

Writing Resumes and Cover Letters

A guide for newcomers to British Columbia



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1. Why are resumes and cover letters important?

In Canada, employers expect to receive a resume and cover letter that identifies the position you are applying for and summarizes your relevant experience.

The goal is to highlight your education, skills and experience, and demonstrate the value you will bring to the position. Your resume and cover letter are your first introduction to a prospective employer, and should be written clearly and professionally.

Before you start

Before you start writing, think about:

- **Your qualifications and skills:** what would you contribute to the company or organization? Why would you be a valuable employee?
- **Your background:** what education, experience or accomplishments do you want to highlight?
- **Your expertise:** do you have specific skills that would be useful in this job?
- **Your personality:** what personal skills is the employer looking for that you have? Time management? Multi-tasking? Project management?
- **The position itself:** what skills are required for this job? What experience do you have that is similar?
- **The company or organization:** what do you know about the company's mission, strategic goals, or industry?

Developing a resume and cover letter requires time and effort.

While you may want to have a “master” copy on hand, it is important to customize your resume and cover letter each time you apply for a job. This shows prospective employers that you are interested in the specific position they are offering, and it allows you to focus your resume and cover letter to show exactly how you fit the requirements of the job.

2. Writing your resume

- Chronological versus functional
- Information to include
- What not to include
- LinkedIn

Chronological versus functional

There are two basic types of resume: chronological and functional.

Many Canadian resumes are **chronological**, and it is what most employers expect. They are easy to scan and provide a clear timeline of your work and experience. This style is useful for most professions, and is probably the type of resume you will want to develop.

Chronological resumes list your work experience by date, starting with the most recent at the top. They can also help demonstrate how you’ve developed in your career, or taken on new responsibilities over time.

Chronological resumes look like this: <https://www.bcjobs.ca/blog/chronological-resumes/>.

Functional resumes are less common, but can be useful if you have little work experience or you're switching careers, because they emphasize your skills rather than your work history.

In a functional resume, you group your work experience by skill, rather than position. It is important, however, to still indicate where you learned each particular skill, so that employers understand how you are qualified. If you write a functional resume, you should also still include a brief list of positions held, along with the dates you held them.

A sample functional resume looks like this: <https://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/functional-resume-break-tradition>

Combination resumes are another option, using both chronological and functional aspects. These are usually only used for high-level executives with a large amount of experience, or individuals with specialized skills. Combination resumes can look like this: <https://www.bcjobs.ca/blog/combination-resumes/>

For more information on these formats, and to decide which is best for you, read this Monster.com article, "Should you use a chronological or functional resume?" <https://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/chronological-resume-or-functional-resume>

See also: <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resumes-cover-letters/chronological-vs-functional-resume>

Information to Include

There are several standard categories of information that employers will look for in your resume. These are:

- Contact information

- Education
- Work history and experience
- Technical skills
- Other information like relevant awards, association membership, or volunteer experience

Contact information

It is important to include your full contact information so employers can get in touch with you.

Place your contact information at the top of the page, and write your name in larger font so that it stands out from the rest of the page. Many people put their contact information in the document header, as it looks professional and leaves more room on the page for other information.

Include your name, mailing address, phone number, and email address. If you have a professional blog or twitter account, you can provide a link to that as well, but only if these are current, professional, and related to the job you are applying for.

Education

List the degrees and diplomas you've obtained, starting with the most recent. Provide the name of the school, the city where it's located, your area of study, and the dates of your program or graduation.

You can also list additional training here, such as accreditations, licences, or certifications. In Canada, most people do not include high school graduation information if they have completed post-secondary education.

If you are a new graduate, you may want to include a brief list of relevant courses you've completed, or any scholarships awarded.

Work history and experience

Include the following information for each relevant job you've held:

- Job title
- Name of the company or organization where you worked
- Dates of employment (including just the years is usually sufficient, unless you worked there for a short amount of time)

For each position, also provide a summary of your job responsibilities, functions, and accomplishments. Be as specific as you can, and quantify your experiences whenever possible; for example, if you were a supervisor, list exactly how many people you supervised. This helps the employer understand the scope of your experience.

Include any promotions you received by listing new job titles or additional responsibilities you took on.

Remember to use action words to describe what you've achieved.

