Writing Job Search Materials

The job search can be stressful. Help yourself out by writing the strongest job search materials possible. Your materials are an employer's first impression of you. They determine if you get an interview, but don't worry! This handout will walk you through researching the position and potential employers and writing the resume, cover letter, and recommendation request emails. Worksheets and samples can be found at the end of this handout.

Position and Employer Research

The best place to start when writing job search materials is the position and the employer. You should dedicate time to researching both.

The Position

The job ad provides most of the details of the position to which you will be applying.

- **Save the job ad:** Copy and save all job ads in a Word document. Do not assume the job ad will remain on the site or search engine where you found it. Employers usually have to pay to keep an ad live, so they will remove it when the application deadline passes. You need to have easy access to help you write your materials and prepare for interviews. Having the ad can also be useful when you get the job and begin negotiating your contract.
- **Review the required and preferred qualifications:** Most job ads have two qualifications sections. The required qualifications are ones that you must have to be competitive for the position. Preferred qualifications are like an employer's wish list. If you have them, it can improve your chances, but lack of these qualifications will not immediately disqualify you. Note that if a job has experience requirements (ex: 2 years of experience with X), you can still apply even if you have not worked directly in the field. Your education and other work experience may count. If you see terms you do not know, look them up.
- **Note the materials requested:** Keep a list of what materials the employer wants you to include in your application. This usually includes a resume and cover letter. You might see the term "CV" or "curriculum vitae." This is basically a longer, more detailed resume. Employers may also ask for professional recommendation letters, writing samples, and other job-specific materials.
- **Find out what they offer:** Obviously, a job is not all about what you can contribute to the employer. You also need to know what you get out of it. Research the cost of living in the area. Will the salary they quoted allow you to live comfortably there? What benefits does the job offer? Health, dental, and life insurance? Paid vacation? Sick leave? Retirement?
- **Research the position:** It is a good idea to research the general position title online to see what the job entails at other companies and the average salary. This can give you a well-rounded view of the job and help you at the negotiating table later on.

The Employer

While most of the important information will be contained in the job ad, you will also need to research the employer.

- **Visit the company website:** Looking at a company's website can help you determine their professionalism, goals, and values. It can also provide you with details about their employees and products.
- **Search for the company online:** Do a general search on the company to find out what other people are saying about them. You can find out if they are good employers, how they treat customers and clients, and if they have been covered positively or negatively in the news.

Resume

Your resume offers potential employers a snapshot of your knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Contents

The contents of the resume should provide specific evidence that you are able to successfully complete the tasks required by the position. Avoid including a general skills section that includes buzzwords like "trustworthy" and "team-player." Instead, show that you have these skills in the descriptions of your education and work experience.

- **Name and Contact Information:** Provide your address, phone number, and email address. Make sure your email address is professional. It can be a good idea to create a separate account just for the search.
- **Objective (optional):** Give a brief (2-3 sentences) explanation of your professional goals. Tailor it to fit the needs of the company to which you are applying.
- **Education:** In reverse chronological order (most recent first), list the degrees you have earned and the schools you have attended. Include Bachelor's, Associate's, and Professional Certificates. **High school is not included once you have earned a higher degree.** Some people include their GPA; however, unless it is a 4.0, this could negatively affect your chances.
- **Work Experience:** List the jobs you have held. Include the name of your employer, your title, the location, and your dates of employment. You can include internships here or in a separate section. Generally, you should use reverse chronological order. However, if you want to highlight specific positions because they relate to the job you are applying for, you can organize based on category or relevance. For each position, use active verbs to describe the tasks you performed and skills you learned.
- **Volunteer Work:** In reverse chronological order, list the volunteer work you have engaged in. Include the name of the organization and/or project, the coordinator's name, and the dates. Briefly describe the tasks you completed.
- **Honors and Awards:** In reverse chronological order, list all honors and awards you have received for academics, volunteerism, or work. Include who gave the award and the date.
- **Other Categories:** You may also include sections on student organizations, athletics, military experience, computer skills, languages, or other experience that is relevant to the position but does not fit under those sections already discussed.
- **Professional and Academic References:** Include the names, titles, and contact information for 2-4 references who can speak about your abilities and/or professionalism. Do not make the employer do the extra work of contacting you to get this information.

Formatting and Style

How a resume looks can be almost as important as what a resume says.

