

Then one day you sit down and try to write a professional résumé and you quickly discover there's a lot you don't know. You have to craft bullet points, and the formatting doesn't make sense. That's called "conscious incompetence" because you now know what you don't know. You now realize it's going to take much more time than you thought to write that résumé. And that's the hardest stage of learning because unless you are really motivated, you are likely to give up. So when you hit that moment of "conscious incompetence" instead of giving up, get help. It is the perfect time to check in with your career center or someone who can help you get through that stage.

Soon, after you've practiced your interview skills, and you've created a good résumé, and you have well-crafted social media, you'll be in "conscious competence" where you will know what to do. And if you're lucky, by the time this process is all over, you'll be in "unconscious competence" and able to handle any curveballs the job search might throw your way.

## CHAPTER 8

# YOUR WANDERINGS ON ONE PAGE

## WRITING YOUR RÉSUMÉ

Richard Hendricks: It says here on your résumé that from 2010 to 2011 you "crushed it"?

Applicant: That's actually an old résumé. It should also read that I crushed it from 2013 to present.

Donald "Jared" Dunn: So are we to understand that you did not "crush it" in 2012?

Applicant: There was a medical situation preventing me from crushing it to my usual standards. So I had to take some time off until I was able to crush it at 100 percent, at which point I resumed crushing it full-time.

—FROM *SILICON VALLEY* TV SERIES, 2015 EPISODE, "THE LADY"

**M**ost employers can eliminate more than 75 percent of their candidates with a brief glance at their résumés. A well-written résumé will both beautifully encapsulate your experiences and be a bridge between you and the interview.

Résumés have their own special rules and methods of construction that are different from virtually any other form of writing. So much advice is conflicting and creates confusion or, dare I say, résumé chaos? For every employer who says "Job objectives are unnecessary," you'll find another who says "I won't read a résumé that doesn't have a job objective." For every résumé guide that says "The résumé must be one page only," another says "Two-page résumés are fine." I've always told my students to spell everything correctly because spelling errors stop the job search. But I've heard employers say "Oh, I overlook the occasional spelling error on a résumé if the candidate is

really qualified.” See what I mean? Chaos. Well, once again, you can relax. Here’s what you need to remember: *résumés* are evaluated based on opinions, not hard-and-fast rules. So ultimately every piece of *résumé* advice comes down to one person’s opinion. Let’s just say that some opinions are more helpful than others.

Before we move into the nitty gritty, here’s one recommendation: don’t try to do it all alone. You will need more than this book to write a great *résumé*. You should take your *résumé* to your career center or to someone who is familiar with current *résumé* styles for suggestions and feedback. Use this book to help write a draft, but always find other people to assist you. This chapter will give you the key information you need to begin, but it can’t cover *résumé* writing with the thoroughness of a complete book on the subject. My goal is to make sure you articulate your wanderings in the strongest possible way. Ultimately, it’s your *résumé*, so when you get conflicting information, go with what you think is right.

With that in mind, you need to write your *résumé* yourself. Do not pay a service to write it for you and do not copy a *résumé* verbatim from a book or website. You might think you’re saving time and energy, but the work you’ll do answering their questionnaires and filling in your experiences will take as long as writing it yourself, and the result won’t really be yours. And if you copy some great lines from the sample *résumé* on your career center’s website, you can bet twenty other students did as well, and the employer will spot the similarities in a minute. Even *résumés* that have been created by computer programs need editing, if only because a lot of the programs use the same formatting and boilerplate phrases, resulting in a formulaic *résumé*. A *résumé* that resembles every other *résumé* gets rejected just as quickly as a *résumé* with obvious errors. If you do use a computer program to start a draft, make sure to edit and adapt from there, incorporating your unique background and taking advantage of all the help available.

You now know that it’s going to take more time than you think, so plan for that. Your final *résumé* will be worth every extra second you put into it. In tight job markets, employers are looking for easy reasons to reject candidates, and a subpar *résumé* is one of the quickest and easiest ways to do that. While the *résumé* won’t get you the job, it will get you the interview that will get you the job, so your

goal is to create a document that is compelling enough to convince an employer you’re worth meeting.

It’s easy to get bogged down in the *résumé* writing process, so stay positive and remember how much you have to offer. You may be tempted to break some of the rules, but you do that at your own risk. In special situations (such as in highly creative fields), the guidelines may be bent without consequence, but it’s better to follow them. When you read that a *résumé* should be one page, don’t think, “I’m going to write a three-page *résumé* to impress employers with how much I’ve done.” Instead, think, “I’m going to impress employers by conveying the most relevant information on one page.” When you start to think, “I’m going to print my *résumé* on brightly colored paper so it will stand out,” think instead, “I don’t need any bells and whistles—the content of my *résumé* will make it stand out.”

