

# THE “DOS AND DON'TS” OF RESUME AND COVER LETTER WRITING (PLUS SAMPLE RESUME)

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## RESUMES

1. Do collect pertinent facts about yourself, including all the positive things about your education here at SIUE (include your GPAs [overall, major and minor] if they are 3.0 or better, plus any honors endorsements on your diploma). Also, under job experience, don't forget to feature the work you did on student publications and TV and radio productions and especially what you accomplished on your internship. Also list a full employment history (you never can tell when the boss who's doing the hiring also started out schlepping burgers at McDonald's), special skills, foreign language fluency (a huge advantage in jobs marketplace), and other college honors and distinctions. On page two, if you have enough info. for a second page, list mass communications course titles you completed that might be appropriate for the job you're seeking, along with names and contact information for at least three references. Lastly, add a line to let them know that you have a portfolio of your work available upon request. You can show them what you can do!

2. Put your name at the top of the resume page, displayed prominently in bigger and bolder type than the rest of the page. If you choose a different type style, make sure it's readable. Include a current address and phone number here in Edwardsville, if that's where you live right now, as well as a backup phone number (a close friend or relative) for messages if the potential employer can't get a hold of you. The most important contact number is your cell phone. Keep your mail box functional and check it a few times per day. A few hours are sometimes critical in a hiring situation. Change the SIUE address for your post-graduation address as soon as you move away from Edwardsville. You simply must have either a good-working telephone answering machine or electronic phone mail service with the phone company or your cell phone company. Record a short, courteous, professional-sounding outgoing message and check for your messages often.

3. For graduates seeking entry-level jobs, don't bother including a statement of objectives on your resume. Any specific objectives you list may limit the kinds of jobs for which you will be considered. If you feel you must say something about objectives, save it for your cover letter, or better yet, for the interview. Besides, it takes up space on page one of your resume. Finally, there's no such thing as a general statement of objectives on a resume that isn't boring, uninformative and hackneyed. Since what's on page one of your resume is the most important, don't use up valuable real estate with objectives.

4. When you cite your educational record, omit the high school you attended and high school activities unless there's something very special (e.g., National Honor Society, Valedictorian, student body president, etc.). Employers want to know what you've done recently. Include other schools or training courses from which you've graduated (e.g., Army tech. schools, etc.) and professional certifications (e.g., FCC Radiotelephone License, Microsoft IT Certifications). This shows your versatility and experience.

5. List all previous employment in reverse-chronological order, unless there are good reasons not to list something (eg., years spent making license plates in prison, etc.). Discuss these with your advisor or the internship coordinator. Remember, a sharp interviewer will ask you why there's a gap in your employment record for four years. If this corresponds to when you were in college, you have a good answer. If not, be prepared to provide a reason for the gap.

If there are many jobs you could list, select only the most recent, or the most interesting ones. In listing your work and professional experiences, prominently display the ones that are most

compatible with the kind of job you are currently seeking. But begin with the most recent job you've held and list the rest in reverse chronological order. Just list the beginning and ending years (e.g., "2001 to 2003") for each job. Do not list why you left any of these jobs. Include any military experience. In most employment situations, being a veteran may be a big plus. If you are older and more experienced and have had many kinds of jobs over the years, you can create two reverse-chronological lists, one for communications-related jobs (which you should list first) and one for earlier employment.

6. Be sure to list your memberships and activities in any professional organizations as well as student professional organizations (e.g., SPJ, PRSSA, our Ad Club, etc.).

7. Use active-voice verbs (e.g., "I supervised," not "supervised by me"). Be sure to Google "good resume words" or "powerful resume words" for tips on supercharging your resume language.

8. Keep your resume current. An employer will consider an applicant as careless if he/she uses an outdated resume or a cover letter he/she forgot to update. And if a person is careless or lazy about selling him/herself, how good a worker could he/she be for the company?

9. Most employers will trash-can a resume with any typos, spelling or grammar errors! They assume that if you can't produce as important a document as your resume without errors, you won't create careful, responsible work on the job, either. Use a dictionary and the spell-checker. After you've proofread your resume thoroughly, get someone else you trust to read it.