- **Keep it short:** Employers will have a limited amount of time to view your resume. You will need to grab their attention quickly. For this reason, most resumes are one page, but two pages can be acceptable if you have enough experience and information to fill both. Make sure all important, relevant information is on the first page. If an employer requests a curriculum vitae, this can be significantly longer.
- **Be concise:** Be thorough yet concise. You should include all relevant experience, but you do not need to provide detailed discussions of every job you have held or degree you have earned. If they like the resume, they will ask you to elaborate in an interview.
- **Pay attention to organization:** Always put the most relevant and important information first. Most resumes begin with Education or Work Experience. If you are just graduating from college, your education is likely more relevant to the position. If you have worked in the field for several years, then your work experience will be more relevant.
- **Use visual cues:** Include white space between items to make them stand out and avoid cluttering the page. Strategically use bold, underline, italics, bullet points, font sizes, and color to create visual cues

differentiating sections and subsections. Do not do all of these at the same time, and be consistent in their use.

- **Use or create a template:** One way to ensure consistency is to use or create a resume template. While Microsoft Word has templates, they tend to be difficult to tailor to your needs. They have also been overused. Canva.com has free resume templates that are easily customizable.
- **Avoid gimmickry:** Do not include pictures, clipart, or clunky borders. Do not try to be overly creative with your materials. Obviously, this depends on the type of job you are applying to, but, generally, a simple template on white paper is best.
- **Proofread!**: Check your resume for spelling, grammar, and accuracy before submitting.

> **Some companies will run your resume through a program that sorts them based on language. Wherever possible, include vocabulary from the job ad.**

Cover Letter

The cover letter is your chance to speak directly to the potential employer. While you want to highlight your skills, you can also show a little bit of your personality.

Contents

The cover letter has three major sections that each serve different purposes.
- **First Paragraph:** The first paragraph is where you show your enthusiasm for the job. First, make sure you name the position. A company may be hiring for several different positions at once, so you want to make sure they know which one you want. Mention something about the company that you like to show that you have done your research. End by explaining what you bring to the table.
- **Body Paragraphs:** The body paragraphs demonstrate your ability to do the job. They should not just repeat what is already covered in the resume. Instead, provide examples or anecdotes that show the employer you in action. Tie these examples and stories back to the position where you can. **Do not hedge. You must be able to speak positively and confidently about yourself.**
- **Final Paragraph:** The final paragraph should reiterate your excitement for the position and encourage contact by sharing your availability for an interview.

Formatting

The cover letter is a one page formal business letter and should be formatted accordingly.
- **Sender's Name and Address:** Include your name and mailing address. You can create a letterhead to use on both the cover letter and resume to create a visual connection between the documents.
- **Date:** Spell out the full date (ex: August 18, 2020).
- **Recipient's Name and Address:** Include the recipient's name and address. If you do not have an individual's name, you can use the department or company name.
- **Greeting:** Use a formal greeting (ex: "Dear…" or "To Whom It May Concern")
- **Body:** Break the body into brief, well-organized paragraphs. No one likes a wall of text.
- **Closing:** Use a formal signoff (ex: "Sincerely" or "Thank you")

Recommendation Request

Many employers will ask for letters of recommendation. In order to get these letters, you will likely have to send out a request through email.

Who Should I Ask?

Choose your references carefully.

- **Use academic or professional references:** Your reference should have some connection to the job you are applying to or have firsthand knowledge of your skills as a worker. Avoid friends and family members.
- **Make sure they know you:** Choose someone you have spoken to in the last year. Do not choose your freshman English professor whom you have not talked to in three years.
- **Know what they will say:** Make sure that you have a good relationship with the reference and that you are certain they will write good things about you. If a reference seems reluctant, it might be a better idea to find someone else.

Recommendation Request Email

Recommendation requests can be formal or informal. Decide what tone to use based on your relationship with the reference.

- **To:** Even if you plan to send the same message to all your references, email each one separately. You do not want them to procrastinate because they think the others will get the recommendation done.
- **Subject:** Make the purpose of the email clear, so it can receive prompt attention.
- **Greeting:** Say hello. Do not just dive into the body of the message. Being more formal than usual can help show your sincerity and the urgency of your request.
- **Body:** The body needs to cover several items. In the first paragraph, you need to explain what position you are applying to and why you want it. Do not forget to **actually make your request** for a letter. In the following paragraphs, give them material to include in their letter. Most of your references are probably busy. The more information you give them, the easier it will be for them to write the recommendation. Remind them of projects you completed for them that connect to the job. Tell them about relevant personal accomplishments that they may not know about.
- **Closing:** Let them know when the letter is due and how to send it to the employer. Thank them for their time. Use a formal signoff.

