Résumé Writing 101

CSMLS spoke to multiple hiring and laboratory managers across Canada to get a sense of what employers are looking for in a résumé. Below are some tips to help you craft a résumé to land your dream job. After all, you only get one chance to make a first impression!

Layout/Format

* Résumés should be about two pages in length (not including the cover letter).
* Be concise and to the point.
* Ensure you have used proper spelling and grammar.
* Include important information in the top third of the page.
* Simply state information; don’t try to use long sentences to get the point across when a simple one will do the trick.
* Don’t bury important information because it might get missed by a hiring manager.
* Don’t include obvious information; it’s a waste of valuable real estate.
* Catch their attention with easy-to-read font and use of bold and underline features to draw their attention to the information you want to highlight.
* A manager may not spend a lot of time reading résumés so be sure to show your qualifications early and clearly.
* Don’t include too much content; include only relevant points for that role (more information can be given at the interview).

Cover Letter

* Cover letters should be no longer than one page in length.
* Tells your story outside of just the facts and figures in the résumé.
* Provides the employer with a chance to see how you write, how you sell yourself, who you are and what makes you stand out.
* Include what attracted you to this role and why you are applying for this job.
* Can be used to fill in a gap in your résumé (if you have been laid off, on leave, etc.) and should answer any questions/concerns a potential employer might have.
* If there is a specific qualification from the job posting that you don’t have, use this as a place to explain why you would still be the ideal candidate.
* Some employers use cover letters to determine if a candidate will be shortlisted or to narrow down choices.

What to Include

* Contact information (name, email, address, phone number, etc.) at the top and easy to read.
* Professional email address; some employers will remove a résumé with an inappropriate email.
* Transferable skills from previous jobs (even if the job is unrelated, the skills you learned might be beneficial).
* Requirements listed in the job posting and be sure to include keywords; prove your knowledge of acronyms and specific lingo for the profession.
* Relevant education and work experience only.
* Area(s) you’ve specialized in.
* Summary of qualifications/career highlights: 5-7 bullet points that address the qualifications listed in the job posting.
* Ambitions and career goals; some employers want to see this future thinking from their employees.
* Credentials, especially if certification is a requirement.
* Use words and phrases directly from the job posting. Some employers run résumés through computer programs that specifically target these.
* For employment experience, don’t just copy and paste bullets from your current job description; this doesn’t demonstrate critical thinking or problem-solving skills.
* Approach the employment part as a list of accomplishments not duties; include practical examples of how you used your strengths, knowledge or resources to improve a situation or benefit your managers, peers or patients.
* An objective statement is not required. Only include one if it’s not intuitive as to why you are applying for the job.
* There is no need to include high school information. It’s not pertinent to the job and only serves to potentially indicate your age.

References

* Standard is to include “Available upon request” in your résumé.
* You should only include a reference in your résumé if that person has some connection with the place you are applying to or the individual interviewing you.

REMEMBER TO:

* Have someone else review your résumé.
* Put some effort into it!