
RESUME & COVER LETTER GUIDE

WRITE DOCUMENTS THAT GET NOTICED

The resume and cover letter are documents required by most employers as they consider candidates for a job or internship. This may be the first and only opportunity you have to make an impression, therefore it is important that these documents represent your skills, experience, and accomplishments well.

TIPS FOR STRONG DOCUMENTS

- Customize each resume and cover letter to a specific job
- Keep it simple – avoid using multiple colors, tables, or other graphics
- Proofread for grammar and spelling errors
- Get feedback from a career counselor, faculty advisor, or professional in the field
- Update your documents regularly with new experiences and accomplishments
- Send all documents as PDFs to keep formatting consistent

RESOURCES

In addition to this guide, you can use these resources to get assistance with your documents:

- **SEAS Open Career Advising Hours**
Work on your documents and receive feedback during these open hours. No appointments necessary, students will be served on a first come, first serve basis. Check the website (careers.seas.gwu.edu) for days and times.
- **Workshops**
Attend a resume and cover letter workshop to learn how to create strong documents. Log-in to Handshake (gwu.joinhandshake.com) and click on 'Events' to see upcoming workshops.
- **Resume, CV, Cover Letter Review Appointment**
Students who need more in-depth assistance can schedule an appointment with a career services staff member to review their documents. Log-in to Handshake (gwu.joinhandshake.com), click on 'Career Center' > 'Appointments' > 'Schedule New Appointment' to see the schedule.
- **VMock** (<https://www.vmock.com/gwu>)
**graduate student access will be available in fall 2019*
Upload your document to get instant, personalized feedback on your resume formatting and content. Follow the instructions at <https://app.joinhandshake.com/articles/10736> to register.
- **International Student Community Ambassadors (ISCA)**
All GW international students can receive peer-to-peer advising including resume and cover letter critiques. Visit go.gwu.edu/intlstudentcareerinfo for days and times.

RESUMES

A resume is an overview of your work and educational background that communicates your qualifications to a potential employer. Choose the appropriate resume style based on your background, experience level, and target industry. **For most people, the Chronological or Combination Style is recommended.**

- **Chronological**

Work experiences are listed in reverse chronological order with the most recent or current position first. This format is straightforward and a good way to show consistent work experience and career growth.

- **Functional**

Skills, knowledge, and achievements are grouped together to highlight transferrable skills. Work history with dates and places of employment is listed separately. This format is used less frequently and may work best for individuals with little work history or career changers whose previous experience is in a different industry.

- **Combination**

This format combines elements of the chronological and functional styles – work experiences are grouped together in sections to highlight relevant experiences. This style is appropriate for most people because it allows you to quickly and easily tailor your resume for each job application.

- **Curriculum Vitae (CV)**

In the United States, a CV is different than a resume. It is typically used in the academic and medical fields and focuses on education and research experience. CVs are generally longer and contain more sections than a resume (e.g., Teaching Experience, Publications, Research Projects, or Presentations).

RESUME FORMATTING

Consistency is key! Employers typically spend 7-10 seconds reviewing a candidate's resume. Good formatting allows the reader to quickly identify your qualifications.

DO	AVOID
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Set margins between .5 – 1.0 inch ✓ Choose an easy-to-read font, size 10-12 (Calibri, Times New Roman, Arial, Garamond, Gadugi) ✓ Be brief! 1 page for each 7-10 years of work experience ✓ Use bold, <i>italics</i>, CAPS, and <u>underlining</u> consistently ✓ Write dates with month and year (08/2019, August 2019, Aug 2019) ✓ Use active voice with correct verb tense (past tense for previous experience) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Grammar and spelling mistakes × 1st person pronouns (I, me, my) × Personal info (gender, marriage status, race/ethnicity, nationality, etc.) × References – provide only when requested × Jargon and elaborate language

RESUME SECTIONS

Each person's resume will vary based on their background and experiences, however there are some common sections that employers expect to see. **See example resumes on pages 5 and 6.**