> **Feel free to check in on your references if you do not hear back from them, but do not pester them.**

See the ***Sample Recommendation Request Email*** *on the Writing Center website.*

Potential Employer Research Sheet

The Position	
Company Name	
Your Connections (Do you know anyone at the company or in the industry?)	
Position Title	
Position Level (Entry-level, Mid-level, Experienced)	
Description of Position (Make note of specific vocabulary)	
Required Qualifications (Make note of specific vocabulary, and put a check next to the ones you meet)	
Preferred Qualifications (Make note of specific vocabulary, and put a check next to the ones you meet)	
Materials Requested (Résumé, cover letter, etc.)	
Pay (If not given, check Glassdoor.com for likely salary)	
Location Cost of Living (Use Google.)	
Benefits (Health Insurance, Life Insurance, Retirement)	

Company Research	
Company Website	
Company Mission/Goal (Make note of specific vocabulary.)	
Company Values (Make note of specific vocabulary.)	
General Information about the Company and Its Products	
Company in the News	
Potential Interviewer (If you get an interview, who in the company is likely to interview you? Find information about the upper-level people in your specific department and their HR personnel.)	

Resume Worksheet

Header	
Name • Use size, font style, and color to make your name stand out.	
Contact Information • Provide your address, phone number, and email address. • Make sure your email address is professional. It can be a good idea to create a separate account just for the search.	
Objective (optional)	
Objective • Give a brief (2-3 sentences) explanation of your professional goals. Tailor it to fit the needs of the company/school to which you are applying.	
Education	

List of Degrees Earned and Schools Attended
• In reverse chronological order (most recent first), list the degrees you have earned and the schools you have attended.
• Include Bachelor's, Associate's, and Professional Certificates. High school is usually not included once you have earned a higher degree.
• For each entry, include the following information:
  o Major(s)
  o Minor(s)
  o School
  o Location
  o (Expected) Date of Graduation
  o If you completed an Honors Thesis, provide the title.
  o (Relevant coursework and/or projects)	

Work Experience	
List of Positions Held and Work Done • List the positions you have held. Include the name of your employer, your title, the location, and your dates of employment. • You can include internships here or in a separate section. • Generally, you should use reverse chronological order. However, if you want to highlight specific positions because they relate to the job you are applying for, you can organize based on category or relevance. • For each position, use active verbs to describe the tasks you performed and skills you learned.	

Volunteer Work	
List of Volunteer Work - In reverse chronological order, list the volunteer work you have engaged in. Include the name of the organization and/or project, the coordinator's name, and the dates. - Briefly describe the tasks you completed.	

Honors and Awards	
List of Honors and Awards In reverse chronological order, list all honors and awards you have received for academics, volunteerism, or work. Include who gave the award and the date.	

Other Categories	
Other Categories You May Include - Student organizations, athletics, military experience, computer skills, languages, etc. - Other categories for experience that is relevant to the position but does not fit under those already given.	

References	
Professional and Academic References Include the names, titles, and contact information for 2-4 references who can speak about your abilities and/or professionalism.	

Final Tips

- Try to keep the resume to one page. Employers will have a limited amount of time to view your resume. You will need to grab their attention on the first page.

- Be thorough yet concise. You should include all relevant experience, but you do not need to provide detailed discussions of every job you have held or degree you have earned. If they like the resume, they will ask you to elaborate in the interview.

- Choose a font that is easy to read. Do not go smaller than 10 pt. in size.

- Use bold, underline, italics, or larger font size to help highlight information and to indicate sections. Do not overuse.

- Bullet points can help make information easier to find within larger sections. This is particularly useful in the Work Experience and Volunteer Work sections.

- Use white or off-white paper.

- Do not include pictures, clipart, graphics, or borders.

- Save your document as a Word file or PDF.

- Check your resume for spelling, grammar, accuracy before submitting!