While you’re digging up old *résumés* and your mindset list, get out your Wandering Map as well. Review it for any forgotten strengths or experiences you want to work in. Is it time to update it and add more experiences? Have you discovered some new themes or threads, or done any experimental wanderings since you wrote it? Be sure to add the new information and note where it connects with other themes and experiences in your life.

The last section of this chapter breaks down *résumé* writing into five distinct sections you can complete all at once or one at a time, depending on your schedule. You will be creating a basic *résumé* that will serve as your template, which you can adjust as needed to fit the opportunities that come along. First, however, you’re going to learn three secrets that will keep your *résumé* at the top of the stack.

## THREE SECRETS ABOUT AN IRRESISTIBLE RÉSUMÉ

OK, so I’m exaggerating a little. These aren’t necessarily secrets; you’ll read similar advice elsewhere. But they are far and away the three key aspects of *résumé* writing most ignored by college students and new *résumé* writers, so they might as well be secrets. Consider

these vital elements as mantras to be repeated over and over while you write, critique, and edit your résumé:

1. To whom am I writing, and why will they care?
2. Can I picture what I've written, and can my claims be substantiated?
3. Is every word spelled correctly, and is my résumé professional and attractive?

Let's look at each of these vital elements in detail.

### VITAL ELEMENT 1: TO WHOM AM I WRITING, AND WHY WILL THEY CARE?

Well, I suspect there's more to come from Dave Scott. But, in the meantime, "Brought back original crust from the moon" should weigh pretty impressively on your résumé, you know?

—DR. LEE SILVER IN *FROM THE EARTH TO THE MOON* (1998 MINISERIES)

A classic adage is to know your audience and write to them. If you're writing a book on dogs, you need to know if your primary audience will be veterinarians or first graders. You wouldn't write to a professor in the same style and language as you would to your best friend, and because a résumé is intended for a potential employer or graduate school admissions panel, you need to put yourself in their mindset and focus on what they are seeking. As you write each section of your résumé, ask yourself, "Why am I telling my audience this?" and "What is my reader most interested in?" Constantly consider how you can add value to an employer: "What should this employer know about me?"

Asking these questions will help keep your résumé relevant, giving you a major advantage over other job seekers. The job to which you're applying becomes your thesis statement, so to speak, and your résumé should support that central point. One way to do this is by using language common to the field (keywords). For example, if you are applying for a human resources job and you have tutored students, you might want to say "trained" students, because the word *training* is commonly used in human resources. Your keywords should be relevant to the field, particularly if your résumé is likely to be scanned.

Using keywords is one of the best ways to demonstrate how your experience and education match the requirements of the position. You can find keywords in books about the field you're interested in. The text for an introduction to an advertising course, for example, will likely contain all the keywords you need for an advertising job.

Have you ever tried to open one of those annoying plastic packages that are vacuum sealed around an electronic device or a pack of batteries? You have to really want what's inside the package to go to the effort of opening it. Focus on that image when you're writing your résumé. Are you making it easy for employers to find the information they're seeking? Or do they have to read through all sorts of text before they can find what they're looking for? Most recruiters will scan your résumé in less than fifteen seconds, and if they don't see what they want right away, they'll probably quit looking.

Part of knowing your audience is anticipating what they will like or dislike. You don't want to set yourself up to be rejected by presenting your politics, religion, unusual hobbies, or other aspects of your personality if they are not relevant to the employer. Your participation in a particular church's activities would be relevant in an application to a faith-based social service program; your hobby of playing World of Warcraft probably would not. On the other hand, if you're applying to work for a gaming company they're going to be much more interested in your knowledge and experience with online gaming than in the church you attend. If you're applying to work with a Republican senator, you might want to list your work with the college Democrats as "managed a campus political organization." You can use your interview to explain the details if necessary. In the same vein of relevance, résumés are designed to reflect what you've done since entering college, so after your sophomore year, do not include high school information unless you are applying to work in a high school.

### VITAL ELEMENT 2: CAN I PICTURE WHAT I'VE WRITTEN, AND CAN MY CLAIMS BE SUBSTANTIATED?

You know, for someone who's got "Watcher" on his résumé, you might want to cast an eye to the front door every now and again.

—SPIKE IN *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER* (1997)

To put it bluntly, there are a lot of bad résumé writing guides out there. Maybe it's because the writers are trying to make their guides unique, but some of their advice is just plain lousy and out-of-date. One of the worst pieces of advice on many websites and in books is the promotion of fluffy language. Fluffy language, for lack of a better term, is sometimes called marketing-speak. It relies on phrases that sound important and meaningful at first glance, but really don't say anything or tell the reader what you have done. Some examples include:

Hard worker with great communication skills

Team player who regularly upgrades collateral to ensure successful responses

Experience with fast-paced environment and multitasking requirements

Your résumé should substantiate your strengths; it should show what problems you solved, what skills you possess, what experiences you have had, and how you were valued in the workplace—but not through buzzwords and trite phrases. Use numbers, percentages, dollar amounts, and other specifics to support your statements, particularly if they are impressive. Don't just say "sold merchandise." Say "increased weekly store sales by 20 percent in first month of employment" (if it's true, of course). Instead of "raised funds for charity," say "raised more than \$2,000 for the American Cancer Society." Some impressive examples would include managed a \$5,000 budget, supervised ten people, advised more than fifty students. On the other hand, these figures are not as significant: worked eight-hour days, supervised one person, managed a \$200 budget. It would be better to say "supervised staff and managed a budget," and let it go at that. Working eight hours a day is expected, so leave it off unless you also took classes on those same days, making your typical day longer than twelve hours.