REQUIRED SECTIONS	
Header (Contact Information)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name, phone number, email address (GW email or an appropriate personal email), physical address
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List schools in reverse order starting with most recent institution; include full name of institution and location (city, state or country if outside the U.S.) Degree (no abbreviations), major/concentration, and graduation date Grade point average (GPA) is optional
Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Languages Technical skills and certifications such as software, tools, and programming languages Indicate level of expertise for each skill (e.g., proficient, advanced, fluent) DO NOT list intangible skills in this section (e.g., good communicator, organized, etc.) – these types of skills should be described in the experience section
Experience (Work, Internships, Research, Projects)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name of organization and location (city, state or country) Job title Start and end dates of employment (month and year) Bullet point list of your activities, read page 4 for example descriptions
OPTIONAL SECTIONS	
Profile/Professional Summary	<p>For candidates with more extensive work history or career changers, a profile can provide an overview of your relevant skills, experiences, and goals. In a few sentences, describe how your background matches the qualifications for a specific job. Read this article from The Balance for more information and examples of resume profiles:</p> <p>https://www.thebalance.com/resume-profile-examples-2062828</p>
Professional Affiliations and Memberships	List any relevant industry organizations that you currently belong to and positions you hold.
Presentations or Publications	Include a citation or link to the work.
Honors or Awards	List awards that relate to the industry or showcase your skills. Academic honors can be listed with the corresponding institution in the education section.

WRITE STRONG DESCRIPTIONS

When writing about your experiences, do not just make a list of responsibilities. You must describe the experience and the skills you used. Write a detailed, yet concise description that focus on your **ACTION**, the **DETAILS** of what you did, and demonstrates **OUTCOMES**.

1. ACTION	2. DETAILS	3. OUTCOME
<p>What did you do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start with an action verb to convey a particular skill (list of verbs on page 9) Avoid phrases such as “responsible for” and “duties include” Review the job description to identify important skills and use similar language 	<p>How did you do it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who were you working with? Where? What tools or equipment did you use? What was the subject or topic? How often? How many? 	<p>Why did you do it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What was the reason or purpose of your work? Was there a change in the outcome? – Quantify results if possible. Can you share an accomplishment or reward?
<p>Collaborated with a <u>team of 6 engineering students</u> to design and build a <u>micro-satellite prototype</u> and <u>submitted a proposal to NASA</u>.</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px 10px; margin: 5px;">ACTION</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px 10px; margin: 5px;">DETAILS</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px 10px; margin: 5px;">DETAILS</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px 10px; margin: 5px;">OUTCOME</div> </div>		

EXAMPLES

- ✗ Responsible for software development.
- ✓ Designed software using Java and Eclipse to develop a cellular application to allow customers to take notes on their cell phone.
- ✗ Teaching assistant for 3 undergraduate courses.
- ✓ Created lesson plans, graded assignments, and held weekly office hours for 3 undergraduate computer science courses with a total of 65 students.
- ✗ Updated website with JavaScript, Python, and MySQL.
- ✓ Wrote and tested code for company website to improve performance and user experience using JavaScript, Python, and MySQL.

Gene Gray

Washington, DC, genegray@gwu.edu, (555) 555-5555, [graygenes.github.io](https://github.com/graygenes)

EDUCATION

The George Washington University, School of Engineering & Applied Science, Washington, DC
Master of Science in Computer Science, GPA 3.8/4.0 Expected May 2020

- **Relevant Coursework:** Design & Analysis of Algorithms, Computer System Architecture, Big Data & Analytics, Artificial Intelligence, Software Testing & Quality Assurance

South China University of Technology, Guangzhou, Guangdong, China
Bachelor of Science in Computer Software, GPA 92/100

May 2018

TECHNICAL SKILLS

Programming Languages: Java (Advanced), PHP (Advanced), SQL (Familiar), Python (Beginner)

Frameworks: Struts, Spring Boot, Spring MVC

Database Systems: MySQL, SQLite, Google Cloud Platform

Software: MATLAB, Microsoft Excel

RELEVANT PROJECTS

Speech Recognition Program, The George Washington University January 2019 – April 2019

- Developed software that can identify a speaker's voice by comparing their voice with an array of samples using the Hidden Markov Model.
- Simulated the superimposition of Hidden Markov Model states in MATLAB and achieved 95% recognition accuracy.