Technical skills

Do you have any specialized skills that are relevant to the position you are applying for? If so, include them. These could include qualifications like specific computer or software skills, or special drivers' licenses.

Other information

Include any additional information that you think is relevant to the job and helps you stand out from other candidates. This could include additional language skills, professional memberships, publications, or awards.

Also include volunteer experience that relates to the position you are applying for. Employers value relevant volunteer experience, and this is a useful way to show how you've gained experience even if you don't have much work history.

Additional tips for what to include are found in Career Cruising's *Employment Guide* (including resumes, letters, interview skills). Available from the VPL Digital Library | Explore our Digital Library page: <http://www.vpl.ca/digital-library/career-cruising/>

See also WorkBC: <https://www.workbc.ca/Jobs-Careers/Find-Jobs/Job-application-tips.aspx>

What not to include

In Canada, you do not include personal information in your resume such as:

- Age, place or date of birth
- Marital status
- Immigration status
- Social Insurance Number

You are also not expected to provide a photo of yourself, unless you are applying for work as a model or actor.

Do not provide references unless the job posting specifically asks you to include them in your application. If you do need to provide references, list them on a separate page, rather than in your resume. Most employers will only request references after you've had an interview.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a popular social media site where you can post information about your work experience and education.

Many employers check job applicants' LinkedIn profiles, and it is a good way to promote your skills online. Employers may also be interested to see who you are connected to professionally, and which organizations or professional associations you are a member of.

Remember that LinkedIn profiles are public, so be sure to keep yours up-to-date and professional. Creating a basic LinkedIn profile is free. For more information, or to set up a profile, visit the LinkedIn webpage <https://ca.linkedin.com/>.

See also:

- <https://www.linkedin.com/help/linkedin/answer/a554351/how-do-i-create-a-good-linkedin-profile-?lang=en>
- <https://www.linkedin.com/business/sales/blog/profile-best-practices/17-steps-to-a-better-linkedin-profile-in-2017>

3. Writing your cover letter

- Do your research
- Header
- Body
- Closing
- Tips

Your cover letter is your chance to introduce yourself to a prospective employer, and explain why you think you are the best candidate for the job. Cover letters

should always be included when you are applying in response to a job advertisement.

Your cover letter is also a good place to include skills that are hard to categorize under any single job position. For example, if good communication skills, organization, or multi-tasking are important qualifications for the job you are applying for, use your cover letter to explain how you demonstrate these in the workplace.

Sample cover letters can be found here: <https://www.monster.ca/career-advice/cover-letter-resumes/cover-letter-samples>

Do Your Research

The first step to writing a good cover letter is to do your research. Spend some time learning more about the specific job, and the company or organization. This is an important step to show employers that you understand the position you are applying for, and that you are interested in and knowledgeable about the company itself.

To learn more about the job, think about the tasks you would be required to carry out. Look at similar job postings to find typical duties. You might want to look at the National Occupational Classification website to view lists of typical duties to get a better idea of what the position might involve:

<https://noc.esdc.gc.ca/>

You may also consider arranging an informational interview with the company's Human Resources department, to learn more about the position. Take a look at the following guide for more information on how to arrange an informational interview:

- **Networking for Employment**

<http://skilledimmigrants.vpl.ca>

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To learn more about the company, look at their website for information. Mission and vision statements are good ways to learn about a company's values and objectives, while marketing material and annual reports can provide information about key executives, recent projects, and new directions.

It is also important to write a new cover letter for each position you apply for. Your letter should be targeted at the specific job you're applying for, so that you highlight your most important skills and experience. The more customized your letter is, the more easily the employer can imagine you in their company.

Header

Cover letters should include the following information at the top of the document:

- Date
- Your full name and address
 - Tip: if you've placed this information in a header on your resume, use the same header for your cover letter
- Employer's full address

Whenever possible, address your letter to a specific person. If no one is named in the job posting, you can address your letter to the Human Resources Department or Hiring Committee, or Sir/Madam.

Body

The body of the cover letter is where you explain why you are interested in the position, what skills you would bring to the position, and what experience you have that makes you a suitable candidate.

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In the opening paragraph, explain what position you are applying for; include the position or application number if there is one in the advertisement. Explain why you are interested in this position and company, and include a brief statement of what you would bring the job.