As you tell your story in your résumé, use language that helps the reader picture what you did. Remember the Krackel bar story? We could picture what Ashley did in the park. Make sure you use clear phrases that show what you did.

The second question I use to determine whether claims can be substantiated is what I call the rule of opposites—that is, does it sound dumb if I use the opposite words? Some career guides recommend that you use phrases designed to impress employers, such as "team player," "hard worker," or "strong communicator" because that's what employers are seeking. And it's true, employers are seeking those strengths, and in chapter 10 you'll learn to use those phrases in a much more powerful way. But on a résumé they just sound boastful and empty. After all (and here comes the rule of opposites), who's going to put on their résumé "loner who can't work with others," "lazy worker," and "poor writing and speaking skills." That's how you know you're writing fluff. Fluff shows up a lot in job objectives as well: "seeking a challenging position in a growing organization with potential for promotion." This would be as opposed to "seeking a position where I can do nothing in an organization that's likely to go out of business and fire me."

Rather than tell an employer your strengths, show them. We can assume that Ashley is a patient, hardworking, and naturally friendly person who is a good problem solver because of the way she described her position. She never had to tell us; she showed us. Verbs and nouns are much more powerful than adjectives.

Use action words to start your phrases and follow with a description that can be pictured. Avoid weak phrases such as "was responsible for," "duties included," "did some work with," and "handled assorted jobs." Those phrases are passive and don't illuminate your skills. Instead of writing "was responsible for managing the front desk," write "managed the front desk, including answering phones, greeting visitors, and assisting staff with a variety of projects." Depending on the space you have available, you could expand that entry to describe the projects if your work was meaningful and of interest to the employer. If all you did was staple reports, it's probably not worth mentioning, even if you're applying for a job that requires stapling reports. Go back to your Wandering Map for more powerful themes and ideas to put on your résumé.

### VITAL ELEMENT 3: IS EVERY WORD SPELLED CORRECTLY, AND IS MY RÉSUMÉ PROFESSIONAL AND ATTRACTIVE?

So, under experience, you've listed here on your hat-shaped résumé that you can skin a buck, run a trout line, and that all your rowdy friends. . . .

—SQUIDBILLIES (2005)

In his excellent book *Does Your Marketing Sell?* British writer Ian Moore says, "Think fast—your audience is whizzing by." In general, your résumé will receive only a few seconds' glance, so the information needs to be easily accessible and readable and spelled correctly. Keep your entries short and to the point. Lead with verbs and nouns and don't use the word *I*. Think of it as translating your experiences and education into sound bites for the six o'clock news. Write what is most important. If you've buried your most important experience somewhere in the middle, it will likely be missed. Keep in mind that image of the plastic packaging that's hard to break through. Make sure the important information pops off your résumé. Here are five tips to ensure your résumé complies with Vital Element 3:

1. Format and print the résumé in an attractive, consistent, and professional manner. Your creativity should show in your phrasing and writing, not through a funky-colored résumé or a strange font. Creativity expert Edward de Bono describes the shift beyond creativity as crossing over the line from creativity to "crazytivity." As in the quote from *Squidbillies* above, if you have a hat-shaped résumé, you've probably crossed that line. Printing your résumé on green paper with images of money on it probably won't thrill a bank. But always consider the job you're seeking. One student who applied for a job as the Oscar Mayer Wienermobile driver put her mustard-colored résumé inside a pickle relish jar. It worked. That was a unique marketing trick, and she was applying for a unique marketing job. Remember Vital Element 1, know your audience.

2. In general, keep your résumé to one page, particularly if you're going into business. If you have a lot of experience and *it is all*

*relevant*, you can have a two-page résumé. But make sure the most important information is on the first page. Employers disagree on this topic and many are amenable to two-page résumés from new graduates (particularly in the nonprofit and education fields), but tread carefully: one page is usually best for a recent graduate entering the business world.

3. Always proofread and proofread again. Spell-checker is wonderful but it doesn't catch everything: homonyms can slip by, as can a faulty word. I've seen résumés where students "mange" projects as opposed to manage them, work with "perspective" members rather than prospective members, or who claim to "writ" well, rather than write well. One poor student applied for a job in "pubic service," and neither she nor the spell-checker noticed the missing *l* until a savvy roommate laughed herself silly and wished her luck finding that job. Correct spelling can't be stressed enough. Employers are looking for reasons to eliminate résumés from the stack and spelling is an easy way to do this.