Cellular Phone Note App, The George Washington University September 2018 – December 2018

- Created software using Java to develop a cellular application that will allow customers to take notes on their cell phone.
- Tested software code to analyze specific word frequency used by customers and increased recognized vocabulary to 35,000+ words.

WORK & INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE

GW Hatchet, Washington, DC March 2019 – Present

Front End Developer

- Editing and designing the web page for GW's independent student newspaper using PHP and its frameworks.
- Meeting weekly with the editorial board to discuss plans for website design, metrics, and troubleshooting.

TECH Org, San Francisco, CA June 2019 – July 2019

Intern

- Implemented and evaluated algorithms and database queries to support scalability and stability.
- Researched new technologies and trends from industry journals and wrote recommendations to senior leadership.
- Worked closely with quality assurance testers, product owners, and utilized feedback from end users to rapidly fix bugs and incorporate suggestions for improvement.

ACTIVITIES & MEMBERSHIPS

GW Tech Collective, Women in Computer Science, American Association for Artificial Intelligence

Shelby Wu

800 22nd Street NW, Washington, DC | wushelby@gwu.edu | 555-555-555

EDUCATION

The George Washington University, School of Engineering & Applied Science, Washington, DC
 Doctorate of Philosophy in Civil Engineering and Environmental Engineering Expected 6/2022

Thesis: The Future of Water in Urban Environments

University of Rhode Island, Kingston, RI

Master of Science in Civil and Environmental Engineering 5/2017

Chi Epsilon Honors Society, American Society of Civil Engineers Fellowship Recipient

South China University of Technology, Guangzhou, Guangdong, China

Bachelor of Engineering in Hydraulic and Hydropower Engineering 5/2015

TECHNICAL SKILLS & LANGUAGES

Software: S-Frame, FlowMaster, StormCAD, SewerCAD, AutoCAD Civil 3D, MicroStation, ArcGIS

Languages: Fluent in Mandarin and English

RESEARCH PROJECTS

Environmental Engineering Lab, The George Washington University, Washington, DC 10/2018 – Current
 Lab Supervisor

- Mentoring a team of seven undergraduate students on water toxicity research.
- Educating and supervising students on equipment use including a gas chromatograph, an atomic absorption spectrophotometer, incubators, and associated water testing equipment.

Engineers for Sustainable World, San Mateo, Guatemala 2/2016 – 6/2016

Team Member, University of RI Chapter

- Researched and designed a dosing siphon and trickling filter to treat the effluent from a septic tank for a school of 200 students.
- Collaborated with local and school officials to identify installation location and to install the septic tank and siphon.

INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE

DCWater, Washington, DC 9/2018 – 5/2019

Intern

- Shadowed city officials on site visits to inspect residential, commercial, and construction sites.
- Supported engineers by tracking material cost estimations, organizing documents related to permits, and corresponding with site supervisors.
- Attended farmers markets throughout the city to inform and educate residents on water conservation.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

The George Washington University, Washington, DC 8/2018 – Current

Teaching Assistant, Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering

- Leading three lab sections totaling 150 undergraduate students.
- Designing lesson plans for each section in accordance with department objectives.

COVER LETTER

This document is an opportunity to share more of your story with the employer and compliments your resume – it should not restate everything. A good cover letter will convey your writing style and voice; demonstrate how your skills and experience fit the role; and show your ability to clearly communicate your thoughts.

TIPS

- Customize each letter to a specific position or purpose.
- Express yourself with confidence – highlight what makes you a strong candidate.
- Be brief! The cover letter should NOT be longer than 1 page.