Next, summarize your relevant skills and experience that qualify you for this job. Focus on your strengths, and provide specific examples of work you've completed. Don't just repeat your resume. Instead, use your cover letter to expand on your resume, and provide details about how your skills will be a valuable addition to the company. Try to link your skills with the position's requirements. Be sure to use keywords from the job posting to match your skills to the ones they're looking for.

Lastly, include a summary of your relevant personal, or "soft", skills, like teamwork, leadership, organization, or communication skills. These are often hard to include in your resume, but are important to employers, who are looking for candidates with both the right qualifications and the right personal "fit".

Closing

Finish your letter by explaining that you've attached your resume, and that you are interested in an interview to learn more about the position. Assume that the employer will have a positive response to your resume, and thank them for their time reviewing your application.

Finally, sign off using "Sincerely" followed by your full name. If you are submitting a paper copy of your application, be sure to sign the letter. Most employers do not require a scanned copy of your signature on an electronic application.

Cover Letter Tips

When writing your cover letter, keep these tips in mind:

- Using the same header for your cover letter and resume looks professional and consistent
- If you are submitting your cover letter in hard copy, print your letter on good-quality 8.5x11" paper
- Keep a copy of what letters you send for your reference; they're also a good starting point for your next application

4. Formatting and Final Touches

Length

Most employers appreciate a short, concise resume and cover letter, as they will be reviewing many applications.

Try to keep your cover letter to **1 page** and your resume to **2 pages**. If you are at a senior or executive level, or if you have a lot of work experience, however, make your application longer to ensure you have shared all the information you need to.

Formatting

When writing your cover letter and resume, be sure to leave lots of "**white space**", or areas without text, in the document. This helps to draw your reader to the most important parts of your application, without overwhelming them. You can create more white space by using bulleted lists, headings, and tabs. Just be careful to not have too much white space – don't give the impression that you have nothing else to say.

Consistency is also important. Use the same font throughout your resume and cover letters, and the same font size (except where you may enlarge or bold your font for emphasis). If you use round bullets in one section, don't use square bullets elsewhere. Paying attention to these small details show you are conscientious in your work.

Include the **page number and your name** on page 2 of your resume (and any additional pages), so that if the pages of your application are shuffled, the employer can easily gather your information back together.

Proofreading

Because your application is your introduction to prospective employers, be sure to carefully proofread your resume and cover letter. Some people find it helps to print a draft and review it by hand.

Don't forget to use Canadian spelling throughout. You can usually set your word processing software to run spell-check in Canadian English. Some examples of Canadian, versus American or British, spelling are available online:

<http://imej.wfu.edu/articles/1999/1/02/demo/tutorial/canas.html>

Submitting your application

Most employers now want to receive applications electronically. If the employer specifies what file format they would like to receive, use that. If they do not specify a format, combining your cover letter and resume into a single PDF file is quite standard, and easily opened by most software programs.

Remember to name your file professionally, and to include your name.

If the employer requests a hard-copy application, print your cover letter and resume on good quality 8/5x11" paper, and submit them, unfolded, in a large envelope.

5. Additional Resources

Still need more information? Try looking at the following resources:

- **How do I create a Canadian-style resume?**
<https://settlement.org/ontario/employment/find-a-job/resume/how-do-i-create-a-canadian-style-resume/>
Monster Resume Centre
<https://www.monster.ca/career-advice/cover-letter-resumes>
- **Tailoring Accomplishments to Your Cover Letter**
<https://www.livecareer.com/resources/cover-letters/how-to/write/cover-letter-accomplishment-samples>
- **Job Bank Build a professional resume**
<https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/findajob/resume-builder>
free tool will automatically generate a clear and polished resume using personal information that you input

The Vancouver Public Library also has a large collection of resume and cover letter resources, including:

- **Best Canadian cover letters**
VPL collection call number 650.142 G7381bc1
- **The perfect resume**
VPL collection call number 650.142 Q67p1
- **Rip the resume**
VPL collection call number 650.142 E47r

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- **Knock `em dead cover letters**

VPL collection call number 650.14205 Y31c

**Questions? Please ask the Information Staff in the Central Branch,
Vancouver Public Library or telephone 604-331-3603.**

Please note that the information in this guide is also available online through the Skilled Immigrant InfoCentre website at <http://skilledimmigrants.vpl.ca/>