4. Use bullet points for emphasis, but if you start to have more than five bullet points in one entry, they will lose their emphasis. You may need to write a few short phrases and then use bullet points to highlight key accomplishments. As you write your phrases, you may be tempted to abbreviate common words like *assistant* to *ass't*. Don't abbreviate unless the abbreviations are well known. You can use the standard two-letter abbreviations for states, for example, or for well-known companies like IBM or ESPN, but don't use abbreviations for words like *administrative assistant*.

5. Use reverse chronological order (your most recent experience comes first), and if you start by naming the employer, the location, and then your title, you should use that order in every entry.

## STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO WRITING YOUR RÉSUMÉ

This guide will help you write a general résumé that will serve as your template for the targeted résumé you will develop as you move along in your search. *The general résumé you create may be several pages long and will contain virtually everything you've done since high school because you won't actually be sending it to anyone.* Instead, you will draw from it to create your targeted résumé by selecting the most relevant information that will appeal to a specific employer or career field. If you don't have a specific field or employer in mind, you can use your general résumé to create a one-page condensed all-purpose résumé that will highlight your best experiences and accomplishments. As you move through the steps, remember three things: it will take longer to write than you think (sorry), conscious incompetence will creep in and you'll want to quit, but most important, *writing your résumé can be one of the biggest self-esteem and confidence-building activities you can do.* So make this experience as enjoyable as possible: reward yourself, work on it in a fun setting, break the task into small pieces by taking it a step at a time, and seek help from your career center or whatever works best for you. Here we go . . .

### STEP 1: COLLECT THE INFORMATION YOU NEED

Start by gathering the information you collected about yourself and your plans in chapters 6 and 7. If you've already written a résumé, print it out. As previously stated, this chapter won't give you everything you might need, so check out résumé websites, particularly the information posted on your career center's website. When you see a résumé you like, print it out and use it as a model. Just remember: do not copy the wording verbatim. You must write the entries yourself because most of your fellow students are copying them as well and your résumé will read like everyone else's. Big mistake. Employers don't like lazy résumé writers and they can spot them a mile away.

## STEP 2: WRITE OUT YOUR EXPERIENCES

Open a document on your computer and at the top of each page write one experience or activity you plan to include in your résumé. Use as many pages as you have experiences or activities. If you had a title or several titles, write them down. Take a few minutes to jot down everything you can recall about that position no matter how silly. Think about what made you unique or stand out; think about promotions, the skills or knowledge you learned, the mindsets you used, commendations from supervisors, what you did during a typical day, and so on. Was there a special event or activity that occurred while you were there? What problems did you solve? What responsibilities did you have? What types of people did you work with? Your list doesn't have to be in any particular order, and you don't have to write it the way it will ultimately appear on your résumé. Just complete it as quickly as possible.

As we consider résumé entries, we're going to follow Justin, a senior international studies major at mythical Longstreet College in Washington, DC. Here's an example of one of his pages describing his work as an administrative assistant and, legal assistant for a law firm one summer:

**Organization:** SQRL Law Firm, DC

**Title:** Administrative Assistant/Legal Assistant

**Dates:** Summer 2016

**Basic description of workplace:** SQRL law firm consists of five attorneys practicing mostly corporate law, including occasional trial work.

**What I did:**

- Kept the office running smoothly so that the attorneys could do their work
- Opened the office at 9:00 in the morning and closed it at 5:00
- Answered phones—clients, other lawyers, judges, professionals from banks, expert witnesses
- Welcomed visitors politely and offered coffee, etc.
- Maintained visitor and call log for legal records and billing purposes

- Created and mailed bills, organized better billing system using Excel
- Coped with changing needs, last-minute deadlines, emergencies, etc., on a regular basis: flexible mindset
- Dressed professionally every day—first impression for law firm
- Learned to write basic legal documents
- Prioritized workload because all attorneys wanted their work first. Used strategic mindset and team mindset.
- Delivered documents to clients or to courthouse—needed to be punctual—five minutes too late and a deadline might be missed—pressure
- Assisted one attorney with a sales presentation at a bank by creating a PowerPoint presentation
- Trained replacement when I left
- Dealt regularly with sensitive and confidential information
- Did a lot of tasks at once because some days I was the only assistant for all the attorneys—had to manage time and multitask. Flexible mindset
- Converted documents to PDF format and e-mailed them
- Learned legal guidelines for maintaining and/or shredding files
- Used my Spanish skills to assist with case involving a Mexican restaurant

Depending on the job he's applying for, Justin has a basic list of his experiences to pick and choose from. For instance, if he were to apply for a job requiring a high level of security or integrity (such as the CIA or FBI), he might select the entries that focus on his work with confidential information and dealing with pressure and deadlines. If he's applying for a management position, he might focus on the independent projects he worked on, training his replacement, and his Excel and multitasking skills.

