RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS

WHAT MAKES A RESUME EFFECTIVE?

Your resume is the foundation document that you need for your career search. It is a summary of your accomplishments academically, experientially and through employment that shows a potential employer the skills you have developed.

Your resume may be your first contact with a future employer and if you make a positive impression and **show how you would be a "fit" for the opportunity, you may be called for an interview.**

TOP TIPS:

- Tailor your resume with keywords, backing up with evidence of accomplishments for every application to demonstrate your area of focus.
- Keep it to two pages max. Include your LinkedIn URL so readers can see more if they wish. Keep an ongoing master copy to keep track of all of your experiences.
- Know your industry – this will help you in using relevant terminology.
- Write strong accomplishment statements using action verbs to articulate your capabilities versus your tasks or duties.
- Every experience counts! A one-day job shadow, a weekend volunteering opportunity or a part-time summer job all have transferable skills employers are looking for. **Use the 3 R's to decide** what to include. Prioritize the most Relevant, Recent, highest Responsibility level.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Not tailoring to your audience, or using keywords without proof.
- Keeping it too simple and short (can be perceived as not putting effort into your resume).
- Spelling and grammar errors - this is the first product of work an employer sees from you and first impressions count.
- Not using your Education section to present your skills and knowledge.
- Taking advice from people who are in different fields/industries who may not have information relevant to you.

RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS

CREATING EFFECTIVE ACCOMPLISHMENT STATEMENTS

1. Identify your Target Audience and Skills they Want

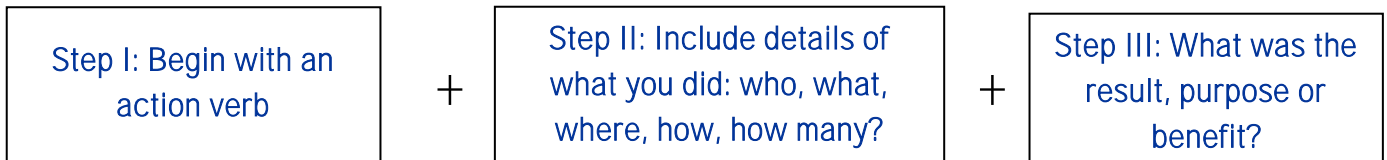### 2. Reflect on your Achievements
Consider your past experiences from work, internship, volunteering, community involvement etc.
Beginning with your most relevant experience, identify your **achievement(s).**

Think of times when you…
- Solved a problem
- Received praise/awards
- Created efficiencies
- Exceeded expectations
- Achieved a goal
- Initiated something

- Received excellent praise/award
- Prevented an issue
- Improved something
- Selected for added responsibility/ promotion
- Demonstrated Leadership

3. Follow the Formula
Create accomplishment statements that give a clear impression of your capabilities and success.

Step I: Begin with an action verb	+	Step II: Include details of what you did: who, what, where, how, how many?	+	Step III: What was the result, purpose or benefit?

Step I: Begin with an Action Verb
- Identify the skills that you used, then, underline which of these skills were critical to your success. Use the list of Action Verbs in this booklet.

E.g. Organized, <u>initiated</u>*, developed*, coordinated (Mark the skills with an asterisks* that are most **relevant to your target audience's needs**

Step II: Relevant Information - Include details of what you did: who, what, where, how, how many?
Briefly describe the relevant information such as: actions taken, time, people involved. Be particular in including information that provides the relevant context.

E.g. Effective filing strategy, including over 10 years of records, used by staff

Step III: What was the result, purpose or benefit?
- Where possible, quantify your results.
E.g. Saved time for staff when solving client issues

Final Accomplishment Statement: Initiated and developed a more effective filing strategy for over 10 years of records which saved time for staff when solving client issues.

RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS

BEFORE AND AFTER ACCOMPLISHMENT STATEMENTS

The following are pairs of statements identifying the same achievements, however, the second statement of each pair gives more data than the other. See the difference it makes?

- Provided customer service
- Provided customer service in a busy retail environment resulting in the creation of a loyal customer base and improved sales by 10%

- Initiated reorganization of file system
- Initiated reorganization of file system which made client information more accessible to staff of non-profit organization

- Initiated and completed system of data entry from manual to computerized
- Initiated and completed system of data entry from manual to computerized system, resulting in improved account analysis and report generation for tax and other purposes

- Maintained and updated files
- Maintained and updated patient files for rehabilitation clinic with approximately 340 regular patients

- Trained administrators and other staff
- Trained administrators and other staff at physiotherapy clinic on MS Excel, saving outside training expenses of more than a $1000

- Created manual for volunteers
- Created procedural and responsibilities manual for volunteers at a community agency, which reduced overlapping duties and increased efficiency.

