

**Office of Career Services  
Southeastern Louisiana University**



**Resume, Cover Letter, and References  
Guidelines**

*Market yourself in the job search by developing professional correspondence that will effectively highlight the skills you have to offer an employer.*

**OFFICE OF CAREER SERVICES**

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**CAREER COUNSELORS** are available in the Office of Career Services to assist juniors, seniors, graduate students, and alumni with developing a resume and cover letter that will make that first impression a positive, lasting one!

**DID YOU KNOW?** By learning how to describe your knowledge and skills on your resume with language and terminology specific to your career goals, you are also preparing for describing your knowledge and skills during the job interview - think about it!

**REMEMBER!** **HOW** you apply for a job is as important as the qualifications you have to offer. In fact, you should view your **JOB SEARCH SKILLS** as part of your overall qualifications. Employers evaluate not only the skills you possess **FOR THE JOB**, but also the skills you exhibit in **LOOKING FOR THE JOB**, such as the quality of your resume and cover letter, and your ability to conduct yourself professionally throughout the interview process.

#### **CAREER COUNSELING SERVICES INCLUDE ASSISTANCE WITH:**

##### **THE RESUME**

###### *Learn How To:*

- Develop the content of your resume to better “sell” what you have to offer
- Develop the format of your resume for optimal visual effect and “scannability”

##### **THE COVER LETTER**

###### *Learn How To:*

- Display your writing skills - ability to organize thoughts and communicate effectively.
- Demonstrate that you have “done your homework” by researching the company

##### **THE REFERENCES PAGE/LETTERS**

###### *Learn How To:*

- Support your application for a job with appropriate, relevant reference.
- Develop proper formats for presenting references information to an employer

#### **CAREER ASSESSMENT**

**Talk to your career counselor about career assessment – interest and personality inventories – designed to help you better understand your work-related interests and personality strengths.**

Your career assessment results can be useful to you in finding a career path as well as developing your cover letter and resume.

- **Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)** - learn contributions of your “type” to the work organization, your communication, leadership, and team work styles.
- **COPS Interest Inventory** - clarify fields of interest you may want to consider in your job search.
- Receive lists of careers based on your MBTI type and COPS interests, and research on web sites below.

#### **CAREER INFORMATION**

**SIGIPLUS** - an on-line career information resource via the CS web site, SIGI provides information for those just beginning a job search, or making a job or career change. The **Occupational Outlook Handbook** and **O\*NET** are additional on-line resources available. **In SIGIPLUS, access the following sections most relevant to the job seeker:**

- **Search by College Major.** . . . View list of career options related to your college major.
- **Information.** . . . . .View information on 250+ careers - qualifications, outlook, etc.

## RESUME, COVER LETTER, AND REFERENCES GUIDELINES

Although there is no “perfect” or “right” resume format, following are guidelines to assist you in developing a professional resume, as well as a cover letter and references page. PLEASE NOTE: These guidelines are a compilation of recommendations from both employers and university career services offices staff.

### Resume Format: Remember to *Keep it Simple!*

Make sure your resume can pass the scrutiny of an electronic scanner – i.e., if the resume is sent through USPS mail, or distributed at a career fair, the employer may scan the resume into a computer database.

#### “SCANNABLE RESUME” SUGGESTIONS:

- ❑ Use white or off-white bond paper, and a high-quality printer with black ink
- ❑ **Avoid** *italics*, underlining, **shading**, borders, and graphics
- ❑ **Use bold type, ALL CAPS, and bullets** to emphasize major headings and points
- ❑ A one page resume is recommended; but if two pages, do not staple – use paper clip
- ❑ Use font no smaller than 10 point and no larger than 12 point; Times Roman or Arial fonts are suggested for professional appearance and “readability”

#### Additional Formatting Suggestions:

##### AVOID ERRORS IN GRAMMAR, PUNCTUATION, AND SPELLING!!!

- ❑ Create a **header** for the first page of your resume (name, address, phone, and email address) – DO NOT put the word “Resume” as part of your header
- ❑ If a two-page resume, on the second page, put your name and telephone number at the top on the left margin, and “Page 2” at the top on the right margin
- ❑ Make sure your email address is professional (no “hotdog@msn.com’s”)
- ❑ List month and year only – and no comma in between – for dates (e.g., May 2003)
  
- ❑ Make sure spacing is **visually appealing** – a one-inch margin all around is recommended – if you must use narrower margins, use no narrower than .75 inch
- ❑ Using resume-writing **templates** is discouraged - templates make it difficult to adjust spacing and can unnecessarily “bump” your resume to two pages
- ❑ Do not include personal information such as age, marital status, Social Security number, etc. (such information is not relevant to your qualifications for the position)
- ❑ The statement “References Available Upon Request” is acceptable to include (yet optional)
  
