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Do I Need a
Resume and a
Cover Letter?

Do I Need a Resume and a Cover Letter?

Do you need a resume? Maybe. If you apply for a job and an employer asks for a resume, you should have one. You don't need one to apply for an hourly, non-management position that uses an online application system, particularly if it is part-time or seasonal.

Is your email address up to the job?

It is essential to have an email address. You can get a free email address, and you don't have to own a computer to get one. Free email accounts can be set up at the library where you can then send email or check for email messages. Many libraries have classes to introduce you to the internet or someone who can help you set up your email account. FirstFind.org has plain language guidance in its Web Skills section.



Checklist for Success: Have a Professional Email Address for Job Search

- If your email is something like curlygurl@yahoo.com or cooldude@hotmail.com, set up a new email just for job search.
- Use your first and last name in your email address whenever possible, it makes it easier for an employer to identify you.
- If your name is taken, someone with the same name already has the email address. Try your first and last name with a period between the two, or first initial and last name.
- Your telephone area code is a good option. billsmith914@gmail.com is an example of a good email address for someone with a common name. Don't use the year you were born or graduated from school in your email address.
- Ask for help setting up your email address. You will find that email is much easier than you thought.





Take the Extra Step: Know Your Email Address and Password

When you get a smartphone the person helping you will likely set up your email. Make sure you know the email account address, username, and password. Write them down. It will be hard to apply to some jobs using only your smartphone, so make sure you know how to log in to your email on a computer, too.

What does a resume look like?

Most resumes are written in a few basic formats because most people create the document using resume templates.

In Microsoft Word:

- choose NEW and you will see RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS as one of the selections below the search box.

Using Google Docs:

- click on FILE then NEW, then FROM TEMPLATE to find options.

Google's [Applied Digital Skills](#) series offers helpful video tutorials on creating a resume in Google Docs.

You can also search online for Word resume templates. Make certain that you are choosing a free template and not signing up for a resume writing service.

We have created a sample resume for a fictional job applicant named Bill Smith. It was built from one of the Word formats. You can find this [sample resume](#) at the end of this chapter.

In your resume **do not:**

- Use multiple fonts (print style) and multiple sizes of type, with the exception of your name, which can be a bit larger.
- Include a photo or personal identifying details including your name marital status and nationality.
- Use fancy formats or colored paper, unless you are a designer.

The [Personal Data form](#) in Chapter 7 will be valuable for organizing information making certain it is correct.



Someone is helping me with my resume. Shouldn't I just let them write it?

When you are working with a training program or referral organization, it is very likely someone will help write your resume. You may also have a friend or relative who offers to help with resume writing.

That's fine, but remember it is **your** resume. You need to be able to talk about or explain all the facts on the resume. The person who helped you will not be with you during an interview.

You need to know how to physically prepare or change your resume, attach it to an email, and print a copy. Remember, whoever helps you also needs to show you how to change or edit your resume, how to convert to a PDF if desired, and how to send or attach it digitally.



Checklist for Success: Know How to Edit, Save and Send Your Resume

- If someone helps you prepare your resume, have them also help you practice making a change in the document.
- Learn how to save and print a copy of your resume in multiple formats, including as a PDF.
- Practice opening your resume on a computer. Even if you can access it on your phone, you may need to make changes and/or print it.
- Name the file clearly with your name and a date, such as "Suzy Smith Resume 2021" to make it easier for an employer to find your resume when sent by email.
- Make sure the date on your file name is current – don't send a resume labeled "Suzy Smith resume 2018"!
- Learn how to attach a document to an email and send a copy of your resume to yourself by email.
- Open your email account to access a copy of your resume; it will be in your email inbox and in your "Sent" file.
- Check your email on your smartphone, you will find your resume there too.

You don't have to own a computer to retrieve your resume. After you send the resume to yourself by email, or have saved it to a flash drive, you can access your resume on any available computer. A flash drive is a small, portable device available at all kinds of stores that only costs a few dollars. Flash drives can be great for saving documents but they can also be lost and break, so always email your resume to yourself.





Take the Extra Step: Stick to Digital if the Process is All Digital

If you complete a job application online, you will likely communicate with the employer by text and cellphone. When you meet a hiring manager who reviews your information on an iPad, don't hand over a resume. The employer has gone digital, they don't want the paper.