- Worked on product layouts
- Revised merchandise layout and recommended changes that resulted in increased product visibility and increased sales by 33%

- Work well in a team environment
- Collaborated with team members to complete a group marketing project for final year commerce class ensuring tasks were identified and completed by the team members on time

- Leadership experience
- Oversaw group project by providing vision and direction regarding project objectives, task distribution resulting in group cohesion and a successful project

RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS

ACTION VERBS – Use verbs to communicate your skills effectively

Communication/People Skills
- Addressed
- Advertised
- Arbitrated
- Arranged
- Articulated
- Authored
- Clarified
- Collaborated
- Communicated
- Composed
- Condensed
- Conferred
- Consulted
- Contacted
- Conveyed
- Convinced
- Corresponded
- Debated
- Defined
- Developed
- Directed
- Discussed
- Drafted
- Edited
- Elicited
- Enlisted
- Explained
- Expressed
- Formulated
- Furnished
- Incorporated
- Influenced
- Interacted
- Interpreted
- Interviewed
- Involved
- Joined
- Judged
- Lectured
- Listened
- Marketed
- Mediated
- Moderated
- Negotiated
- Observed
- Outlined
- Participated
- Persuaded
- Presented
- Promoted
- Proposed
- Publicized
- Reconciled
- Recruited
- Referred
- Reinforced
- Reported
- Resolved
- Responded
- Solicited
- Specified
- Spoke
- Suggested
- Summarized
- Synthesized
- Translated
- Wrote

Creative Skills
- Acted
- Adapted
- Began
- Combined
- Composed
- Conceptualized
- Condensed
- Created
- Customized
- Designed
- Developed
- Directed
- Displayed
- Drew
- Entertained
- Established
- Fashioned
- Formulated
- Founded
- Illustrated
- Initiated
- Instituted
- Integrated
- Introduced
- Invented
- Modeled
- Modified
- Originated
- Performed
- Photographed
- Planned
- Revised
- Revitalized
- Shaped
- Solved

Data/Financial Skills
- Administered
- Adjusted
- Allocated
- Analyzed
- Appraised
- Assessed
- Audited
- Balanced
- Budgeted
- Calculated
- Computed
- Conserved
- Corrected
- Determined
- Developed
- Estimated
- Forecasted
- Managed
- Marketed
- Measured
- Netted
- Planned
- Prepared
- Programmed
- Projected
- Qualified
- Reconciled
- Reduced
- Researched
- Retrieved

4

Helping Skills

- Adapted
- Advocated
- Aided
- Answered
- Arranged
- Assessed
- Assisted
- Clarified
- Coached
- Collaborated
- Contributed
- Cooperated
- Counselled
- Demonstrated
- Diagnosed
- Educated
- Encouraged
- Ensured
- Expedited
- Facilitated
- Familiarized
- Furthered
- Guided
- Helped
- Insured
- Intervened
- Motivated
- Prevented
- Provided
- Referred
- Rehabilitated
- Represented
- Resolved
- Simplified
- Supplied
- Supported
- Volunteered

Management/Leadership Skills

- Administered
- Analyzed
- Appointed
- Approved
- Assigned
- Attained
- Authorized
- Chaired
- Considered
- Consolidated
- Contracted
- Controlled
- Converted
- Coordinated
- Decided
- Delegated
- Developed
- Directed
- Eliminated
- Emphasized
- Enforced
- Enhanced
- Established
- Executed
- Generated
- Handled
- Headed
- Hired
- Hosted
- Improved
- Incorporated
- Increased
- Initiated
- Inspected
- Instituted
- Led
- Managed
- Merged
- Motivated
- Navigated
- Organized
- Originated
- Overhauled
- Oversaw
- Planned
- Presided
- Prioritized
- Produced
- Recommended
- Reorganized
- Replaced
- Restored
- Reviewed
- Scheduled
- Secured
- Selected
- Streamlined
- Strengthened
- Supervised
- Terminated

Organizational Skills

- Approved
- Arranged
- Catalogued
- Categorized
- Charted
- Classified
- Coded
- Collected
- Compiled
- Corrected
- Corresponded
- Distributed
- Executed
- Filed
- Generated
- Incorporated
- Inspected
- Logged
- Maintained
- Monitored
- Obtained
- Operated
- Ordered
- Organized
- Prepared
- Processed
- Provided
- Purchased
- Recorded
- Registered
- Reserved
- Responded
- Reviewed
- Routed
- Scheduled
- Screened
- Submitted
- Supplied
- Standardized
- Systematized
- Updated
- Validated
- Verified

