

CAREER GUIDE

RESUMES AND LETTERS





CAREER AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Robert S. Carey Student Center
First Floor
careers@stvincent.edu
www.stvincent.edu/careers

 <https://stvincent.joinhandshake.com/login>

 [Facebook.com/SVCcareers](https://www.facebook.com/SVCcareers)

 [Twitter @SVCcareers](https://twitter.com/SVCcareers)

 [Instagram @SVCcareers](https://www.instagram.com/SVCcareers)



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Cover Letters



WHO NEEDS a cover letter? Everyone who sends out a resume! Even if the letter never came up in conversation or was not mentioned in an advertisement, it is expected that you will write one. Cover letters, also known as “letters of application,” should be tailored to the specific company and the specific job or internship for which you are applying.

The cover letter is a three-to-four paragraph, one-page letter, typed in a business format that introduces you and your skills. It has the purpose of making the employer aware that you are available and interested in a position. Your cover letter is a reflection of you and is used to convey your experience and abilities. It will offer another chance to emphasize what you have to contribute to the company or organization, giving you an edge over other applicants. A cover letter demonstrates your written communication skills, your ability to apply your skills to a professional setting and your understanding of the company and position of interest.

Submitting a Cover Letter



TECHNOLOGY HAS quickly become our primary means of communicating and, with that, comes email and social media. With online job postings being so prevalent, emailing or submitting an application on the company’s website are the most likely ways you will send your cover letter.

When applying via email, you attach your resume to the email, but that leaves one question, “*Do I type my cover letter in the body of the email or do I attach a separate Word document with my cover letter?*”

It is best to type the cover letter in the body of the email for two reasons. It will save the reader the extra step of opening an attachment. The employer can quickly and easily read your cover letter upon opening his or her email and then open the attached resume. Secondly, if the reader forwards your email to an ATS system (Applicant Tracking System), the ATS “reads” the text with more clarity than a PDF.

When submitting your cover letter via an online application, copy and paste your letter if given the option to do so.

When typing your emailed cover letter please remember the following tips:

- This is a formal, business-style letter. While email is often considered a casual method of communicating, remember you are a job seeker and must follow the proper letter writing format. Follow all rules as though you were writing a formal letter.
- Keep the cover letter concise so the reader does not have to scroll far, but be sure to include the necessary information to grab the reader’s attention.

Cover Letter Format



Your Address

Date

Contact Person, Title

Department, Company Name

Address

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. (Contact Person):

Introduction Paragraph I (2 - 4 sentences)

Establish the purpose of your letter, attract attention and generate interest

- State why you are writing by naming the specific position or type of job and how you heard about the position/employer.
- Demonstrate why you are interested in the position by explaining that you have researched the position and employer and tie it in to your candidacy.
- Insert a brief sentence that provides degree, major, college affiliation and graduation date.

Body Paragraph II & III (2-4 sentences each)

Indicate how your skills, education and experience match the employer's needs

- Indicate how you can help the employer achieve organizational goals in your specialty by focusing on what you can do for the employer rather than what the employer can do for you.
- Highlight your most significant accomplishments, abilities and experiences specific to the position and company.
- Sell your credentials; prove you should be invited to an interview.
- Use the third paragraph to discuss more of the "soft skills" that cannot be seen on the resume using carefully selected keywords.

Closing Paragraph IV (3-4 sentences)

State your commitment to action

- Mention enclosed resume, sample work or portfolio if applicable.
- Take the initiative to make clear what happens next: "I will be in touch to follow up."
- State your availability. Let them know if/when you will be in the area, especially for positions that will require relocation.
- Restate contact information including phone and email so the employer can contact you.
- Thank the employer.

Sincerely,

Your Signature

Your Name Typed

See cover letter examples on the Career and Professional Development Center website.

Using Personal Experiences in a Cover Letter

USING PERSONAL experiences to highlight your interests in a position can enhance your cover letter if done correctly. When getting personal, do not reveal information that can become uncomfortable for the employer or detract from your qualifications.

When considering putting personal information in a cover letter, stop and think:

1. Will this interest my employer?
2. Is it relevant to my career?
3. Will this add to my qualifications?

Be cautious about employers who may unintentionally discriminate based on what you discuss in your cover letter. It may be better to discuss these personal experiences during an interview when you can explain in more detail.