*Now* it's your turn. Go ahead and fill out as many sheets as you can with your experiences. Doing these sheets now will save you

tons of time when you're writing your targeted résumés. Don't forget to do a sheet for all your school activities or groups, volunteer experiences, or even classes that required work above and beyond traditional note taking and test taking. Some sheets may have only two or three entries, and that's OK. The point is to get as much down on the paper now so you don't forget it later when you're quickly writing your targeted résumé to meet a deadline. Write quickly, write casually, and don't censor yourself.

### STEP 3: WRITE THE HEADING SECTION OF YOUR RÉSUMÉ

This step is rather simple, although mistakes can be made. You should include your name, address (current and/or home address), a phone number where you can be reached, and your e-mail address. You can bold your name, but don't make it more than one font size larger than the text in your résumé (that is, if your résumé is in Times New Roman 12, your name shouldn't be larger than 14). Do not use creative fonts for your name; stick with the same or a similar font you use in your résumé. Some preformatted résumés use different styles for the heading with special fonts, underlining, and so on. As long as it looks professional, you can use the style you prefer.

Here's one way Justin could write his heading:

*Justin Matthews*  
*123 Maple Street*  
*Smalltown, MD 55555*  
*e-mail: jmmd@emailserver.com*  
*cell phone: 301-555-5555*

Remember the discussion about being sensitive to new cultures in chapter 7? Your phone and e-mail habits can label you as stuck in the student culture if you're not careful. Be sure your e-mail address is professional-sounding. Create a new e-mail account for your job search and keep "lilsuzieq@" or "buysthebeer@" for your friends. If you give employers your phone number, they might actually call you, so make sure you answer your phone professionally and create

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a professional voice mail. Turn your phone off (or scrupulously read the caller ID before answering) at parties or other events where you might not present your best self.

## STEP 4: WRITE THE JOB OBJECTIVE AND/OR STRENGTHS SECTION

Employers have mixed reactions to this aspect of résumés—some insist on a job objective; others don't care. But they all agree that a bad job objective (fluffy, poorly written, or not appropriate for their organization) will greatly hurt your chances, so tread lightly here. Remember you will likely be creating several résumés, so you can use a different job objective on each one.

Do you have a specific job or career field in mind, and are you sending it to organizations that hire for that position? Then go ahead and state it:

Technical writer

Research analyst

Market researcher

If you have some ideas, but aren't completely sure, try considering the following:

What activities would you like to perform (writing, editing, teaching, managing, and so on)?

In what setting would you like to work (outdoors, education, insurance, banking, nonprofit, and so on)?

What kinds of people, data, or things (children, the elderly, money, stocks, computers, statistics, laboratory equipment, electronic equipment, and so on) interest you?

How does the position mesh with future career plans?

Pull it all together, as in:

Management training position in retailing leading to a career as a buyer

Secondary-level history teacher and soccer coach in private-school setting

Marketing or grant-writing position for nonprofit organization

Instead of a job objective, you might find it more effective to have a strengths section. A strengths section can help pull together a varied background and focus the employer's attention on your most important accomplishments. This section should list your top three or four strengths in a bulleted format. Remember to tailor your strengths to fit what the employer is seeking and show concrete accomplishments, not fluffy boasting. Here is an example:

- Extensive experience with PC and Mac operating systems; software knowledge includes Microsoft XP, SPSSX statistical software, and Adobe Creative Suite
- Bilingual Spanish/English
- More than three years' experience in customer service

Notice the lack of fluff—no “hard worker who will bring a team spirit to your workplace.” The skills should be tangible and relevant to the employer.

Justin is considering three Possible Lives after graduation: working in a law firm for a few years and then going to law school; working in a bank, starting in a customer service capacity; and/or working in the sports/recreation field—he's not sure exactly where or how. Because the three industries he's selected are different, Justin will need to create three résumés, targeting each to the specific industry. As you read through the next stages of creating the résumé, note how the different sections of Justin's résumé change depending on his focus.

## STEP 5: WRITE THE EDUCATION SECTION

Most résumés of college students and recent graduates should list the education section before the experience section, because that is the primary feature they are selling to an employer. In addition to listing your school, graduation date, and major(s), you can add other



information as appropriate. Consider if any of the following education-related elements are relevant to your future employment. You can expand or contract the information based again on relevance to the employer.

Special courses beyond your major

Skills, knowledge, or training you acquired in classes

Projects you worked on

Presentations you gave

Research you conducted: What type of research? What instruments or methods did you use? Was it published? Did you assist a professor with research that will be published?