Where do I start? Identify yourself correctly.

The top of the resume includes your contact details. Everything must be spelled correctly. Use correct two letter state abbreviations, for example, New York is NY. Make sure that capital letters are used for city and street names; St., Ave., or Rd. There is no need to write **phone number** or **email** next to these items. If you have more than one phone number, a landline and a cell number, include just one, the number you are most likely to answer professionally and that gets good reception.

Here's a sample of identifying information at the top of a resume:

Bill Smith

11 Main Street, Southchester, NY 11233 | (914) 555-0100 | billsmith914@gmail.com

Some job seekers don't want to put a home address on a resume. It is acceptable to leave out your street address and put in only city, state, phone number and email address. Employers will want to know that you live in the area where the job is located. Be aware that it's not difficult to find addresses and you will have to include one on an application.

What's my objective?

An objective on a resume is considered old fashioned. Resume objectives are written to target one position or highlight generic skills. Today's resumes start with a short statement, a summary of skills, experience and goals. This is called a **Profile**.



How do I write a Profile for my resume?

The Profile at the top of a resume is a 2 - 4 sentence introduction. The Profile needs to be short, creates a clear picture of your value as an employee and includes keywords that relate to the job you are interested in. Employers receive a lot of resumes, and they are unlikely to read them word for word. A good Profile draws the attention of a reader and provides a brief summary.

What's a keyword and why should they be in my Profile?

Keywords are the magic words in your resume that describe the skills, abilities, and work experience employers are looking for. They are an important part of your Profile. Employers look for these words when reading hard copy resumes or use software called applicant tracking systems (ATS) to find keywords electronically to identify candidates to meet in person.

Skills such as "master carpenter" are certainly keywords. Common keywords to include in your resume can be found in job postings. These might be **project management, team building, customer focus** and **leadership**. Make sure the resume you submit includes a few of the keywords in the description posted about the position.

Look at this sample of "Key Responsibilities for a Retail Cashier" from a job posting for Bed Bath & Beyond and you will see keywords highlighted.

Key Responsibilities:

- Engage customers in a **courteous, helpful** and **respectful manner, promptly** and politely **respond to customer inquiries** and customer requests for support.
- **Process customer transactions** through the register and customer service desk.
- Collect and **process payment** from customer and enter into register (includes applying coupons, providing change and receipts).
- **Package customer purchases** for removal from the store (includes wrapping and bagging).
- Ensure all items intended for purchase are identified and **properly scanned**.
- Execute activities related to store initiatives to **offer customers additional products and services** (i.e. special sale items, credit card applications).
- Return misplaced product, **customer returns** and other products gathered in the front-end to the correct location in the store.
- **Execute price changes** and sign changes as needed.
- Perform additional duties as required, but not limited to: **stocking, freight processing,** price changes and cart retrieval.



Do I put all of these keywords in my Profile?

No, your profile can include keywords that describe your strongest skills that match the job description you are targeting.



Take the Extra Step: Stay Away From I, Me and My

Professional resumes are written in third person, they do not include “me” or “my.” Resume content includes short descriptive sentences that can be read and understood quickly.

An example of a Profile targeting a position in customer service and as a cashier is:

Profile

Experienced cashier with a track record of success providing excellent customer service. Consistently respond in a courteous, respectful and helpful manner completing all transactions promptly and accurately.





Checklist for Success: Describe Your Work Experience

- Write work experience in chronological order, the most recent experience is at the top.
- Include a volunteer job or any work that is off the books, it represents work experience.
- Make sure the dates you worked are correct. Unless you are a recent grad, there is no need for months in dates; use only years.
- Check names of companies and locations for accuracy and correct spelling.
- Limit work experience to no more than ten (10) years. Earlier work may not be relevant and employers focus on current skills. For example, if you have experience as a bookkeeper the accounting software you used twenty five (25) years ago is very different today, or you may have relied on hard copies only at that time.
- Go back to an earlier point if the specific job, or industry, is relevant but in most situations do not include jobs more than fifteen (15) years ago.
- If you worked long term for one employer, don't cut the time to shorten the work history. For example if you worked for Enterprise Rent a Car from 1999 – 2008, don't change the starting year to 2005 or 2010. Employers like stability too.
- Bold job titles and make sure that readers will understand them. For example, for a job title like "Clerk 3" make File Clerk or Assistant Bookkeeper.
- Highlight accomplishments or significant responsibilities in bullet points; be selective and clear. Avoid jargon.
- Use words that represent action or activity such as operated, provided, completed, planned, built, saved and led.
- Use numbers, dollars and percentages to highlight accomplishments whenever possible. Say, "Cleaned 15 floors each shift," instead of, "Cleaned Floors."
- If you have the same, or similar jobs, don't repeat the same responsibilities, choose one or two accomplishments for each that stand out and include specifics such as, "Supervised 14 cashiers," or "Tracked \$10,000 each day."
- Use present tense for a job you are still working in, past tense for jobs you no longer hold.
- Check carefully for spelling and grammar. Employers may automatically say no to a resume that has these errors.



