

JOB SEARCH TOOLKIT:

Tools & Techniques You Need for a Successful Job Hunt

The following section is entitled: **Chapter 5: Resumes and Cover Letters**

Table of Contents

Introduction

Chapter 1: *What Kind of Job Are You Looking For?*

Chapter 2: *Networking*

Chapter 3: *Responding to Job Postings and Signs*

Chapter 4: *Completing Job Applications*

Chapter 5: *Resumes and Cover Letters*

Chapter 6: *Searching for Jobs on the Internet*

Chapter 7: *The Value of Volunteer Work*

Chapter 8: *Training Programs, Agencies and Help from the Government*

Chapter 9: *Preparing for Job Interviews*

Chapter 10: *Interview Tips*

Chapter 11: *After an Interview: Next Steps*

Chapter 12: *Quick Tips about Keeping a Job and Starting a New Job Hunt*

The full text of the Job Search Toolkit is available at: ***FirstFind.org>>Look for a Job.***

Chapter

5

Resumes and Cover Letters

A resume is not something to be scared of and it does not have to be anything fancy. You may be asked for a resume when you apply for a job, so it's a good idea to have one prepared.

What does a resume look like?

Most resumes today are written in a few basic formats. This is because most people create their resume using resume templates. You will find resume templates in Microsoft Word. To find these in MSWord, click on new and type resume into the search box. Google Docs also has a resume template. 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 potential job applicant named Bill Smith that uses one of these templates. We include instructions for each part of a resume throughout the chapter, with a view of Bill Smith's resume for each of those parts. You can view Bill Smith's complete resume at the end of the chapter. You can also find it as well as a sample resume template with hints and instructions in Appendix G.

Resumes do not have to be in fancy formats or printed on color paper. In fact simple formats are better. Stick to one font (print style) and the content should be all the same size type, with the exception of your name which can be a bit larger. Using different fonts and sizes makes it hard to read and may not print out the way you planned. Do not include a photo or personal identifying details such as your age, marital status and nationality. It is more important that it is well written and that it does not have any mistakes.

To start writing your resume you will need your Personal Data Form to help you organize information and to make certain that you include the correct information.

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 that you will work with someone who will help you write your resume. You may also have a friend or relative who can help you.

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 also need to know how to physically prepare or change it. What if you move after you write it and you are no longer working with the job coach or counselor? What happens if the friend who prepares the resume moves? What if you need to change the objective on your resume to match a new job opportunity? You will want to be able to change your resume.

When someone helps you prepare your resume ask him or her if you can practice making a change in the document.

Once you have watched how changes are made or have tried to make changes yourself, save a copy of your resume. Name the file clearly with your name and a date, such as "Suzy Smith resume 2016." This makes it easier for an employer to find your resume if you send it by email. It will help you too, so you won't have to figure out if the resume is labeled, "res4." Make sure the date on your file name is current – don't send a resume titles "Suzy Smith resume 2012"!

After you save the resume, send a copy to yourself by email. When you do this, you will be able to open your email account to access a copy from a computer connected to the Internet. You can also save a copy of the file on a flash drive or memory stick. A flash drive is a small portable storage device for electronic files. You can buy them in all kinds of stores, and they only cost a few dollars. Even if you do not own a computer, you **always** have access to a computer. You can work with a different friend, relative or agency or training program or you can always go to any public library. There are even people available in the library who will help you with the word processing. If you have sent the resume to yourself by email, or have your flash drive, you can simply use it on any available computer.

Identify yourself correctly

The top of the resume includes some very important information: your name and address. It is essential that everything here be spelled correctly. Use correct state abbreviations, for example, New York is NY. Make sure that capital letters are used for city and street names and 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 land line and a cell number, include the one that 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
211 Main St.
Southchester, NY 11233
(914)234-5678
Billsmith914@gmail.com

It is essential to have an email address. Having an email address shows that you know something about using a computer. You can get an email address for free. You do not have to own a computer to have an email address. Free email accounts can be set up at the library where you can then send email or check for email messages. Many libraries have short courses to introduce you to the Internet or someone who can help you set up your

email account. This website can also be helpful: **Email 101**
(<http://www.gcflearnfree.org/email101>)

If you have a smart phone, an email account was probably set up on the device when the account was activated. Ask a friend or the phone provider for instructions for accessing your email on your smart phone. When email is set up on your phone you will also need to learn how to access the same account from a computer. It will be hard to apply for jobs and send your resume only from your phone.

When you do get an email address, make sure that the one you choose is professional. You do not want your email to be hotbabe@yahoo.com or cooldude@hotmail.com. These are not very businesslike. You should use your last name and your first initial, or first and last name, whenever possible. This also makes it easier for someone to see who an email is from. Gmail is a good option for a new email account. If your name is "taken", someone with the same name is already using it. If this is the case, when you type in your name try it with a period between your first and last name or with numbers at the end. Good options for numbers are your area code or street address. Don't use the year you were born or graduated from school. An example of a good email address for a name that is not likely to be available would be billsmith914@gmail.com.