- ❑ **Do not fold** resume/cover letter - use a manila envelope for mailing – light-colored manila envelopes are more visually appealing than the traditional “orange” color
- ❑ If possible, use labels rather than type or print addresses directly on envelope; or, if typing directly on envelope, use high-quality printer

## Resume Content: Remember to *Sell Yourself!*

### Objective (optional)

- ❑ Give resume **focus** by including an **objective**. Choose from three types of objectives:
  1. Field-specific objective (“A career in sales....”)
  2. Skills-specific objective (“The opportunity to apply communication skills....”)
  3. Combined field and skills-specific objective (“Career in sales with opportunity to apply communication skills....”)

### Skills Summary (optional)

- ❑ Create bulleted statements which describe personal characteristics and areas of knowledge, and areas of experience
- ❑ Tailor resume to career goal by describing **transferable** knowledge and skills you possess – i.e., those which apply to the type of work you’re seeking
- ❑ Include statement describing computer skills
- ❑ Include statement(s) describing special course projects (“Special course projects included....”)

### Education

- ❑ List most recent educational experience first, and other colleges attended in reverse chronological order (not necessary to list other colleges if attended only one or two semesters, and not necessary to list high school unless had significant accomplishments)
- ❑ Verify type of degree you’re obtaining or have obtained (look in college catalog):
  - “**Bachelor of Arts, Psychology**”                      “**Bachelor of General Studies**”
  - “**Bachelor of Science, Accounting**”            “**Master of Business Administration**”
  - “**Associate of Arts, Office Administration**”    “**Master of Education, Counselor Education**”
- ❑ **NOTE! Accounting majors who have completed, or will complete, the 150-hour CPA requirement should state this (e.g., “Completed 150-hour CPA requirement”).**
- ❑ List a minor if you have one (“Minor in Management”)
- ❑ List some of the courses in your major, and/or minor, to support your objective (**do not** list course numbers – only titles; course numbers are irrelevant to an employer). Use **subheading** “Major Coursework Included” and/or “Additional Coursework Included”
- ❑ Along with the name of the university or college you attended, list the city and state
- ❑ List graduation date as follows: “**Graduation Date: May 2004.**” Even if you have not yet graduated, list this rather than “Anticipated Graduation Date: May 2004”
- ❑ List Overall and/or Major GPA if 3.0 or higher

### Experience

#### *For each job listed:*

- ❑ Begin with most recent job first and list others in reverse chronological order
- ❑ Include statement describing **context** of work environment (type of business or organization – its services and/or products, etc.)
- ❑ Include **numbers** and/or **percentages** if possible (of staff for whom you worked, customers served, increase in sales, etc.)
- ❑ Describe **skills** and **knowledge** acquired, **how applied**, and if possible, **results** of efforts
- ❑ Describe specific **accomplishments, initiatives or contributions** made to the job or company
- ❑ **Internships** may be listed under “Experience,” as well as **volunteer work** if it supports Objective

### Activities/Honors

- ❑ List **student or other organizations** to which you belong(ed), and
- ❑ List **offices held**, and dates held; and/or **committees** on which you served
- ❑ List **honors** such as “Dean’s List,” “Gamma Beta Phi honor society,” etc., and **awards** received
- ❑ List **volunteer** experiences – your “job title,” name of organization, city, state – and dates

## “Outline of My Knowledge and Skills”

Use the following example to assist you in describing qualifications you can offer to an employer in the job descriptions on your resume. Think in terms of:

- I. Knowledge and skills you acquired in a particular job or educational experience. Emphasize knowledge and skills most relevant and transferable to your career objective.
- II. Results or accomplishments that occurred from developing and/or applying that knowledge/skill (such as improving a work environment, contributing to a team effort, or your own personal growth).
- III. The context of your work experiences – WHERE you worked (describe office or company); for WHOM you worked (a person with a high level of responsibility? Many people?), and include a brief descriptive statement of the context of each job and/or company.

**The terms “knowledge” and “skills” can be used interchangeably. The example and outline below are structured to help you distinguish between the actual tasks you performed on the job, and the knowledge and skills you developed and applied in performing those tasks, to assist you in preparing your resume as well as preparing to discuss your qualifications in a job interview.**

### DESCRIBING WORK EXPERIENCE:

Use **ACTION VERBS** to describe work experience and skills. **PAY ATTENTION TO VERB TENSE!** For example, if describing current employment, use present tense.

