Queensland Law Society

Tip sheet: Writing resumes and cover letters

A resume is your personal sales brochure. It outlines your skills and experience, and tells the prospective employer a little about what type of work you are looking for. It also provides contact details so people can get in touch with you.

What is the purpose of a resume?
The primary purpose of a resume is to get you to the next stage of the application process, which is usually an interview. A resume does not have to contain every historical detail of your career to date - it just needs to create a compelling picture of why you are a suitable candidate for the role on offer.

What do I need to include in my resume?
Typically, a resume will contain the following information:

- your name and contact details
- career objective (make sure your objective matches the role you are applying for!)
- core skills or strengths
- employment history – usually in reverse chronological order i.e. most recent role first. For each role, include role title, organisation, start and finish dates, job duties and, most important, key achievements
- qualifications – including formal education, training courses or certificates, academic awards, professional associations
- interests and hobbies (optional)
- referee details (optional)

The information is usually presented in the above order.

Depending on the role, you may also like to include other details such as licences, languages, technical skills or details of published books or articles, where relevant.

Do	Don't
Keep your resume to three pages or less	Include a photograph unless specifically requested to do so
Summarise your core strengths and skills	Include personal details such as age or marital status
Include achievements for each role, using action words	Include detailed job information for roles you held more than 10 years ago
Account for gaps in your work history	Include hobbies and interests that detract from the image you wish to present
Get a friend or colleague to proof-read it for you to pick up spelling or grammar issues	Include a cover page, borders or clip art.
Include current contact details including mobile and professional email address	Introduce any information that may be perceived as a potential negative for the employer, such as political or religious affiliations
Use consistent fonts and layout with plenty of white space	Overstate or exaggerate your achievements or responsibilities
Tailor for each job application, even if only slightly, to highlight relevant information for the role	Include details that are not relevant to the role you are applying for

Do I need a Cover Letter?

You should include a cover letter for every application that you submit. The cover letter must be tailored specifically to the company or role. The cover letter is your chance to capture attention, highlight key areas of suitability and request a meeting or interview.

Tips for Cover Letters

- Keep to one page maximum.
- Address the person by name and title if possible, or use 'Dear Sir or Madam' – avoid "To Whom it may Concern".
- Clearly indicate which role you are applying for.
- Try to grab the reader's attention early on.
- Review the job advertisement or role description for the key competencies or requirements, and specifically address these in your cover letter using examples that demonstrate your skills.
- Try to convey enthusiasm and interest in the role. Explain what it is that appeals to you about the role or company, but avoid 'gushing'.

Recommended Books (available from BCC Library)

Resumes that get shortlisted by Jim Bright & Joanne Earl, 2008

Getting a brilliant job: the student's guide by Karen Bright, 2005

Writing resumes & cover letters for dummies (second edition) by Amanda McCarthy, 2014

Useful Links

www.careerfaqs.com.au/resumesandcoverletters - An Australian site that provides samples of resumes for specific industries and roles.

www.seek.com.au – The Advice & Tips page provides tips on resumes, cover letters, addressing selection criteria and more.

Article: What skills do law firms look for when recruiting graduates for trainee solicitor jobs?