Research Skills

- Analyzed
- Clarified
- Collected
- Compared
- Conducted
- Critiqued
- Detected
- Determined

- Diagnosed
- Evaluated
- Examined
- Experimented
- Explored
- Extracted
- Formulated
- Gathered

- Inspected
- Interviewed
- Invented
- Investigated
- Located
- Measured
- Organized
- Researched

- Reviewed
- Searched
- Solved
- Summarized
- Surveyed
- Systematized
- Tested

Teaching Skills

- Adapted
- Advised
- Clarified
- Coached
- Communicated
- Conducted
- Coordinated
- Critiqued

- Developed
- Enabled
- Encouraged
- Evaluated
- Explained
- Facilitated
- Focused
- Guided

- Individualized
- Informed
- Instilled
- Instructed
- Motivated
- Persuaded
- Simulated
- Stimulated

- Taught
- Tested
- Trained
- Transmitted
- Tutored

Technical Skills

- Adapted
- Applied
- Assembled
- Built
- Calculated
- Computed
- Conserved
- Constructed
- Converted
- Debugged
- Designed
- Determined
- Developed
- Engineered
- Fabricated
- Fortified
- Installed
- Maintained
- Operated
- Overhauled
- Printed

- Programmed
- Rectified
- Regulated
- Remodeled
- Repaired
- Replaced
- Restored
- Solved
- Specialized
- Standardized
- Studied
- Upgraded
- Utilized

Source:
http://www.quintcareers.com/

RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS

OPTIMIZING YOUR RESUME FOR AN APPLICANT TRACKING SYSTEM (ATS)

ATS' are **software that help employers and HR professionals manage the hiring process. If you've ever applied through a portal, you've encountered an ATS.** It allows an employer to search by the specific criteria they requested (**degree, amount of experience, specific skills**). They can search resume components for information.

Follow the instructions regarding type of file (i.e. .doc, .docx, pdf, txt) to submit.

Keep formatting simple: Avoid tables or graphics. ATS can't read graphics, and they misread tables. If you want **to include graphics for visual appeal when a human reads it, just don't put text in the graphic for the ATS.**

Option to submit a longer resume: Submitting a slightly longer resume that allows you to pack in more relevant experience and keywords and phrases could increase your chances of ranking higher in the system.
Caution: Keep in mind that the resume will eventually be read by a person, so you still need to be concise.

Use keywords in the job description: Strategically incorporate industry terms, keywords, and skills from the job posting. Make sure it makes sense because the actual recruiter who reads it later will frown on any repetitive, nonsensical use of these words.

Save your resume with a relatable name: Save your resume with a file name that is useful and meaningful to the recruiter. This helps the recruiter to find your resume quickly. For example,**"YourName.Job.Posting.123"**

Call your work experience, "Work Experience": Software may completely skip over your work experience because you didn't label it as such.

Start your work experience with the employer/organization name: Applicant tracking systems look for company names first, followed by your title, followed by the dates you held that title.

Spell check, spell check, and spell check again: ATS will skip keywords that are misspelled.

Formatting:
- Use standard fonts such as Arial, Georgia, Arial, Courier, Lucinda, Palatino, Tahoma, Verdana.
- Avoid using special characters (like arrows) for bullets. Standard dashes or bullets are fine.
- Do not hide keywords in white font in your resume.
- If you are using a creative resume, ensure it is ATS readable.
- Use keywords logically and in different places on your resume.
- Avoid using borders, shading or symbols.

Resume ATS Hacks:
- **Obscure Job title?** Use an **equivalent** to match with the terms the hiring manager is likely to look for in the ATS. For example, Customer Service Representative (Guest Experience Facilitator). The real title is in brackets and its equivalent is listed first to catch the attention of humans & computers.
- **Save time customizing.** Word cloud generators identify keywords from job descriptions. Copy and paste 5 job postings into a word cloud to see most common key words. (jasondavies.com/wordcloud/)
- **Use a free resume analyzer** to compare the posting with your customized resume. (jobscan.co)

RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS

EXAMPLES OF RESUME SECTION TITLES

Objective Career Objective Professional Objective Career Focus Career Goal	Profile Key Competencies/Skills Highlights of Qualifications Career Profile Professional Qualifications Professional Profile	Education Academic Background Training Professional Education Additional Training Professional Development
Experience Relevant Experience Employment History Work Experience Additional Experience Professional Background Professional Experience	Other Skills Projects Career-Related Skills Computer Skills Technical Skills Certification Specialized Skills	Achievements Accomplishments Awards Recognitions Scholarships
Professional Affiliations Associations Professional Memberships Professional Associations Memberships Affiliations	Activities/Interests Community Involvement Volunteer Activities Related Activities University Activities Professional Interests	Academic Presentations Publications Conferences Attended Conferences/Conventions Papers Presented Professional Presentations

FORMATTING AND STYLE TIPS CHECKLIST

- ☐ **Acronyms** – Avoid acronyms if they could be unfamiliar to your audience. Spell out the first use of each in full and include the short form in brackets.
- ☐ **Verb Tense.** For present roles, use present tense and for past roles, use past tense.
- ☐ **Omit unnecessary words like 'a', 'an', 'the'.** E.g. "**Led two**-person team during departmental restructuring; **completed successful transition of 140 people and five core processes in 11 months"**
- ☐ **Number Form:** Be consistent in your use of all number and date formats. Those under 10 are spelled out in full while those above 10 are numeric. **Don't forget to list the currency if it is not in Canadian dollars.**
- ☐ **Pronouns** – Do not use first or second person pronouns. Reserve words like I, my, we, our, for your cover letters or your LinkedIn summary.
- ☐ Ensure accurate spelling and grammar: Set your spellcheck "English Canada" when directing your documents to Canadian opportunities. Use commas and semicolons or dashes properly. Consult a Canadian style book.
- ☐ **Reverse Chronological:** In each section, list your experiences from most recent to least recent.
- ☐ General Formatting:
  - o Proper paragraph spacing, date alignment, and tab settings.
  - o Margins that are appropriate to make things fit on the page, and balanced white space and text.
  - o Use bold and italic (not underlining) to make important items stand out.
  - o Use a consistent and professional looking font (ie. Arial, Tahoma, Calibri) and size (11 or 12).

RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS

MAC ALUMNI

Home Address	LinkedInURL
Phone number	Email

CAREER SUMMARY (optional)

It is a synopsis - a positive, confident summary of your special qualifications summing up what you bring to the position. It will touch on your experience (# of years, or areas of focus), your credentials significant to the position, and your transferable skills that are key to the position. It is your marketing statement.

HIGHLIGHTS OF QUALIFICATIONS (optional/job specific)

- # yrs experience related to the position
- credentials/training/education relevant to the position
- One or two skills/strengths with qualifying statements to back it up
- Skills/strengths or knowledge relevant to the position
- Work ethic or values or technical skills relevant to position

EDUCATION

Bachelor of …..   year – present
Major area of study; minor
McMaster University, Hamilton, ON
- Add any relevant subjects taken with a brief description
- Add research/projects undertaken with brief description or results if possible
- Add academic awards if significant (if more than 3, include in a separate section)

WORK EXPERIENCE

Position Title (in bold)   Dates
Name of company or organization, city, province
- Use 1-2 lines for each accomplishment statement to describe your relevant activities in that position
- Use strong action verbs to give your points more impact
- At least one of the bullet points should describe an initiative you took or an achievement you had with results
- Consider using SAR formula (situation, action, result)

Position Title (in bold)   Dates
Name of company or organization, city, province
- Trained staff on cash, debit and credit transaction to ensure consistent and effective operations
- Responded to customers in an attentive manner while working in a busy downtown retail store
- **Entrusted with manager's responsibilities while manager was off si**te and on vacation

EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND/OR VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE
- List the positions you held in student and voluntary organizations; treat them like regular jobs.

RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS

Position Title   Dates
Name of club/organization, event, city, province
- Use 1-2 lines for each accomplishment statement to describe your relevant activities in that position
- Use strong action verbs to give your points more impact
- At least one of the bullet points should describe an initiative you took or an achievement you had with results
- Consider using SAR formula (situation, action, result)

TECHNICAL SKILLS (optional)

Can adjust headings to be more specific or general (Computer Skills, Language Skills, Business Skills, Additional Skills, Related Skills etc.). This is where you add any relevant "hard skills" or knowledge areas. Depending on the importance to the position, this heading may be on the first page.
- Programming Languages: C/C++, Visual C++, Visual Basic
- Graphic Programs: Corel Draw, AutoCAD
- Office Applications: MS Word, MS Excel, MS PowerPoint