Below you will find a sample work experience section for Bill Smith:

Sales Associate/Cashier | ABC Audio, Southchester, NY | 2016 - present

- Operate busy register assisting more than 200 customers during each shift.
- Accurately account for cash of \$1,500 per shift and handle credit card transactions.
- Provide excellent customer service, responding to questions about items promptly and courteously earning more than five complimentary customer comment cards.
- Follow detailed plans to stock merchandise on shelves and in the storeroom.

If you have a LinkedIn profile make sure that your resume is consistent with information posted there. The dates for jobs should be the same and general information about work should give the same picture. Your LinkedIn profile may go back earlier than your resume. See Chapter 2 for more information about LinkedIn.

How do I describe gaps and non traditional roles?

If you have a big gap in employment (more than 6 months), think about any volunteer activity, off the books work, or individual responsibilities. Include them on the resume.

For example, if you organized events for a community organization you could include:

Tag Sale Chair | Southchester Community Center, Southchester, NY | 2019

- Solicited \$10,000 worth of goods for annual fundraising sale.
- Organized team of 20 volunteers for set up, operations, breakdown and cleanup.
- Tracked sales and input information into QuickBooks for financial reporting.

Or if you were a caregiver for a relative:

Senior Caregiver | Private Family, Southchester, NY | 2016- 2018

- Administered physical therapy resulting in full recovery.
- Coordinated and contacted healthcare providers including doctors, nurses, acupuncturists, pharmacists and physical therapists.
- Advocated for client, using research and repeated follow up to ensure appropriate care and obtain increase in services



If you were incarcerated there is no need to write the name of the correctional facility, you can identify the work using the name of the employer:

Cook | Central Cafeteria, Elmira, NY | 2016 - 2019

- Prepared breakfast and lunch following rotating menu.
- Minimized food waste by identifying and using excess dairy products.
- Trained two cooks on cafeteria standards for meals and food safety.

What about education?

Put education in a separate section on your resume. For recent grads, this section will be at the top of the resume. If you just completed a training program for a specific career, you may want to put this on top.

Be specific and correct with the name of any school you attended and the city and state where it is located. If it is a recent degree or completed program, include the date of completion. If it was completed more than 15 years ago, you do not have to put a date. You should also indicate any special achievements during school and any activities you were involved in.

Bill's education looks like this on his resume:

Education

High School Diploma | Southchester High School, Southchester, NY

Member of Varsity Track Team, Vice President of Video Club

If you just completed a degree or training program for a specific career, you may want to add this to your Profile. Here's an example of including recent education in your Profile.

Service professional with Security Guard License and a record of success interacting with the public and internal customers. Ability to demonstrate excellent oral and written communication skills, including drafting required reports.



What about a Skills section?

A skills section is helpful if you have relevant experience or education that matches requirements and software in a job posting. The Skills section is another place to highlight keywords.

Here's a sample from Bill Smith's resume:

Skills

- Proficient with POS systems
- Excellent interpersonal and communications skills
- Certified pallet jack operator
- Inventory database input

Don't simply create a long list of non-specific, soft skills such as team player, hard working, friendly and outgoing. These are too generic. Be specific if you are going to include a Skills section, or leave it out.

Interests

These can include personal details that you might have in common with an interviewer or that relate to the job you are interested in. Don't make up interests just to complete this section.

Some interviewers like to talk about things you have in common. They also like to see outside interests that show job related skills like creativity and responsibility. You can say, for example, that you like to cook, read biographies, write poetry, listen to music, garden, play sports, travel, or play computer games. Think about your hobbies and how those hobbies make you smarter or better. Watching TV is not a good example!

