

JOB SEARCH CHECKLISTS / QUICK TIPS



**STUDENT, GRADUATE & CO-OP
EMPLOYMENT CENTRE**



Professional Cover Letter Checklist

Cover letters are used to summarize your suitability to a specific position, attract a recruiter/employer's attention, and make them want to find out more about you. It is a good tool to demonstrate both your written communication skills as well as your problem solving ability. It demonstrates that you understand the COMPANY's needs and you are able to match your skills to those needs all in a one-page document. To gain a solid start at writing an effective cover letter, use the checklist below.

FORMATTING

- Use a standard font (Arial 10, Times New Roman 11, or Calibri 11)
- Include the date, contact person's name and title (if known), company name, company address, subject line, and salutation (i.e. Dear Mr. /Mrs. /Ms. (contact person's last name) OR Hiring Manager)
- Ensure your cover letter fits onto one page
- Check your cover letter for spelling and grammar
- Ensure you include 'Sincerely,' an inserted image of your signature underneath (optional) and your typed name underneath that
- Below your typed name, include 'Enclosed: Resume' (you can also include Transcript and References (only if requested on the job posting))

HEADER

- Use the exact same header that you use at the top of your resume (see Professional Resume Checklist)

FIRST PARAGRAPH OF LETTER

- Include the position you are interested in along with the competition number (if applicable)
- Generate interest by noting either a mutual contact or something specific you learned about the company based on your research (dig deep rather than just listing something from the company home page) and try to make a connection between that research and how you could add value
- Explain why you are interested in the company or the particular position
- Write a sentence explaining your current situation (i.e. currently pursuing a _____ Certificate/Diploma/Degree or are a recent graduate of the _____ Certificate/Diploma/Degree program)
- Write a summary sentence about what makes you a strong candidate for the position of interest

BODY OF LETTER

- Include one or two middle paragraphs with a specific topic for each of those paragraphs
- Highlight only those qualifications that are relevant to the position of interest (do not be afraid to repeat things stated in your resume – just do not copy and paste directly from your resume)
- Provide SPECIFIC examples to demonstrate those key skills/qualifications (you can expand on the accomplishments included in your Highlights of Qualifications section on your resume)
- Avoid using any negative language or drawing attention to skills/qualifications you do not possess
- Avoid focusing on what you will gain, and instead, focus on how you could add value for the employer

FINAL PARAGRAPH OF LETTER

- Write a summary sentence about what makes you a strong candidate for the position (use different wording from the summary sentence at the end of the first paragraph)
- Reaffirm your interest in working for the company
- Indicate that you would appreciate the opportunity to meet to discuss your qualifications in detail
- In the last sentence, thank the reader for their time and consideration

If you require further assistance on writing an effective cover letter, please contact the Student, Graduate, & Co-op Employment Office at (250)-862-5412 or coop@okanagan.bc.ca



Professional Resume Checklist

Writing a professional resume has one specific purpose: **to win an interview**. A great resume will make it as easy as possible for an employer to determine whether you might have what it takes to be successful in the position/company of interest based on your skills, education, or experience. To gain a solid start at writing your resume, follow the checklist below.

FORMATTING

- Use a standard font (Arial 10, Times New Roman 11, or Calibri 11)
- Ensure dates are aligned with the right margin (set right tabs) and dashes are the same size and have the same spacing throughout (i.e. 2009 – 2011)
- Ensure your bullet points are regular circle bullets (not overly large) and are all aligned and the text in the bulleted sections is indented and aligned
- Include page numbers within the footer field on both pages (if on two pages)

HEADER

- Include your name and contact information in the Header field (this becomes a form of personal branding so ensure your name stands out and your contact information is clear)
- Include either your mailing address or just your city and province
- Include your phone number, professional email address, and your LinkedIn profile link (optional)
- Ensure the spacing, font size, and style of header is consistent on both pages of your resume, on your cover letter, and at the top of a references page

HIGHLIGHTS OF QUALIFICATIONS SECTION

- Include four to six bullet points that summarize the most important educational foundation, experience, skills and accomplishments you possess that are relevant to the position of interest
- Write the first point as a summary of your relevant education and experience
- Include a relevant skill plus a specific example as proof for each of the next few bullet points
- Ensure the skills listed are required in the position of interest and are a reflection of your strengths
- Ensure your bullet points are unique to you and could not be written by another person
- Include relevant technical or language skills as your last bullet point (when applicable)

EDUCATION SECTION

- List your education in reverse chronological order (most recent first)
- Ensure formatting (bolding, spacing, alignment of dates with the right margin) is consistent
- Include relevant term projects or practical lab experience examples (when applicable)