When you are signing up for a free email account read all the instructions and fill in all of the required boxes. There will be specifics about the requirements for your password and you may have to provide a phone number. Once you have your professional email address, write the entire address and your account password in your notebook.

Remember: if you have an email address that is not professional-looking, use it only for personal activity and messages to and from friends. Make sure to sign up for a new email account that has an easily identifiable email address. This way emails about job search related items won't get lost in a mailbox full of advertisements.

Don't let fears of technology stop you. When you ask for help you will find that using computer email is much easier than you imagined.

What's my objective?

The objective is a way to describe the type of job you are looking for. It is usually a short sentence stating that you have the experience, the education or the training for a particular kind of job. **You do not have to include an objective on your resume.**

It is helpful to include an objective on your resume if you are looking for a very specific job. For example, you might write that you are "seeking a position that uses my customer service skills and experience" or "looking for a job that allows me to use my training in medical records billing."

Make sure that that the objective fits the job you are applying for. If you use a resume to apply for a job that doesn't match your objective, change the objective or take it off the resume. You should learn how to adjust your resume for different types of jobs. You can save the different versions of your resume on your flash drive. You may, for example, have one that is saved as; "Bill Smith Customer Service resume" or another that says "Bill Smith Retail Pro Resume."

Here is Bill Smith's objective for a retail sales or cashier position:

Objective: Seeking a position in retail sales or cashiering that uses my strong work experience and outstanding customer service skills.

Describing your work experience

Work experience on a resume is included in chronological order with the most recent experience at the top. Don't worry if it is a volunteer job or off the books work as long as it represents work experience. Make sure that all of the dates you worked, names of companies and locations are included and spelled correctly.

If you have been working for more than ten (10) years you don't have to include the first job(s) you had. The work may not be relevant and employers are more interested in 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. But 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 to make sure there is only ten (10) years of work experience on the resume. Employers like stability too. If you have a LinkedIn profile make sure that any resume you use does not contradict information you posted on LinkedIn. 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.

The job titles should be eye catching and draw the attention of the reader. Writing job titles in bold or larger print will help. Use job titles that say something about your work. For example, if your job title was a "Clerk 3" that is unlikely to mean anything to someone who did not work in the same job or for the same company. Something like File Clerk or Assistant Bookkeeper, depending on the job, would be easier to understand.

Stick to action words; stay away from personal pronouns

For each job, highlight a few accomplishments or responsibilities, preferably in bullet points. You do not have to write down everything you did each day. Bullet points make it easy to read each accomplishment. Your bullet points should be short and easy to read. Use one or two lines for each bullet point but no more than 3. Don't make the reader search for information.

Use action words to describe your work. Take the time to make sure that your resume content starts with words that represent action or activity such as *seeking*, *operated* and *provided*. Some other action words to use are *completed*, *planned*, *built*, *saved* and *led*. Use numbers or dollars to highlight accomplishments whenever possible. You could say, "Cleaned 15 floors each shift" which gives the reader more information than "Cleaned floors." Don't write full sentences.

Personal pronouns including *I*, *me* and *mine* do not belong in resume content. Look at the objective above and you will see that it does not say, "I am seeking a position..." And the description of work does not say, "I operated a busy register..."

Correct spelling and punctuation are essential in a resume. Many employers will not speak to a candidate with obvious mistakes on their resume. Try not to repeat the same responsibilities for each position even if they are similar jobs. Choose one or two accomplishments for each job that will make you stand out. Accomplishments that have numbers and dollars are more likely to catch the eye of an employer; "Supervised 14 maintenance workers," or "Handled \$10,000 in cash."

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

ABC Audio Southchester, NY 2011-2015

Sales Associate/Cashier

- Operated busy register assisting more than 200 customers during each shift.
- Accurately accounted for a cash drawer of \$1,500 per shift and handled credit card transactions.
- Provided excellent customer service by responding to questions about items in a prompt manner earning more than five (5) complimentary customer comment cards.
- Followed company plan to stock merchandise on shelves and in the storeroom.

If there are gaps of time between jobs you will need to be prepared to explain them in an interview. If you did any volunteer work, work off the books or went to school during these gaps include these on your resume. Employers want to know that candidates engage in productive activities and are ready to focus on work.

What's a keyword?

Keywords are the magic words in your resume that describe the skills or abilities that employers are looking for. If someone is reading a resume, they will look for these words. Lots of companies use computer programs to find keywords and help identify the candidates to meet in person. Skills such as "master carpenter" are certainly keywords. More common keywords to include in your resume can be found in job postings. These can include things like *project management*, *team building*, *customer focus* and *leadership*. It's a good idea to make sure the resume you submit includes a few of the key words in the description posted about the position. Keywords in the description of Bill's work above include *customer service*, *credit cards* and *stocking*.