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Name of Conference/ Course/Workshop/Training   Dates
Name of company or organization, city, province
- State any license/certificate/designation received and expiration date (if needed)
- For conferences a brief overview could be provided especially if it is unique (one time offering)

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS
Canadian xxxxx Association   Date
Ontario Association of xxxxxxx

INTERESTS (optional) or PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS

- Tennis: Competed extensively through Canada in various junior and senior tournaments
- Public Speaking: Joined the local toastmasters group to improve speaking skills

** Review the alternate resume heading sections to market your experience most effectively.

RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS

THE CREATIVE RESUME

The human brain can process images faster than words, colour increases interest and when it gets paired with a visual, it gets more views.
- **Get a person's atten**tion, create a colourful visual application; change your traditional resume into a creative resume.
- Use reputable sites to create it. Check out novoresume.com or visualcv.com as possible options to design your resume. Many sites have free versions as well as paid plans that give access to more features and templates.
- Ensure that it is ATS friendly template if you are applying online.

Is this technique right for everyone? Definitely not!
- Know your industry, the company, and the acceptance level for the non-traditional.
- Develop your creative document as well as your traditional materials and have them prepared to submit.
- CAUTION: Even if you feel like you found the perfect company to send your creative resume to, beware that it might not get through the ATS (Automatic Tracking System) filters.

Don't overdo it. The point here is "skim ability". Before you use it, have it reviewed for clarity and design. Make your value easy to see and answer the question for the employer:
- What problem will this candidate potentially solve for me?
- Does it send the right message about your suitability for the job?
- Does it look visually appealing?

IDENTIFY YOUR VALUE MESSAGE
What do you want to be remembered for? Don't take this part lightly—it's the basis for everything else. Now, using that sentence, craft a headline that describes your value using keywords from your industry.

A favourite design is to choose top 2-4 competencies that at one glance communicates your most important qualifications. E.g. MARKETING | ANALYST | DIGITAL MEDIA

MAKE LISTS OF YOUR SKILLS, WORK EXPERIENCE, VOLUNTEER, AND EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES
Take an honest look at what skills and accomplishments specifically support your value message.

For your work experience, write out each position that is relevant, the length of time you held the position, and your best accomplishments in that position.

Example of a Creative Resume

Mac Alumni

Career Goal/Job Title

CONTACT

(123) 456 7899
email@mcmaster.ca
Personalized LinkedIn URL

EDUCATION

MCMASTER UNIVERSITY

Hamilton, ON
Bachelor of _____ (Major)
2012 - 2016

- Add any relevant subjects taken with a brief description
- Add research/projects undertaken with brief description or results if possible
- Add academic awards if significant

PERSONAL PROFILE

Make a statement that will identify what you are seeking

CAREER ACHIEVEMENTS

- Your relevant experience
- Your credentials/training/education relevant to the position
- One significant accomplishment, very briefly stated
- One or two skills/strengths with some qualifying statements to back it up
- A reference to your values, commitment, or work ethic
- Accomplishments related to the position you are applying for

EXPERIENCE

POSITION TITLE (WORK)

Company/organization – city, province
2016 – Present

- Use one liners to describe your relevant activities in that position
- Use action verbs to give your one-liners more impact
- Describe an initiative you took or an achievement you had with results
- Consider using SAR formula (situation, action, result)
- Emphasize your transferable skills (leadership, organization, team work, etc.)

POSITION TITLE (VOLUNTEER)

Name of club, charity, event – city, province
2014 – 2015

- Describe what you did in this position
- Emphasize your transferable skills and any achievements

POSITION TITLE (EXTRA-CURRICULAR)

Name of club, charity, event – city, province
2014 – 2015

- Describe what you did in this position
- Emphasize your transferable skills and any achievements

TECHNICAL SKILLS

Mac OS	■■■■■
Windows	■■■■■
Adobe Suite	■■■■
Programming C++	■■■■■

PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

Management	▲▲▲
Team Player	▲▲▲▲▲
Organization	▲▲▲▲▲
Communication	▲▲▲▲
Leadership	▲▲▲▲▲
Creative Thinking	▲▲▲▲

LANGUAGES

|	
English	●●●●●
French	●●●●
Spanish	●●●●

RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS

WHAT IS A COVER LETTER AND WHY DO I NEED ONE?
A cover letter should accompany **every** resume, unless otherwise stated. It is an opportunity to explain to the hiring manager why they should consider you and why the attached resume will be of some interest to them. This is where you highlight and expand on your **most relevant** points in your resume.