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE SECTION

- List your relevant professional experience in reverse chronological order
- Ensure the formatting is consistent and use the same format in a Volunteer Experience section
- For companies that are not well-known or are international, include a brief company description
- Ensure each bullet point listed for each position is written in the form of an accomplishment statement (RESULT (Improved, Increased, Ensured, etc. + by/through + how (action verbs with 'ing' endings)) and quantify whenever possible

ADDITIONAL SECTION OPTIONS

- Include relevant volunteer experience, additional training/certifications, memberships, interests, etc.
- Ensure the same formatting is used for the section heading title and content

If you require further assistance on writing an effective professional resume, please contact the Student, Graduate, & Co-op Employment Office at (250)-862-5412 or coop@okanagan.bc.ca



Accomplishment Statement Tips

Writing your resume is a challenging undertaking, especially when it comes to doing so effectively. The resume should demonstrate your ability to meet the employer’s needs by highlighting your qualifications and accomplishments to persuade the employer to want to interview you. By writing your professional experience using accomplishment statements that outline your achievements, employers will understand what you have accomplished in the past, your level of involvement, the scope of your experience, and what you can do for their organization in the future. Use the following guideline to help you write effective accomplishment statements:

‘ACCOMPLISHMENT STATEMENT’ FORMULA

RESULT: Accomplishment verb with result (quantify when possible) + **by/through** + **Transferable Skill* (use action verbs and quantify the scope of what was accomplished)**

*Tailor the transferable skills to the job posting skill requirements (i.e. if the posting asks for communication skills, make sure you have a bullet point that includes the language ‘.....by communicating with.....’).

*Use a T-Chart (i.e. a table in Word) to help you brainstorm how your experiences and qualifications match what the employer is looking for in the position of interest. Copy and paste job requirements and qualifications on one side and match your skills and experience (specific examples using action verbs) on the other side.

For example:

Job Requirements/Qualifications	What have you done that matches these?
Ability to work well as part of a team	Collaborated with a team of 10, as a volunteer for Canuck Place Children’s Hospice, to raise \$10,000
Assist with month-end journal entries & audit requests, prepare monthly account reconciliations	Have you done this in a previous position? Have you taken any courses that would address your learning related to these tasks?

ACCOMPLISHMENT VERB EXAMPLES:

Attained	Improved	Resolved	Ensured	Increased	Eliminated	Saved
Exceeded	Decreased	Surpassed	Reduced	Minimized	Maximized	Retained

Accomplishments don’t need to be monumental to show an employer how you can add value. Think of how you made things better in even a minor way. Rather than only listing your duties in a position, an accomplishment statement describes how that helped the organization. For example, ‘compiled feedback’ is a duty, whereas ‘Supported a website design launch by compiling feedback from multiple departments’ is an accomplishment.

ACCOMPLISHMENT STATEMENT EXAMPLES

Accomplishment verb with result (quantify when possible)	by/through	Transferable Skill (quantify the scope of what was accomplished)
Improved customer feedback	by	implementing a training program for 10 new Customer Service Representatives and ensuring clients consistently received timely and complete information.
Increased sales by 18%	through	developing and implementing divisional store merchandising plans.
Promoted to Customer Service Supervisor in three months	by	delivering customer education on the company’s services and sharing best practices with colleagues.

*The order of the accomplishment statement can be switched as long as all elements of formula are included.

If you require further assistance on how to include accomplishment statements on your resume, please contact the Student, Graduate, & Co-op Employment Office at (250)-862-5412 or coop@okanagan.bc.ca



Interview Preparation Checklist

Job interviews can be a source of concern if you haven't had much experience with them. Use the following checklist to help you prepare and feel more confident when it comes to explaining your qualifications.

PRIOR TO THE INTERVIEW

- Know where the interview will be located and how you will get there on time (if you're not familiar with the location, find it on a day prior to the interview) – it is best if you arrive about 10 minutes early
- Take time to choose appropriate attire (at least one day prior) and groom carefully – professional appearances are important since the first impression is a lasting one
- Do some research on the company before the interview (the employer will want to know why you want to work there and how you think you can contribute to the organization's overall goals and your knowledge of the company demonstrates you are keenly interested in working for them)
- Analyze the job posting to identify the key skills they are looking for (you would have done this for your cover letter and resume but be prepared to expand on specific examples to demonstrate those skills)
- Anticipate what questions the employer might ask and prepare answers to those questions in advance
- When preparing examples for behavioral questions (i.e. Give me a specific example to demonstrate your _____ skill), use the STAR technique to frame your answers (S = Situation, T=Task, A=Action, R=Result)
- Prepare approximately 5 different stories to support 5 key relevant skills the employer may ask you about
- Prepare questions to ask the interviewer at the end of the interview; avoid asking about benefits, vacation time, salary, etc. until you have been offered the position
- Prepare a references page (using the same Header as you used for your cover letter and resume) with phone numbers and email addresses for those contacts (make sure it is evident how you know those individuals (i.e. you have included the company name and their title or relation to you))