Sample Resume
Jane Jobseeker

1111 N. Wesleyan Blvd., Rocky Mount, NC 27804

(555)555-5555   JJobseeker@gmail.com

OBJECTIVE

A position as an English teacher in the North Carolina school system.

EDUCATION

B.A. English North Carolina Wesleyan College, Rocky Mount, NC (April 2020)
- Minor in Education
- Honors Thesis: "Teaching Loss through Children's Literature"

HONORS and AWARDS
- Dean's List (2016-2020)
- English Writing Award (2019)
- Sigma Tau Delta—English Honors Fraternity (2016-present)

WORK EXPERIENCE

Teaching Assistant   Spring 2019

John Smith Middle School, Rocky Mount, NC
- Planned eight 30-minute lessons on various English literature texts, such as *The Bridge to Terabithia*
- Responsible for organizing afterschool writing tutoring
- Coordinated class field trip to the North Carolina Museum of Art

Shift Leader   June 2016-January 2018

McDonald's, Rocky Mount, NC
- Promoted to shift leader after 8 months as a cashier
- Supervised and trained new employees
- Ensured customer satisfaction
- Mediated disputes between employees

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE
- Writing Buddy Program, John Smith Middle School, Rocky Mount, NC (Fall 2017)
- Habitat for Humanity, Rocky Mount, NC (June 2015)

COMPUTER SKILLS
- Proficient in Microsoft Word, Excel, and Publisher
- Experience with Adobe Photoshop

REFERENCES

Dr. John Doe   Kelly Jones

Associate Professor of English   McDonald's Manager

3400 N. Wesleyan Blvd., Rocky Mount, NC   2222 Creek St., Rocky Mount, NC

(777)777-7777, jdoe@ncwc.edu   (999)999-9999, Jones@gmail.com

Sample Cover Letter

Jane Jobseeker

1111 N. Wesleyan Blvd., Rocky Mount, NC 27804
(555)555-5555 JJobseeker@gmail.com

April 10, 2020

Carrie Jones
Director of Human Resources
Raleigh School System
101 Tree Lane
Raleigh, NC 27615

Dear Ms. Jones:

I am applying for the position of English Teacher at Raleigh Middle School that was advertised on your website. I am excited for the opportunity to contribute my creative approach to teaching literature to this excellent school.

I am graduating from North Carolina Wesleyan College in April with a degree in English and a minor in education. My coursework has not only allowed me to delve deeply into the literary texts I would use in the classroom at Raleigh Middle School, but has provided me with the pedagogical theory needed to understand how to get students to engage with the material.

In the Spring semester, I worked as a teaching assistant at John Smith Middle School. I observed professional teachers and had the opportunity to plan and teach several lessons on my own. During my lessons, I asked students to engage with the literature through artwork, having them draw and explain their favorite scenes from the text. I also coordinated a field trip to the North Carolina Museum of Art where I asked students to turn the artwork into stories of their own. These teaching methods allow students to feel connected with what they read and write, which research has shown to increase student interest and success.

I look forward to applying my approach to teaching to the English classes at Raleigh Middle School. I am available for phone and Skype interviews. If you have any questions, please contact me by phone at (555)555-5555 or email at jjobseeker@gmail.com.

Thank you for your consideration,

Jane Jobseeker

Sample Recommendation Request Email

To: jdoe@ncwc.edu

Subject: Request for Letter of Recommendation

Dear Dr. Doe,

I'm applying to become an English teacher at Raleigh Middle School and would like to ask you for a letter of recommendation. I've taken three of your classes, including Children's Literature, and I believe you can accurately speak to my ability to succeed as a teacher.

During my time at North Carolina Wesleyan College, I have improved my public speaking and presentation skills. In addition to my work as a teaching assistant at John Smith Middle School, in your class I planned and taught a lesson on the theme of death and loss in children's novels. This lesson focused on how to discuss difficult topics with young kids and how to design projects that allow them to explore their own feelings of loss. I look forward to incorporating these discussions and projects into my own classroom.

In addition to the work I completed for your classes, I volunteer in the Writing Buddy Program at the middle school. I have tutored three kids to help improve their writing using low-stakes freewriting and brainstorming exercises. By the end of the program, each of the students had increased their vocabulary and completed their own short story demonstrating their new skills.

If you have any questions, please let me know. The application is due in two weeks on May 8.

Thank you!
Jane Jobseeker