A good cover letter will:

- Give the reader a **sense of the person** behind the words, demonstrate interest and enthusiasm.
- **Relate to the reader and provide examples** of your relevant experiences, skills or qualities.
- **Link** your experience to the position through storytelling.
- Be **professional** in tone and appearance and contain no spelling or grammar errors.

Employer		You	
Need 1		Example 1	
Need 2		Example 2	
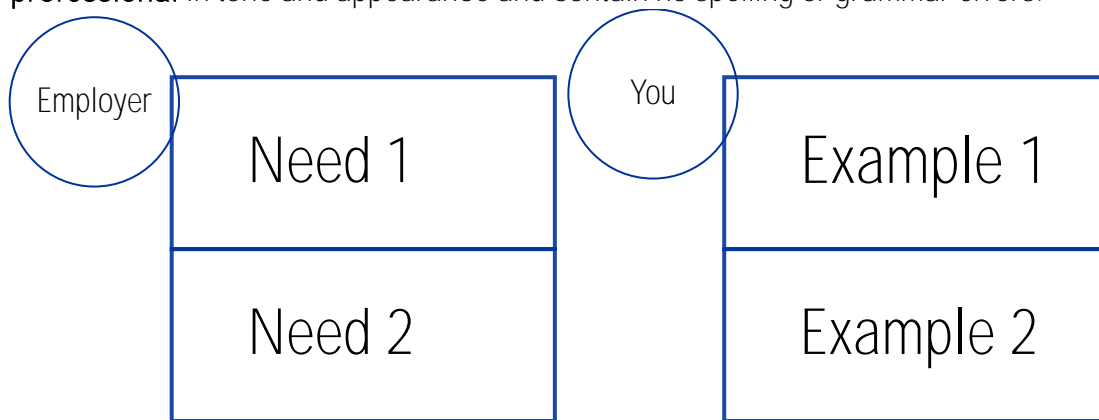
Cover letter writing takes practice. Here are some tips to make it easier:

- Highlight the skills, experiences or qualifications in the full **job description or occupation profile. Use this as a check to cover the** most important ones in your cover letter (and your resume!)
- Job postings usually list the most important aspects first in the list of requirements.
- **Research the organization/department** so you can talk about how your values and interest match the their goals and values.
- Know what you can and want to contribute **– your skills, qualities, and experiences**. This is the pivotal aspect in the whole job search process. It is where you start your goal setting and it is information you will need to provide throughout the job application process (resumes, interviews, phone calls, etc.).
- **Get support** by getting your letter proofread for overall tone, content and spelling errors/typos.
- You can disclose information about yourself if you think it will support your application or fill a diversity hiring need, (i.e. Disability, Indigenous, etc.). Many inclusive employers encourage applicants from **diverse backgrounds. Using language like 'lived experience' is recommended.**

Common mistakes:
- Sounding too much like your resume, by using short sentences or bullet points that do not provide any additional information.
- Not tailoring, or forgetting to update the company to which you are applying.
- Not articulating how previous experience relates or adds value to the role to which you are applying.

RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS

COVER LETTER FORMAT

Your Contact Info (Can use the same format as the header on your resume)

Date you will Submit Application

Full Name of Individual in Hiring Position (Make sure spelling is correct)
Position of the Individual
Company name
Address
Postal Code

Re: Application for Job ID #/ Job Title, if applicable.

Dear Ms., Mr. or use full name, (If the name is not available, Hiring Manager)

The first paragraph usually addresses: what **position** you are applying for, **how you became aware** of the position, **why you are interested** in the position or organization. You can integrate some of your **key qualifications as an opener and to grab the reader's attention.**

The **middle 2-3 paragraphs** usually addresses: how your experience (work, academic, volunteer), skills, and interests **relate to the position** and how your **values/goals fit with the organization**. **Customize each letter** and address specific qualifications that have been identified in the posting. Customized letters are more engaging to read and leave the best impression.

Use your understanding of the job requirements to decide which skills and experiences to highlight. Provide 1-2 select **specific examples from your experience to peak the reader's attention. Use** Situation, Task, Action, Result (STAR) stories to explain these experiences by telling a story. Include characteristics that make you a good employee and provide some evidence of such (i.e. Awards, feedback from supervisors or clients).

In the closing paragraph briefly summarize your interest or good fit. Explain how you can be contacted. Finish the letter with some pleasantries such as: I look forward to meeting with you to discuss how I may contribute to your team or thank you for considering my application.

Sincerely,

Full Name