10. Some say that you should keep the length of your resume to one page. Although some employers like this, many others think that your resume should be as long as you need to fit all the relevant information you should share with a potential employer. Here's a working compromise: Your resume is usually accompanied by a cover letter. If you're close to being able to fit everything on one page, move something like your three references to the end of your cover letter. For those employers who read only page one, list the most important, most impressive facts first on your resume. I suggest this: Most SIUE graduates need two pages, one for all the important stuff, and the second for references, specific skills and mass comm. courses relevant to the job you're after. check out the sample resume at the end of this handout for how you might organize it. Don't get hung up in layout: Just make the layout visually clean, easy to read, and well-organized.

11. Put the following information toward the end of your resume (or cover letter):

a. The names, titles, addresses and phone numbers of no less than three references. If possible, name one or more media professionals along with the professor/s you may have asked to list as a reference. Do not just say, "References available upon request." Many employers want to know who supports your candidacy before they contact you further. They might know them. Other employers don't want to be bothered hanging on the phone with you, phone propped between ear and shoulder, while they write down all the contact information for your references. Give them to him/her at the outset.

b. Be sure to mention that "Portfolio [or a portfolio and resume tape/disc/website] are available upon request." If it's on a website, follow this statement with your URL. In addition, News-Editorial or P.R. hopefuls should send neat photocopies of five or six byline clips of their best-published stories along with any resumes, and mention that there's more available in their portfolio. For these grads, clips are as important as good cover letters and resumes. Then, if employers want to see more of their work, they can show them the portfolio/disc/website.

12. Be sure to use a good quality bond paper on your resume, and when you get it into final form for a mass mailing, give it a last edit for typos and then have it professionally printed. Don't settle for regular photocopies unless they are virtually indistinguishable from the quality of those professionally printed.

13. Do not list your birth date, your family situation (married, three children, divorced, etc.), and other personal things such as your state of health, your religion or political affiliations. These items are inappropriate and often illegal for employers to ask in this day and age. Also, don't attach your photograph to your resume. Your good looks should have nothing to do with your candidacy. If they do, you may not want to work there. Where it usually matters is if you're a TV journalist. Let's face it: some of us have a "face for radio." But they'll see you in your TV resume tape, anyway. Sending an 8 x 10 glossy reeks of egotism, too. Also, leave off your hobbies, etc., unless it's directly relevant to the job you seek, e.g., you're applying for a correspondent job at *Golf Digest* and you happen to be a scratch [zero handicap] golfer and were voted All-American on your college golf team. Bosses generally don't care how you spend your spare time.

14. Don't include a discussion of salaries, past or present or desired, in either your resume or cover letter. Wait for the interview.

**There is a sample resume at the end of this handout.**

## **COVER LETTERS**

A cover letter is not a part of your senior portfolio. It's certainly important when you're applying for an internship or a job, though...

1. Before a potential employer ever reads your resume, he/she reads your cover letter. If all you send in the mail is your resume, don't plan on an employer even reading it. Therefore this very important document should be just as flawlessly written and proofread as your resume. I have been told by many media employers that if they notice a typo, grammar error, or misspelling in the cover letter, they toss the whole package into the trash without ever reading the resume. These folks don't have to settle for second-best: Your most serious competitors' paperwork will be flawless and stylishly written.

2. Use this letter to briefly state your intention to apply for a specific job you've seen advertised or, as a query letter to a company you'd like to work at that has no openings just now. In a query letter, say you'd like to apply for any openings now or in the near future in your specialty area.

3. Cover letters are also used to summarize the strongest elements of your resume in a few paragraphs.

4. Don't send a form letter! Personalize each and every one with the name and title of the employer. Depending on the kind of media organization and the kind of job, say different things about yourself that reinforce why they should hire you for work at their company. If you send out hundreds (and you probably will), you may carefully formularize certain key sentences or even paragraph blocks for certain target audiences. But ultimately, each letter should be as specific to their particular job opening as possible. Employers often say, "If he/she doesn't take the time to learn who's in charge and what we do here, he's not right for us." So if you begin your cover letter with "To whom it may concern," or "Dear Sir or Madam," don't plan to ever hear from them. In fact, bad cover letters and resumes often end up as objects of derision on office bulletin boards.

5. Use the same quality and color paper for your cover letter that you used in creating the resume. Same with envelopes. Look classier than the rest.

6. Start with a self-introduction and what specific job or kind of job (don't use the word "position" - some employers don't like the term) you seek. This is key to your success: Briefly and persuasively explain how the skills you possess, found in more detail in your resume, are right for the job they have advertised. Provide some examples of your achievements if you can, and explain how you produce results. Remember, the job search is about showing them how you can help them, not the reverse.