DURING THE INTERVIEW

- Shake hands firmly with the interviewer(s) and introduce yourself clearly with your first and last name
- Maintain eye contact with the interviewer (not a stare-down though) to demonstrate your interest
- Try not to fidget as it might distract the interviewer from what you are saying
- Allow the interviewer to take the lead; do not interrupt when he/she is speaking
- Listen carefully to the questions asked and ask the interviewer to restate a question if you are confused
- It is okay to pause to construct a thoughtful answer but then try to be direct and concise
- Convey your strengths and abilities without appearing arrogant/conceited; do not exaggerate your qualifications but do speak to how you would add value to the company/position
- Use your prepared stories using the STAR technique to answer any behavioral questions (Give me a specific example to demonstrate your _____ skill)
- Answer the questions honestly rather than telling the interviewer what you think he/she wants to hear as you do not want to succeed in getting hired for a job in which you are not suited
- Show your (genuine) enthusiasm, avoid using a monotone voice, and remember to smile
- At the end of the interview, thank the interviewers for their time, re-state your interest in the position, and briefly summarize how your experience matches their needs
- Request a business card (that way you will have the correct spelling of their name in order to write a thank you after), and pass them yours (if you have one) and shake hands in closing

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- Write a thank you email to each interviewer (this is important because a thank you email gives you one more chance to remind the employer about the special skills you can bring to the company)

If you require further assistance on interview preparation, please contact the Student, Graduate, & Co-op Employment Office at (250)-862-5412 or coop@okanagan.bc.ca



Networking Tips

Networking is an important skill since a high percentage of job vacancies are filled by referrals. The more contacts we have, the more people who will know about our current situation and what qualifications we have to offer, and therefore, the more opportunities we will hear about. For some, networking comes naturally. For others, networking is a learned skill and one that needs practice. Use the following checklist to help you prepare and feel more confident when it comes to developing your network:

PREPARATION

- Ensure you have the right attitude! We all find it easier to connect with people who are approachable and friendly. Smile and enjoy the opportunity to meet new people.
- Have professional business cards ready to hand out/swap with someone when needed. Co-op students are eligible to receive 50 free business cards!
- Write down a list of possible contacts. These can include fellow students, current and former employers/colleagues, friends, acquaintances, relatives, volunteer contacts, teachers, coaches, team members, dentist, doctor, physiotherapist, pharmacist, etc.
- Ensure you have created a professional and up-to-date LinkedIn profile. Recruiters use LinkedIn to search for potential candidates. You can also use LinkedIn to find potential contacts at companies of interest or to follow up with someone you have met. If requesting a connection, state the reason why you want to connect.
- Prepare a memorable introduction (your 20-second elevator pitch). Be prepared to briefly state who you are, what you do/have done, and (potentially) what you would like to do in the future – in a way that will make the other person want to learn more about you. This preparation will also help with the common interview question, 'Tell me about yourself.'
- Practice! Practice your pitch; use your phone to video yourself for critique purposes or ask one of your family/friends/Co-op Coordinator to do a mock introduction with you. Practice your handshake too; are you a bone breaker or a limp noodle? Avoid both.

LET THE NETWORKING BEGIN!

- Touch base with each of your possible contacts and make them aware of your situation. Even though they may not have anything specific to offer, they can give you valuable leads to pursue.
- Another option is to approach employers that are involved in a field of interest. You can request an information interview (a research interview, initiated by you) to learn more about a company, the type of work performed, and any other companies you should speak with. This will help you determine if it would be the type of job you may be interested in (and suited for). The purpose is NOT to ask for a job!
- At networking events, take the initiative to say hello, make eye contact, shake hands, clarify the person's name if necessary, and be sure to ask questions to learn more about your new contact as well.
- Be comfortable with conversation starters. You could comment on the event speaker, the size of the crowd, the person's shoes, etc. 'Breaking the ice' is a way to start making a connection.
- Remember that many people at networking events are just as nervous as you are. Develop and practice your message but then try to relax and just be yourself.

FOLLOW UP

- Stay in touch with the individuals you meet. Organize your network resource list in a way that makes it easy for you to keep track of when to follow up and be sure to keep the list updated.
- Follow Up! It is your responsibility to follow up with the individuals you meet. This could be through sending a follow-up personal note, a thank you, or a relevant article that would be helpful to that person. Networking is a reciprocal process – it is about getting and giving information, resources, and referrals.
- Stick with quality and not quantity. Meaningful leads and referrals will eventually come from those with whom we have developed true relationships.

If you require further information on how to network effectively, please contact the Student, Graduate, & Co-op Employment Office at (250)-862-5412 or coop@okanagan.bc.ca