Cover Letter Reminders

Each letter should

- be individually tailored to each position.
- use the same paper for your resume and cover letter (good quality 8 ½ x 11).
- conform to good business style and must be free of errors.
- be addressed to a specific person when possible.
- be no longer than one page in length.
- indicate a special interest in the specific organization.
- use self-descriptive words to highlight your “soft skills.”
- reflect the fact that you have researched the organization or company.

Before Writing Your Cover Letter

Review job descriptions:

- Read the entire description thoroughly.
- Pay attention to job responsibilities.
- Highlight your skills which match those in the job description.

Research the employer:

- Visit company websites and social media.
- Speak to employer ‘insiders’ when possible.
- Read company literature, business publications or the company annual report

Use appropriate adjectives related to the position of interest:

- Sales/Marketing (assertive; persuasive)
- Counseling/Education (empathetic; sensitive; approachable)
- Accounting/Business (detail-oriented; organized)
- Computer Science/IT (analytical; problem-solver)

Determine what kind of candidate the employer is seeking:

- Skill sets (functional, technical, adaptive, transferable)
- Practical experience; education/training; personality traits

See cover letter examples on the Career and Professional Development Center website.

Thank-You Emails

FOLLOWING a job interview, job fair meeting or an informational interview, a thank-you email should be sent to the employer. Remind the interviewer of your interest in the position and thank him or her for taking the time to discuss the company and position. The email will also remind him or her of your meeting place and date and possibly put your resume at the top of the pile. It does not guarantee the position but will definitely earn you a few bonus points.

Regardless of the outcome, follow-up emails are important. They will set you apart from other job seekers and leave a great, lasting impression for consideration of future positions within the company. You can follow up with a thank-you letter, but start with the email for promptness.

Thank-You Email Format

Thank-You Email Tips

- For the sake of speed, follow up with an email since recruiters travel often.
- Add the interviewer's name and email address to your contacts so his or her name appears. This shows an extra level of commitment on your part.
- Remind the interviewer of the details (event and date) of your meeting.
- Communicate additional relevant information if appropriate. Or just remind him or her of the particular skill he or she seemed most interested in when you talked.
- Offer to provide additional information and include your phone number. Close the letter with a suggestion for further action, such as your availability to meet or speak again.
- If you are sending thanks after a group interview try to get the emails and names of each interviewer.

To: Their Name (See the tips for more information)

From: Use an email account that includes your name

Subject: Thank you for the interview/information

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. (Contact Person):

It was a pleasure meeting you on [DATE], at the [TITLE] job fair. I was pleased to learn about the Leadership Training Program at the Medical Society of Pennsylvania (MSOPA). I would like to further express my interest in both the leadership program as well as my enthusiasm in working for MSOPA.

After our conversation, I am even more excited by the possibility of sharing my communication skills and technical expertise with MSOPA as a Leadership Trainee. This, along with my education and experiences in business and operations, is what will allow me to succeed at MSOPA. I believe I can progress steadily through your training program and become a successful member of the leadership team.

Again, I would like to thank you for your time earlier this week. I welcome the opportunity to discuss my skills and qualifications in an interview. Please feel free to contact me if you need further information. I may be reached via email or at 123-456-7890. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Your Name Typed

Resumes

DEFINITION: A resume (or résumé) is derived from the French meaning “brief history.” A resume is a document containing a summary or listing of relevant job experiences and education, usually for the purpose of securing a new job. Often the resume is one of the first items a potential employer encounters regarding the job seeker. The goal of a resume is to get you an interview, not a job offer.

The resume will be an employer’s first impression. The employer will look at not only the content, but also the punctuation, grammar, format and other details that may not seem relevant to you. This is why it is important to have an acceptable, one-page resume. However, there may be special circumstances for alumni or experienced professionals when a one-page resume is not sufficient. That is why it is crucial to have at least one professional review your resume. We recommend having your resume reviewed by your career consultant.