If you did not include volunteer work in your work experience, you can include it here. A good example of what to include may be that you help seniors at a local community center or have participated in a walkathon to raise money for a worthy cause.

Bill chose to include the following in his resume:

Interests

Running, auto repair and restoration, and reading mystery novels.





True Stories: Stick to a Page or Two

A software professional arrived at a resume writing session with a 12 page resume. He was convinced that all of the experience he had must be included. You can't include everything in a resume, no one wants to read it all, and employers will ask questions. The resume was cut down to two pages, and he landed a job in a few weeks. The best resumes are easy to read, and should never be more than two pages. If there is a second page, it does not have to be full, in fact it's easier to read if it is not.

References

The actual names and contact information for references do not belong on a resume. Employers may ask for references in applications or when they are ready. There is also no need to include the line, "References will be furnished upon request." It's old fashioned.



Take the Extra Step: Get a second opinion

Once you have completed your resume, ask someone else to read it. Another person can check for errors that you may miss when you read the same thing so many times. A second opinion can also help make sure that what you wrote is easy to understand.

Congratulations—you now have a resume! But...don't forget to update.

When you have finished your resume you may breathe a big sigh and say "I'm glad that's done." Sorry, it's not done. A resume needs to be a living document. You know how to change it so you can tailor it with the right keywords for different jobs. If you add skills, volunteer work or certifications, think about the best way to include these in your resume. If your resume is posted on a job site, like Indeed, update it once in a while. Look at the keywords and make some changes to match postings. Resumes that are updated can rise to the top in a search and get a second look.



I was asked for a cover letter. What's that?

A cover letter provides an introduction to a candidate. It is either a separate document or can be included in the body of an email. A good cover letter can be just as important as a good resume.



Checklist for Success: Customize That Cover Letter

Your cover letter does not have to be too long and fancy but must include the following items:

- The specific posting you are responding to.
- Address the letter to a specific person if you know the name, or "Dear Hiring Manager" if you do not.
- A short statement that says why you are qualified for the job, or bullet points that match some of the requirements for the position.
- 3-5 bullet points with keywords that match your education and experience with specifics of the job.
- Confirmation of your contact information, so employers don't have to search for it.
- A thank you.

It is important that you use proper letter format, spelling and punctuation. It is a good idea to have someone else read your cover letter before you send it out.

In Microsoft Word:

- choose NEW and you will see RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS as one of the selections below the search box.

Using Google Docs:

- click on FILE then NEW, then FROM TEMPLATE to find LETTERS, they are not specifically identified as Cover Letters.

The cover letter we recommend includes bullet points where you can include information that matches the job posting. This draws the reader to content that connects your skills and experience with the job opening. See [Cover Letter](#) sample at the end of this chapter.



Email, Mail, or Fax?

Most resumes and cover letters are delivered by email. You can also use U.S. mail, fax or you can drop them off in person. When you are responding to a posting that asks for a resume, the posting will say how to send it. Follow these instructions! For example, if the instructions say that the resume and cover letter must be included in the body of the email, don't send them as attachments.



Write It Down: Correct Email Addresses to Send Resumes

When you speak to someone and they ask you for a resume, make sure you have a pen and paper to write down an email address. Thank them and repeat the information to make sure that you are sending the resume to the right place. This sounds like, "Thank you, I just want to confirm that I will be sending the resume by email to suzysmith@abcaudio.com."

When you use email to send a resume and cover letter, you should also keep your email brief. In the subject line write the reason for the email, for example "Response to 4/10/21 Craigslist Posting for a Sales Associate." When you are attaching your resume and cover letter, always open the attachment before you press send to make sure you have included the right document. Also make sure that your resume and cover letter are clearly labeled. Save the document with a title that includes your name and resume and/or cover letter. A good document title would be "Bill Smith Resume 2021."

Included below is a sample of this format using what Bill Smith might write in an email:

Dear Hiring Manager,

I am writing in response to your job posting for a Sales Associate on Craigslist on April 10, 2021. As you will see from my attached resume, I have more than 5 years of experience in customer service in both retail and restaurants. I strive to provide excellent customer service and have been recognized for my efforts.

I can be contacted at (914) 234-5678 or by email at billsmith914@gmail.com to discuss my qualifications for this job.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Bill Smith



It is a good idea to include a personalized note in an email even if the job posting does not ask for a cover letter.