7. Close each letter with the statement that a portfolio of your written and/or published work (and, if you're a broadcaster, a resume tape/disc) is available upon request. Put this statement on both your cover letter and your resume. Then state your hope that soon you and the employer can meet to discuss how you can contribute to their organization. Don't tell them that you will call them in a few days to arrange an interview. That's much too presumptive -- it's as if you're arrogantly saying, "Of course you'll want to interview me; I'm a control freak, too, and I want to manage when and how you'll see me." They will decide whether or not they want to call you in for an interview. But since you still want to aggressively pursue leads, wait a week or so and then pick up the phone and call the employer to make sure that he/she has received your cover letter and resume. This may result in an impromptu phone interview, which can give you a slight edge in finalist selection, and perhaps an invitation to visit. Getting face time in a visit may be especially helpful if they don't have any openings right now. Bring your portfolio and get to know the boss, and who knows? When they do have an opening, you may be the first person he/she thinks of.

8. Adjust the tone of your cover letter so it doesn't sound too formal (you almost can't be too conversational when writing to Ad and P.R. types or to many broadcasters (use broadcast style with them), and you can't be too journalistic-sounding when writing to a newspaper editor). Also, make sure you don't come off as desperate. Like dogs and bees, employers can smell fear.

9. Never use a cover letter to request information about the organization! Research this on your own on their website and other sources, so when you come for your interview, you'll impress them with your preparation. Other candidates will do this, so you want to come off the most prepared.

10. Finally, remember that like the frosting on a cake, the clothes you wear, or the cover of a book, your cover letter is what they see first, and makes that all-important first impression. The cover letter represents you and your resume until you have sold the employer on the importance of reading that resume. So make that cover letter look beautiful and read like Shakespeare.

Sample resume on next page...

# Sarah T. Graduate

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## ***Current Address***

126 Robertson St.  
Edwardsville, IL 62025  
cell (618) 692-2222  
stg@siue.edu

## ***Permanent Address***

84 Home St.  
La Salle, IL  
(815) 344-4444  
stg@hotmail.com

## **Education**

**Southern Illinois University Edwardsville**  
Bachelor of Arts degree, May, 2007 (GPA 3.21)  
Major: Mass Communications (GPA 3.36)  
Emphasis: Broadcast News  
Minor: Political Science (GPA 3.12)

## **University Honors**

- Dean's Scholar
- National Dean's List, 2005-2007
- President, SIUE Chapter, RTNDA

## **Experience** 2006

**KTVI-TV 2 (Fox)**  
Newsroom Intern

- Wrote/rewrote stories, taped network feeds, worked phones, ripped wire, operated prompter during newscasts
- Assisted producers in TV newscast preparation
- Served as assistant to assignment editors
- Learned to edit stories on Avid NewsCutter

2004-2006

**WSIE-FM, Edwardsville, IL**  
Part-time Radio News Reporter (paid staff)

- Compiled newscasts and announced on-air on weekends
- Worked news desk and the phones in afternoons on weekdays

2004-2006

**The Alestle (SIUE campus newspaper)**  
University Newspaper Reporter and Copy Editor (paid staff)

- covered events, wrote stories, shot pictures
- edited copy, laid out pages using Quark & Photoshop

2000-2003

**The La Salle News-Tribune**  
La Salle High School Activities Reporter (unpaid)

- wrote a weekly column and contributed occasional stories

## Technical Skills

- Windows, Mac operating systems, Word, Excel, Pro Tools, Quark, InDesign, Powerpoint, Photoshop & Dreamweaver
- Avid Express DV, Canon XL-1 & 2 mini-DV ENG cameras, Ross Synergy 3 video switcher, Chyron Duet character generator, Hitachi studio cameras

## Mass Communications Courses completed while at SIUE

- Electronic Media News
- Public Affairs Reporting
- TV Production
- Internship/Senior Portfolio
- Newswriting
- Electronic Media Performance
- Writing for the Media
- Media Law and Policy
- Media Management
- Introduction to Mass Media

## References

- John Jones  
Producer, *Fox 2 News*  
KTVI-TV  
5915 Berthold Ave  
St. Louis, MO 63110  
(314) 644-7525
- Tom Dehner  
News Director  
WSIE-FM  
Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville  
Box 1773  
Edwardsville, IL 62026  
(618) 692- 2941
- Dr. Ralph Donald  
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**Broadcast copy portfolio, radio and TV news resume discs available upon request**