WRITING THE COVER LETTER

Each cover letter needs to be customized for each job application. Use this guideline as a template for crafting your cover letters. **See an example cover letter on page 8.**

COVER LETTER SECTIONS	
Header (Contact Information)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Name, phone number, email address (GW email or an appropriate personal email), physical address ▪ Use same font and style as the resume
Date, Address & Greeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Date the document is submitted ▪ Use the address listed in the job posting or from the company website ▪ Address the letter to a person using their title (Mr., Mrs., Ms., Dr.) and last name, their full name, or use “Dear Hiring Manager” or “Dear Selection Committee” if the name is unknown
Introduction Paragraph	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Specify the position you are applying to, how you found it, and a specific reason you are interested in the job. Try to make a connection to the company’s mission, values, or other unique qualities. ▪ If you learned of the opportunity through a person (e.g., recruiter, GW alum, or faculty) do mention the person’s name (if they approve). Do not exaggerate the relationship. ▪ Choose 2-4 skills from the job description that you want to highlight. Write a ‘thesis statement’ that will provide a focus for the cover letter.
Body Paragraphs (2 or 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ For each skill you chose in the introduction, provide a specific example of how you have used that skill before. Do not just copy bullet points from your resume. Provide more context and detail about that experience. ▪ Make a connection between your previous experience and how you can apply that experience and skill in the new role. Look at the list of job responsibilities to determine how your skills will be a good fit. ▪ Stay focused! Choose one or two examples for each skill and do not bring up additional skills beyond what was outlined in the thesis statement.
Closing Paragraph	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Briefly restate your interest in the job and summarize why your skills make you a good candidate. ▪ Include requested information such as start date, hours of availability, etc.
Signature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Printed name and written or electronic signature

G. W. Smithson

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July 17, 2019

John Graham
Revature LLC
11730 Plaza America Drive
Reston, VA

Dear Mr. Graham,

I am submitting my application for the Revature Software Engineer Manager position that I found on The George Washington University Handshake website. As an organization that strives to make an impact through well-trained IT professionals, I am attracted to the opportunity to continue my professional development while supporting the work of Fortune 500 companies. I believe that my technical knowledge, leadership ability, and collaborative nature make me a strong candidate for this role.

I am currently in my last semester at The George Washington University School of Engineering & Applied Science obtaining my Master's degree in Computer Engineering. I chose to return to school and focus my coursework on graphics and user interface because of the prevalence of smart technology and my desire to stay informed of emerging trends. My coursework has included design of interactive multimedia and design of human-computer interface, which has prepared me to immediately contribute to a variety of projects. I have three years' experience with SQL, and advanced knowledge of Java and C++.

In my current role as a team leader at Cellular USA, Inc., I guide four other engineers as we develop products to fit the needs of a large federal client. Starting with the initial proposal, and at each stage of the project, I identify the key issues that need to be addressed and assign tasks accordingly. I schedule regular meetings with the project manager in order to incorporate feedback and ensure that our work is aligned to their goals. My ability to engage internal and external stakeholders will be a valuable quality when working for high profile clients at Revature.

For the next stage of my career I want to continue utilizing my skills while providing software solutions to improve business operations. I believe that my background and dedication make me a strong fit for the Software Engineer Manager job, and I look forward to discussing my qualifications in an interview. Please let me know if you have any questions and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

GW Smithson

ACTION VERBS – Start your bullet points with action verbs to demonstrate your skills and experience.