Papers you wrote

Honors you received

Study-abroad experiences

Justin studied abroad in Mexico. He thinks his experiences aren't particularly relevant to the recreation/sports field, so he's going to keep his entry short, as in:

*Study abroad, Guadalajara, Mexico (August 2014–June 2015).  
Immersion program.*

On the other hand, for the banking and legal positions, his knowledge of Spanish and his ability to work in a different cultural environment might be more relevant, so he will expand his entry as follows:

*Study abroad, Guadalajara, Mexico (August 2014–June 2015).  
Immersion program. Intensive study of Mexican culture, history,  
language, and international politics. Resided with Mexican fam-  
ily. Courses taught entirely in Spanish. Taught English to children  
of Mexican family.*

If you have completed an internship, you can list that in the experience section. If you have not started the internship yet, but plan to do one soon and would like to include it in your résumé because it is relevant, you can put it in the education section and call it “anticipated internship,” indicating the anticipated dates when you will complete it and what your duties will be.

## STEP 6: WRITE THE EXPERIENCE SECTION(S)

The experience section is usually the most time-consuming part of the résumé, but it won't be for you because you have already listed the important aspects of your experiences back in Step 2. Start creating your experience section by reviewing those lists you created. Whenever possible, focus on the outcome of your actions, not just what you did.

As you look over your experiences, you need to make a key decision—in general, which is more appealing, your job titles or the places where you've acquired your experience? If you have job titles like manager, vice president, legal assistant, and so forth, then you will probably want to lead with your titles. On the other hand, if your titles are clerk, intern, or waitress, you will probably want to lead with the names of the organizations.

Now that you've made that decision, you can start listing in reverse chronological order each of the experiences you described on your pages. For the moment, you only need to include the names of the organizations and their locations, your title, and the dates you worked.

Justin has a total of six significant experiences between his summer jobs, internship, and college activities. As he looked over the list, he determined that the places he worked were more impressive than the titles he held, so he decided to list his experiences with the organization name appearing first. This listing (with all entries described, of course) would be fine for a generic résumé with no particular focus.

<b>Longstreet College Sports Office</b> , Washington, DC <i>Office Assistant</i>	Fall 2016–present
<b>Longstreet College Campus Activities Board</b> , Washington, DC <i>President</i>	2014–present
<i>Treasurer</i>	2016–present
<b>SQRL Law Firm</b> , Washington, DC <i>Legal/Office Assistant</i>	2015–2016
<b>The Woodlands Inn</b> , Barclay, MD <i>Lifeguard</i>	Summer 2015
<b>Commissioner Bill Smith's Office</b> , Annapolis, MD <i>Coordinator/Intern</i>	Summer 2014
<b>Underwater Canoes</b> , Cambridge, MD <i>Customer Service Representative</i>	Summer 2013

As you look at your list, are there any patterns to your experiences that would interest the employer? For instance, are you seeking a nonprofit job and you had several jobs or experiences where you worked for particular causes or with a particular population? Perhaps you are seeking a position that requires creativity, and several of your experiences had elements of creativity to them. If you have two or more experiences that can be combined in a manner relevant to an employer, consider doing that and labeling them concretely. Cut and paste your list to sort it according to the categories. Now, instead of a generic experience section that would simply list all your experiences in reverse chronological order, you might choose to have a Nonprofit and Community Service section if that applies to the position you're seeking. Or a Creative and Communications section, and so on.

By dividing your experiences into these specially labeled categories, you are making them pop from the page so the recruiter will see them. Some students use Relevant Experience as their lead experience category, but it begs the obvious question: relevant to what or to whom? It's better to identify why you're placing certain experiences above others with a term that specifically describes it. You can then create a second experience section to include the other experiences that didn't fit under your initial category. If these experiences fit a category as well, use that word. If not, you can call it Additional Experience.

Here's Justin's first attempt at organizing his law résumé:

<b>LAW/OFFICE MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE</b>	
<b>Longstreet College Sports Office</b> , Washington, DC <i>Office Assistant</i>	Fall 2016–present
<b>SRLQ Law Firm</b> , Washington, DC <i>Legal/Office Assistant</i>	Summer 2016
<b>Commissioner Bill Smith's Office</b> , Baltimore, MD <i>Coordinator/Intern</i>	Summer 2015
<b>Underwater Canoes</b> , Cambridge, MD <i>Customer Service Representative</i>	Summer 2014
<b>LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE</b>	
<b>Longstreet College Campus Activities Board</b> , Washington, DC <i>President</i>	2014–present
<i>Treasurer</i>	2016–present
<b>The Woodlands Inn</b> , Barclay, MD <i>Lifeguard</i>	2015–2016
	Summer 2015

For his résumé for sports and recreation employers, Justin might lead with Sports and Recreation Experience and include his sports office, lifeguard, and canoe sales experience, and then list his other work under Additional Experiences. For his banking résumé, Justin might lead with Customer Service and Office Experience and include his law firm, commissioner's office, canoe shop, and lifeguard experiences. In each case, he will likely change the bulleted point phrases under each job listing to indicate the most relevant parts of the experience.

Are there experiences you listed on your pages that don't fit or don't seem as relevant? Consider leaving them off. You don't have to list every job and every experience you've ever had on a résumé.