Achieved	Conducted	Directed	Initiated	Prepared
Administered	Coordinated	Evaluated	Instituted	Presented
Advised	Counseled	Expanded	Maintained	Researched
Analyzed	Created	Expedited	Managed	Reviewed
Assisted	Delegated	Facilitated	Marketed	Supervised
Balanced	Demonstrated	Generated	Motivated	Trained
Calculated	Designed	Implemented	Organized	
Compiled	Developed	Improved	Planned	

**USE TERMINOLOGY OR “BUZZWORDS” OF YOUR PARTICULAR FIELD OF INTEREST AND/OR STUDY.**

**Job Title:** Student Assistant

**Place of Employment or Other Experience (e.g., student organization, volunteer work, etc.):**  
Office of Admissions, Southeastern Louisiana University, Hammond, LA

**Tasks Performed:** Performed office administration functions including assisting students with application to university, organizing and updating student files, corresponding with prospective students re: status of application. Utilized PeopleSoft software to perform office activities. Assisted professional staff with freshmen orientations to the university.

**Knowledge/Skills Acquired:** Customer service skills, including friendly and courteous interaction with prospective students; attentive listening skills; patience in addressing concerns or complaints. Administrative skills including attention to detail, planning and organizational skills, analyzing information to make decisions, ability to work under pressure of deadlines, and managing multiple tasks simultaneously.

**Results/Accomplishments:** On own initiative, updated and reorganized filing system by making new folders and alphabetizing in more efficient system than previously existed. Commended by supervisor for customer service skills, responsibility and self-motivation.

## THE COVER LETTER or LETTER OF APPLICATION

It is recommended that you accompany your resume with a cover letter (also known as a “letter of application”) when initially contacting a specific employer.

### Format

- Create a header - use it for your resume, cover letter, and reference page (use high quality printer)
- Limit to one page; use white or pastel colored paper (use same for resume and references page)
- **Include date!** And remember, check for typos, grammatical and spelling errors – **MUST BE ERROR FREE!**

### Content

- Address letter to contact person/person hiring if possible, or to “Dear Human Resources Director,” “Dear Hiring Manager,” “Dear Search Committee Chair,” etc.
- First paragraph should state how you learned of the position, and reference the position title and company or organization name.
- Vary sentence structure so that you do not start every sentence with “I”.
- Explain WHY you want to work for this particular company/organization. Include statements describing knowledge you have of company.
- Select examples from past work experience instead of repeating your entire work history.
- Tactfully suggest your availability for an interview, where and how you can be reached.
- Once a cover letter is written, it can be tailored to other positions for which you apply.

## THE REFERENCES

A reference/recommendation is a verbal or written statement by someone who can comment on your work, academic, or organization/community service performance, in support of your application for a job.

- Reference information should be provided on a page separate from your resume, **NOT ON THE RESUME**. The phrase “References Available Upon Request” may be included on your resume, but if included, DO NOT include a separate references page. Instead, bring copies of reference page in a portfolio to the interview.
- The references page should contain the same header as your resume, with the word **REFERENCES** underneath. No page number is necessary.
- Three to five is a sufficient number of references to list on your references page.
- References should be people in positions of authority who have direct knowledge of your work performance and/or academic performance and/or student organization/community service activities performance.
- **CHARACTER REFERENCES (E.G., A FRIEND, MINISTER OF YOUR CHURCH) SHOULD BE AVOIDED.**
- **ALWAYS ASK PERMISSION** to use someone as a reference, and **GIVE THE REFERENCE A COPY OF YOUR RESUME**. This will be helpful to the reference if he/she is contacted by a prospective employer.
- Each reference’s name, current job title, place of employment (including city and state - mailing address not necessary), and work telephone number including area code (NOT home telephone number unless given permission to list).

## LETTERS OF REFERENCE or RECOMMENDATION

You may also ask each reference to write a letter of recommendation for you. An employer may eventually ask for such letters, particularly if you are hired. **SUCH LETTERS MAY BE ADDRESSED “DEAR HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTOR,” “DEAR HIRING MANAGER,” OR “DEAR SEARCH COMMITTEE CHAIR,”** or by using this contact person’s name, and should be current - i.e., **DATED WITHIN THE CURRENT YEAR.**

If possible (without causing inconvenience to the person recommending you), letters should be addressed to the person responsible for hiring. Photocopied current letters of recommendation may be sent if a job advertisement requests that you send letters with your resume, unless original copies are requested.