want to learn more about you:

Keep it brief. Your cover letter should be concise. Keep it to two or three paragraphs or slightly more.

Customize the content. As with your resume, it’s important to target your cover letter to each job opening. Boilerplate copy won’t be nearly as helpful toward your goal of grabbing the hiring manager’s attention. Explain why you are interested specifically in this job at this company.

Avoid rehashing your resume. Your cover letter and resume should complement one another without being repetitive. Expand key strengths described in your resume that directly address one or more of the company’s needs.

Address any concerns. The cover letter also is a place to pre-emptively explain anything you can think of that might give a hiring manager pause. If you were out of work, briefly describe what you’ve done in the meantime to keep your skills up to date. If you currently live in another city, express your willingness to relocate.

MAKING YOUR FIRST IMPRESSION COUNT

As you prepare your resume and cover letter, keep in mind that they are the first things about you a hiring manager sees. You don't want to blow your first impression. Even well-crafted documents may not guarantee you a job interview, but you can be assured poorly prepared ones will work against you. Also be aware that managers will almost certainly Google you before inviting you to an interview. Include links to any public and professional social media profiles you have to assist in their search.

SAMPLE COVER LETTER

If you were printing this cover letter to send it out, you'd want to add your mailing address and the day's date, but when you're emailing a cover letter, you can follow this format:

Subject: Application for Executive Assistant Position

Body: Dear Ms. Brown, [or "Dear Hiring Manager," if you don't know the name]

I saw on your website that Super Corp. is looking for a new executive assistant, and I had to send in my application right away. I've long admired Super Corp.'s commitment to our community, especially the Local Kids Initiative.

I'm currently an administrative assistant at Other Corp., where I've worked in the Specific Department the past five years. In my current role, I've managed travel arrangements, appointment calendars and internal communications for a team of 12, and I'm ready for the new challenge that Super Corp. would offer. [Mention any other specific skills that you have that the job listing asks candidates to have.]

Attached is my resume. Please reach out to me if you have any questions. I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Phone number]

[LinkedIn profile link]

Chronological Resume

Morgan Exampleman

(513) 555-1234

morganexampleman@example.com

EXPERIENCE

Fiscal Director

May 2013 to present

Super Corp., Fresh Food Division, Cincinnati, Ohio

- Reporting to COO and CFO, prepare annual operational budget of \$50 million and capital budget of \$12 million and maintain cost accounting system for the division
- Develop cost standards and variance analyses for the company's seven regions
- Plan and implement weekly managerial accounting seminars designed to improve fiscal responsibility of division managers
- In 2016, served as project manager of major reorganization of department and reporting structure in the division, providing enhanced analysis and control, increasing profits by 21 percent in the first year
- Cut divisional costs by 17 percent over three-year period (2014–2016)

Manager of Cost and Budget

October 2009 to April 2012

Worldwide Widget, Cincinnati, Ohio

- Reporting to director of financial planning, prepared operating budget, analyzed and recommended revenue-enhancing and cost-cutting measures
- Reduced costs by 15 percent within first year
- Organized and taught educational series of courses for non-accountants to improve fiscal responsibility of managers

Staff Accountant

June 2006 to August 2009

Big Four Accounting, Cleveland, Ohio

- Responsible for audit tasks and provided technical accounting assistance on a management consulting assignment as part of audit staff

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

- Bachelor of Science degree in business with emphasis in accounting and minor in Spanish, 2006, Upper State University, Columbus, Ohio
- Certified Public Accountant in Ohio
- Proficient in Microsoft Excel, Access and Power Point; ERP software; online payroll systems; accounting software
- Member of Financial Executives International, Cincinnati Chapter

Functional Resume

Morgan Exampleman

(513) 555-1234

morganexampleman@example.com

SUMMARY

CPA with 11 years of experience in financial management reporting, including three years in public accounting and three years in cost accounting. Extensive supervisory and project-development experience.

EXPERIENCE

General Accounting

Have extensive experience in ensuring control over financial issues as they relate to corporate mission. Have prepared operational budgets in excess of \$40 million and have played a key role in reorganizing the accounting department and reporting structure within divisions, providing enhanced analysis and control. Profits in one program increased 21 percent in the first year.

Cost Accounting

More than three years of experience maintaining cost accounting on division level. Proven experience in developing cost standards and variance analyses for companies with regional operations. Assisted with coding and pricing of manufacturing and marketing procedures.

Management and Training Skills

Have designed and implemented managerial accounting seminars designed to improve fiscal responsibility of all division managers by reviewing and teaching techniques to maximize revenue and minimize expenses. These seminars, in one instance, cut accounting costs by 17 percent over a three-year period. Developed capital budget monitoring system for justifications and expenditures to ensure most beneficial use of capital funds.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

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- Certified Public Accountant in Ohio
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- Member of Financial Executives International, Cincinnati Chapter

Combination Resume

Morgan Exampleman

(513) 555-1234

morganexampleman@example.com

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WORK HISTORY

- **May 2013 to present:** Fiscal Director, Super Corp., Fresh Food Division, Cincinnati, Ohio
- **October 2009 to April 2012:** Manager of Cost and Budget, Worldwide Widget, Cincinnati, Ohio
- **June 2006 to August 2009:** Staff Accountant, Big Four Accounting, Cleveland, Ohio

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

- Bachelor of Science degree in business with emphasis in accounting and minor in Spanish, 2006, Upper State University, Columbus, Ohio
- Certified Public Accountant in Ohio
- Proficient in Microsoft Excel, Access and Power Point; ERP software; online payroll systems; accounting software
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