Now that you have decided which experiences fit best in the categories you've selected, look over the list of duties you compiled for each experience. Which aspects of your experiences best fit this

field? Which skills most apply to your potential work setting? Can you phrase them to fit the language of the field to which you're applying? Rank them from most significant to least significant based on your job objective. Use action verbs followed by specific explanations of what you did. Remember to show, not tell. In general, you should leave out the insignificant or less important tasks.

*Justin* is going to include his law firm experience in all three of his résumés. For the law firm job, he plans to select his most valuable and responsible roles to highlight perhaps as follows:

- Researched cases and created and filed documents for five attorneys
- Designed efficient billing system resulting in 20 percent greater collection of fees
- Organized office tasks to ensure all deadlines met and files properly maintained

For the customer service banking job, Justin might list the following entries under the law firm position:

- Provided daily customer service to clients, consultants, vendors, and staff
- Maintained financial records, created invoices, and reconciled accounts
- Interpreted and translated for Spanish-speaking clientele

For the sports and recreation field, Justin might choose to focus on organizational and management skills, such as:

- Explained legal documents and reviewed basic laws to clients
- Created PowerPoint marketing presentation for law firm
- Worked in a fast-paced environment, completing numerous tasks under pressure, never missing a deadline for more than fifty cases

As you can see from the example above, one job or experience can lead to a variety of other careers—you just need to think about the way your experience fits the position you're seeking. You'll notice that the word *I* does not appear on Justin's entries. He leads with an action verb and then the subject, trying to make his descriptions as clear as possible and free of fluff. Below is a list of common action words that might help you develop your experience entries.

### Action Words

Achieved	Developed	Mastered
Adapted	Directed	Motivated
Administered	Drafted	Negotiated
Advertised	Earned	Operated
Analyzed	Effected	Ordered
Approved	Eliminated	Organized
Arranged	Enabled	Originated
Attained	Established	Oversaw
Authorized	Evaluated	Participated
Balanced	Executed	Performed
Budgeted	Expanded	Pinpointed
Calculated	Expedited	Planned
Chaired	Facilitated	Prepared
Collected	Generated	Processed
Communicated	Guided	Produced
Compiled	Identified	Programmed
Completed	Illustrated	Promoted
Computed	Implemented	Proposed
Conceptualized	Improved	Provided
Condensed	Increased	Publicized
Conducted	Influenced	Published
Conferred	Initiated	Purchased
Consulted	Inspected	Recommended
Controlled	Instructed	Recorded
Coordinated	Interpreted	Recruited
Corresponded	Launched	Reduced
Created	Lectured	Reinforced
Critiqued	Led	Reinvented
Delegated	Maintained	Reorganized
Demonstrated	Managed	Repaired
Designed	Marketed	Reviewed

Revitalized	Tabulated	Unified
Revived	Taught	United
Scheduled	Trained	Upgraded
Strategized	Transcribed	Used
Strengthened	Transferred	Utilized
Summarized	Transformed	Won
Supervised	Translated	Worked
Surveyed	Treated	Wrote
Systematized	Tutored	

## STEP 7: THE INTERESTS SECTION

This is a completely optional section of your résumé and another area where you will get mixed responses from employers. Some say they like it because it shows your personality and can provide a common ground for conversation. Others say they aren't interested. So let two factors help you make your decision: space and relevance. If you have extra space to fill on your résumé, an interests section is one way to do that. (Just make sure you don't have a larger Interests section than experience section! It might look as if you aren't interested in working.) Also, if your interests are relevant to your career field, by all means include them. Just be sure they don't conflict with your field (for example, someone whose hobbies are sewing and reading applying for a high-pressure sales job) or are risky activities that might indicate an insurance liability for an employer (motorcycle racing, skydiving, and so on).

That's it! You're done. No need to put "References available on request" at the bottom of your résumé unless, again, you have lots of extra room. Instead, create a separate word file that has "References of [Insert Your Name]" and list your references' names, job titles, addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses. If you want, you can include one line for each reference indicating how you know the person if it's not obvious from title or place of employment.

So before we end this chapter, let's go back and visit Justin one more time. The more Justin considered his after-graduation options, the more he found himself leaning toward a career related to sports and recreation, even though he had no idea what he could do. He started

researching careers related to sports and found that many of them required advanced degrees or special athletic skills. But then he found a website called CoolWorks.com, which had a job listing for an office assistant at a tourist resort in Alaska. It was a short-term opportunity offered from May until September, and it involved working in the office of a resort that offered hiking, biking, kayaking, and all the other activities he loved. The salary wasn't exciting, but housing was included, and the company was ranked one of the best employers in the nation, so he figured if he did well on that job, they might promote him or help him find other opportunities. Not only that, he'd get to live in Alaska for five months, which sounded like a great adventure.