COMMUNICATION	Presented	Restored	ACCOMPLISHMENT	Hired	Executed	Inspected
Addressed	Promoted	Solved	Achieved	Hosted	Incorporated	Interpreted
Advertised	Proposed	Specialized	Attained	Implemented	Inspected	Interviewed
Advocated	Publicized	Standardized	Completed	Improved	Logged	Invented
Arbitrated	Reconciled	Studied	Created	Incorporated	Maintained	Investigated
Arranged	Recruited	Transmitted	Demonstrated	Increased	Monitored	Located
Articulated	Referred	Upgraded	Earned	Initiated	Obtained	Measured
Authored	Reinforced	Utilized	Exceeded	Inspected	Operated	Reported
Clarified	Reported		Expedited	Instituted	Ordered	Replicated
Collaborated	Resolved	CREATIVE	Finished	Intervened	Organized	Researched
Communicated	Responded	Acted	Improved	Launched	Prepared	Reviewed
Composed	Solicited	Adapted	Instituted	Led	Processed	Searched
Condensed	Specified	Applied	Launched	Managed	Provided	Solved
Conferred	Spoke	Began	Maximized	Mediated	Purchased	Summarized
Consulted	Suggested	Combined	Partnered	Merged	Recorded	Surveyed
Contacted	Summarized	Composed	Restructured	Motivated	Registered	Systematized
Conveyed	Synthesized	Conceptualized	Revamped	Navigated	Reserved	Tested
Convinced	Translated	Condensed	Showcased	Originated	Responded	Wrote
Corresponded	Wrote	Created	Succeeded	Overhauled	Retrieved	
Debated		Customized	Surpassed	Oversaw	Reviewed	TEACHING
Defined	TECHNICAL	Designed	Transformed	Planned	Routed	Adapted
Developed	Adapted	Developed		Presided	Scheduled	Advised
Directed	Analyzed	Directed	LEADERSHIP	Prioritized	Screened	Aided
Discussed	Applied	Displayed	Achieved	Produced	Specified	Clarified
Drafted	Assembled	Drew	Administered	Recommended	Submitted	Coached
Edited	Built	Entertained	Analyzed	Reorganized	Supplied	Communicated
Elicited	Calculated	Established	Appointed	Replaced	Standardized	Conducted
Encouraged	Computed	Fashioned	Approved	Restored	Systematized	Coordinated
Enlisted	Conducted	Formulated	Assigned	Reviewed	Tabulated	Defined
Explained	Conserved	Founded	Attained	Scheduled	Updated	Developed
Expressed	Constructed	Generated	Authorized	Secured	Validated	Enabled
Formulated	Converted	Illustrated	Chaired	Selected	Verified	Encouraged
Furnished	Debugged	Improvised	Challenged	Streamlined		Evaluated
Incorporated	Designed	Initiated	Considered	Strengthened	RESEARCH	Explained
Influenced	Determined	Instituted	Consolidated	Supervised	Analyzed	Facilitated
Interacted	Developed	Integrated	Contracted	Terminated	Clarified	Focused
Interpreted	Devised	Introduced	Controlled	United	Collected	Fostered
Interviewed	Engineered	Invented	Converted		Compared	Guided
Involved	Fabricated	Modeled	Coordinated	ORGANIZATION	Conducted	Helped
Joined	Fortified	Modified	Decided	Approved	Controlled	Incorporated
Judged	Installed	Navigated	Delegated	Arranged	Critiqued	Individualized
Lectured	Maintained	Originated	Developed	Catalogued	Detected	Informed
Listened	Operated	Performed	Directed	Categorized	Determined	Initiated
Marketed	Overhauled	Photographed	Eliminated	Charted	Diagnosed	Instilled
Mediated	Printed	Planned	Emphasized	Classified	Evaluated	Instructed
Moderated	Programmed	Presented	Enforced	Coded	Examined	Lectured
Motivated	Rectified	Revised	Enhanced	Compiled	Experimented	Motivated
Negotiated	Reengineered	Revitalized	Established	Corrected	Explored	Persuaded
Observed	Regulated	Shaped	Evaluated	Corresponded	Extracted	Supported
Outlined	Remodeled	Solved	Executed	Dispatched	Formulated	Taught
Participated	Repaired		Handled	Distributed	Gathered	Trained
Persuaded	Replaced		Headed		Identified	Tutored