Resume Guidelines

- Keep your resume to one side of one page.
- List items in each section in reverse chronological order (most recent to the oldest).
- Start bullet phrases with strong action verbs and keep them brief and concise.
- Present yourself accurately and positively.
- Stress accomplishments and outcomes of projects and experiences.
- Quantify when possible using specific populations, percentages, dollar amounts and numbers to substantiate claims.
- Use present tense verbs when describing a current position; past tense for previous positions.
- Write out acronyms.
- Resume font size and style should be consistent. (Size: 11-12 point)
- No personal pronouns (I, me, my, they, them, etc.).
- Use bold and italics sparingly — do not use underline.
- Use black square or circle bullets instead of dashes, asterisks, graphics or other symbols.

- Use email address, cell phone number and LinkedIn profile address.
- Do not use borders, graphics or shaded boxes and use only black ink.
- Use off-white or white 24# resume paper when attending job fairs, networking events or interviews.
- Creative majors such as graphic design or art may deviate from these guidelines. These should be approved by a career consultant professional to be sure they are appropriate.

Resume Don'ts

- Don't crowd margins or use excessively small font.
- Don't over-design your resume or use a pre-formatted template resume.
- Don't include information that will be difficult to justify or explain during an interview. (For example, list only activities with active participation).
- Don't waste space discussing all aspects of the company and the company's clients.
- Don't include references. Reference requests should be made once you are a final candidate.
- Don't use pronouns, abbreviations, conjunctions or jargon unless terms are widely known.
- Don't have someone else write your resume (you can ask for advice, but you know yourself best and will have to defend the content).
- Don't disclose a disability on your resume.
- Don't include photographs, social security numbers or marital status.

Resumes *continued*



Resume Categories

Objectives

- Objectives should only be used when you are applying for a position that may not be obvious to an employer based on your education, skills, experience or activities. (e.g., A student has been an accounting major for three years but has recently discovered he is interested in the field of public policy.)

Contact Information

- Contact information appears first on the resume and should include name, address, phone and one email address.
- No more than three names should be listed (first, middle, last or first, "nickname," last).
- LinkedIn and/or professional website.

Education

- This should always be the first category on your resume.
- List the name of your most recent school first — Saint Vincent College — with city and state.
- List the degree exactly as it will appear on your diploma.
- GPA should be listed if 3.0 or above.
- Major GPA may also be appropriate. See a career consultant to determine the best way to list on your resume.
- List only institutions from which you are earning a degree/certificate.
- Do not include high school if you are pursuing a post-secondary degree.

Research

- This section may list your senior thesis. Listing the title of your senior thesis (e.g. Senior Thesis: "Ascorbic Acid and Serum Cholesterol: A comprehensive review of the effects of mega doses of Vitamin C on HDL and LDL cholesterol,") is most appropriate when describing this experience.
- This section can also include additional classroom projects as well as research done independently, outside of the classroom.

Course Work

- This section is especially for those seeking an internship or those who may have little experience upon graduation.
- Remember to list courses related to the position of interest. The relevant courses could vary based upon the position of interest.

Course Work *continued*

- Do not list more than 7-10 courses. Do not list course numbers.
- If necessary, create sub-categories to separate the different types of courses (you may have two sub-categories that demonstrate your areas of expertise or education).

Experience

- Relevant work experience should be toward the top of the resume, the section after education.
- All work experience should be listed in reverse chronological order.
- List organization or job title first, depending on marketing appeal.

Skills

- Skills should be included on every resume. This may include: technical skills; laboratory skills; foreign language; certifications and anything relevant to the position of interest.
- This is not the place to list your soft skills. Those should be mentioned in the cover letter.
- Depending on your intended career, your skills may be best toward the top or bottom. Ask a career consultant for more details.

Military Service

- Include military service from beginning to end date. If applicable, site honorary discharge.
- This section should be organized similarly to the experience section.
- Discuss military experience in 'layman terms,' translating military jargon into civilian lingo.

Additional Categories

Additional categories may be used individually or combined into two sections. It is appropriate to combine if you do not have at least two examples in each category. Additional categories may include, but are not limited to:

- Leadership
- Honors or awards
- Activities
- Volunteer work
- Publications
- Project experience
- Service learning
- Certifications
- Professional development

See resume examples on the Career and Professional Development Center website.