The title was "office staff" at the resort and required strong organizational skills, basic bookkeeping and accounting skills, and strong knowledge of MS Word, Excel, and Access computer programs. He would be greeting customers and selling various adventure packages and tours. The advertisement also indicated that because the job involved arranging backpacking, rafting, and hiking itineraries for customers, outdoors experience was a plus. So armed with the job description in hand, he began adjusting his résumé to fit the position.

You may recall that Justin had originally planned to keep his study-abroad experience brief on his résumé for the sports and recreation area, but then he realized that while he was studying abroad he had spent his spare time hiking, biking, and doing all the activities listed in the job description. So suddenly a completely different aspect of his study in Mexico became important. He also decided that based on the job description, it would be better to lead with his office management skills rather than his recreational skills, since the advertisement led with office skills.

On the next page, you'll see Justin's final résumé for his possible career at a resort in Alaska. It would have been just as easy for Justin to create a résumé for a law firm or a bank, and he can still do that when he returns from Alaska in October.

Now it's your turn . . .

What could you do in the next twenty-four hours to make your résumé stronger?

If you knew you couldn't fail, where might you target your résumé? Is there a dream place where you'd like to work, or a field you'd like to try even though you might not succeed? It seldom hurts to write a résumé and see what happens.

## Justin Matthews

123 Maple Street, Smalltown, MD 55555 ~ (301) 555-5555 ~ e-mail: jmmd@internet.com

**OBJECTIVE:** Office Assistant Position for Vacation Resort

### EDUCATION

Longstreet College, Washington, DC  
B.A., International Studies

May 2017  
GPA 3.25

### Study Abroad, Guadalajara, Mexico

August 2014–2015

Immersion program. Intensive study of Mexican history and culture. Utilized time off to explore outdoor recreation, including kayaking, backpacking, climbing, and scuba diving. Resided with Mexican family: strengthened Spanish-speaking skills by interpreting and translating for family.

### ADMINISTRATIVE/OFFICE MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE

#### SQRL Law Firm

Washington, DC

#### Legal/Office Assistant

Summer 2016

- Provided daily customer service to clients, consultants, vendors, and staff.
- Explained legal services and costs to clients, including service packages and discounts.
- Maintained financial records, created invoices, and reconciled accounts on Excel.
- Coordinated more than forty legal cases simultaneously with 100 percent accuracy in meeting court deadlines.

#### Commissioner William Smith's Office

Baltimore, MD

#### Coordinator/Intern

Summer 2015

- Supervised office, handled calls and correspondence (including e-mails) with constituencies.
- Resolved complaints and found solutions for constituents' financial and legal problems.
- Maintained a positive demeanor, increasing constituent satisfaction rating by 20 percent.
- Designed and updated constituent database regularly to ensure accuracy.

### SPORTS/RECREATION EXPERIENCE

#### Longstreet College Sports Office

Washington, DC

#### Office Assistant

Fall 2016–present

- Recorded student statistics for official records and answered incoming office calls.
- Called students, supervisors, and officials to remind them of their scheduled working times.
- Supervised sports games and maintained order within the gymnasium and sport fields.

#### Longstreet College Campus Activities Board

Washington, DC

#### President (2016–present) Treasurer (2015–2016)

- Coordinated and promoted sports-related events, including whitewater rafting and caving activities.
- Negotiated contracts with agencies providing outdoor expedition activities.
- Served as liaison with faculty and administration and organized executive board meetings.

#### The Woodlands Inn

Barclay, MD

#### Lifeguard

Summer 2015

- Maintained cleanliness and order around pool. Monitored water daily and adjusted chemicals as needed.
- Ensured safety of patrons by maintaining constant vigilance and providing rescue services.

#### Underwater Canoes

Cambridge, MD

#### Customer Service and Sales Representative

Summer 2014

- Rented and sold canoes, boats, and kayaking equipment and accessories.
- Instructed clients in the operation and safe use of equipment, resulting in no injuries during season.

## CHAPTER 9

# MAKING THE EMPLOYER CARE

## COVER LETTERS THAT WILL GET YOU THE INTERVIEW

Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing about.

—BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

In this chapter we're going to focus on the cover letter, the key piece of job-hunting correspondence. We will briefly discuss other correspondence in the job-search process, but the writing knowledge you acquire when crafting a cover letter can be easily transferred to other documents. You are going to use a system for developing your cover letter that will help you avoid writer's block and keep your letter interesting and focused. You will also learn to avoid the five fatal errors that can ruin your chances of getting a job: a lack of focus in your writing, poor sentence structure and/or bad grammar, misspelled words or typographical errors, an inappropriate style (too casual or academic), and a failure to focus on the reader's interests and needs.

As you prepare to write your cover letter, you can expect to spend about one-third of your time *planning* your writing, one-third *writing*, and one-third *rewriting and editing*. You will need space and time to write these documents, so find a place where you can focus and won't be disturbed. You need to clear all the clutter from your mind—this is not the time to make that to-do list or help