Here's a sample of a job posting for a Bed Bath & Beyond Manhattan location. You will see a few key words highlighted. Read through the posting and you find position titles this employer is hiring for and instructions on how to apply.

Job Description

Are you looking to start a great career or supplement your income? Then Bed Bath & Beyond is looking for you! We're seeking **outgoing customer service** orientated individuals to join our team in multiple Manhattan locations. Available positions include: Sales Associates, Cashiers, Overnight Stock Associates, Registry Consultants, Sales Specialists and Beauty Consultants.

Job Requirements

Our goal is to provide a noticeably better customer service experience. If you have what it takes, and you want to work in an **upbeat, fast paced environment** click the link below to submit your resume on-line.

What about education?

Put education in a separate section on your resume. If you just completed a training program for a specific career, you may want to put this on top. You may want to highlight your education if you do not have a great deal of work experience or your work experience is in a different field.

It is important that you are 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:

Southchester High School, Southchester, NY

High School Diploma

Member of Varsity Track Team, Vice President of Video Club

Should I include information about my family?

No. Do not write down that you have children, are married etc. But you can include some outside interests. 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.

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.

Bill chose to include the following interests:

Running, auto repair and restoration and reading mystery novels.

References

The actual names and contact information for references do not belong on a resume. An employer will ask for them when they are ready. There is also no need to include the line, "References will be furnished upon request." Everyone assumes you will give references when they are requested.

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!

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

A cover letter provides an employer an introduction to a candidate that goes along with a resume. 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. 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 or name of person who told you to send a resume
- A short statement that says why you are qualified for the job or bullet points that match some of the requirements for the position
- Confirmation of your contact information
- 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. You will find a letter format in the word processing program that you use.

You can find resume templates in Microsoft Word. To find these in MSWord, click on new and type cover letter into the search box. Google Docs also has a letter template although it is not specifically for a cover letter. You can also search online for Microsoft Word Cover Letter templates to find other versions for free.

You can find samples of cover letters to use as a guideline in Appendix H.

Email, Mail or Fax?

While there are many different ways to send a resume and cover letter most will be 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 or ad 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.

When you speak to someone and they ask you for a resume, ask them how they would like you to send it. You can simply ask, "How would you like me to send that to you?" or "Can I email the resume to you?" When someone tells you an address, fax number or 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. For the subject line you should write the reason for the email, for example "Response to 4/10/16 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 2016."

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, 2016. 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 cover letter as a note in an email even if the ad does not ask for one. If instructions ask you to fax your resume you may fax a cover letter or use the fax cover sheet to provide this information. Just like cover letters, your fax cover sheet needs to clearly identify the job you are applying for and use correct spelling and punctuation.

You can find templates for fax cover sheets in Microsoft Word by typing in fax cover sheet in the search box after you open a new document, the same process you used for resumes and cover letters. You can also find them at <http://www.faxcoversheets.net/templates.htm>.

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 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. When it comes to the job experience section, you may be told that you can write "see resume" but don't assume that you can do this. The job experience section also asks for information that may not be on your resume. Ask or 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.

Looking good and keeping track

Each time you send out a resume, write it down in your Record of Applications Completed (See Chapter 4) or 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 two 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.

The full text of the Job Search Toolkit is available at: FirstFind.org>>Look for a Job.

Resume Sample

Bill Smith
211 Main St.
Southchester, NY 11233
(914)234-5678
Billsmith914@gmail.com

Objective Seeking a position in retail sales or cashiering that uses my strong work experience and outstanding customer service skills.

Experience

ABC Audio Southchester, NY 2011-Present

Sales Associate/Cashier

- Operated busy register assisting more than 200 customers during each shift.
- Accurately accounted for a cash of \$1,500 per shift and handled credit card transactions.
- Provided excellent customer service by responding to questions about items in a prompt manner earning more than five (5) complimentary customer comment cards.
- Followed company plan to stock merchandise on shelves and in the storeroom.

McDonalds Southchester, NY 2009-2011

Crew Member

- Took orders accurately, used cash register and provided customers with food.
- Worked the late shift at busy drive through window.
- Cleaned eating area and bathrooms when assigned according to schedule.

Benny's Burgers Northchester, NY 2008-2009

Food Server

- Offered customers specials of each night for weekend shifts.
- Took food and drink orders and made beverages and made sure that food order was correct.
- Processed cash and credit card payments for meals.
- Provided excellent customer service that resulted in regular customers who requested that I wait on their table.

Education Southchester High School, Southchester, NY
High School Diploma
Member of Varsity Track Team, Vice President of Video Club

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

Cover Letter Sample

Dear Ms. Smith:

I am writing in response to your job posting on Indeed for a Sales Associate. After reading your description I am confident that my experience and abilities at 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) 234-5678 or by e-mail at billsmith914@gmail.com. I have enclosed my resume for your review, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Bill Smith