If you are instructed to drop off a resume in person, it should be folded in a business envelope with a cover letter included. On the outside of the envelope, the name or title of the person receiving it should be printed or typed clearly.

Now that I have a resume, why do I have to fill out an application?

Even though you have provided a resume, many employers will also ask you to complete an application. Yes, you must do this! Application forms ask for information that is not typically included on resumes. The job experience section also asks for information that may not be on your resume. Read the instructions carefully. Online applications often offer the opportunity to upload a resume. If you want to do this, the resume has to be available on the hard drive of the computer you are using or on a portable flash drive. To use this option, click the Browse button that shows up and follow the same steps you would use to attach a document.



Write It Down: Keep Track of Resumes You Send Out

Each time you send out a resume, write it down in your notebook so that you know where it has been sent. This way when someone calls and says, for example, "I received your resume. I am from Apple Hardware Supply" you won't respond "Who?"

Always carry at least five (5) extra copies of your resume to an interview, even if you sent one electronically. Carry them in a folder or large envelope with a piece of cardboard that will keep it neat. Even if you already sent your resume, you may be asked to speak to a different person who does not have a copy. You can just give them one of the resumes you are carrying. You look prepared and they do not have to search for your resume.



Chapter 5 To Do List

- _____ Pick a clear, professional resume format
- _____ Use a professional email address
- _____ Find keywords to include in your resume
- _____ Edit any cover letters each time you use one
- _____ Have someone else read your resume and cover letter to check for spelling, grammar and make sure it is clear

Quick Links to Resources

Resource Name	Web Address
First Find - Email Basics	FirstFind.org Located under Web Skills
Applied Digital Skills	applieddigitalskills.withgoogle.com/s/en/home Located under Learn Job Seekers



Need Help?

The Westchester Library System offers workshops, resources, and one-to-one counseling to guide your job search and improve your interviewing skills. Find out more at FirstFind.org.



Resume Sample

Bill Smith

11 Main Street, Southchester, NY 11233 | (914) 555-0100 | billsmith914@gmail.com

Profile

Experienced cashier with a track record of success providing excellent customer service. Consistently respond in a courteous, respectful and helpful manner completing all transactions promptly and accurately.

Experience

Sales Associate/Cashier | ABC Audio, Southchester, NY | 2016 - present

- Operate busy register assisting more than 200 customers during each shift.
- Accurately account for cash of \$1,500 per shift and handle credit card transactions.
- Provide excellent customer service, responding to questions about items promptly and courteously earning more than five complimentary customer comment cards.
- Follow detailed plans to stock merchandise on shelves and in the storeroom.

Crew Member | McDonald's, Southchester NY | 2013 - 2016

- Took and fulfilled orders accurately, processed cash and credit card payments.
- Regularly assigned to drive-through window during high volume late night shifts.
- Cleaned eating areas and bathrooms to standard when assigned.
- Worked closely with an effective team recognized for sales and quality records.

Food Server | Benny's Burgers, Northchester, NY | 2011 - 2013

- Described and offered specials to customers each night.
- Took correct food and drink orders, made beverages.
- Closed out checks after meals with cash or credit cards.
- Provided excellent service that resulted in requests from regular customers.

Education

High School Diploma | Southchester High School, Southchester, NY

Member of Varsity Track Team, Vice President of Video Club

Skills

- Proficient with POS systems
- Excellent interpersonal and communications skills
- Certified pallet jack operator Inventory database input
- Inventory database input

Interests

Running, auto repair and restoration, and reading mystery novels.



Cover Letter Sample

Dear Ms. Jones:

I am writing in response to your job posting on Craigslist for a Sales Associate. After reading your description, I am confident that my experience and abilities in providing excellent service are a perfect match for this position.

I would bring to your organization a broad range of skills, including:

- Success at working in busy store settings during holiday rush periods.
- Knowledge to respond to and satisfy unusual customer requests.
- Accurate completion of monthly inventory and restocking.
- Flexibility to work varied shifts, weekends and holidays.

I would welcome the opportunity to further discuss this position with you. If you have questions or would like to schedule an interview, please contact me by phone at (914) 555-0100 or by email at billsmith914@gmail.com. I have enclosed my resume for your review, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Bill Smith

