

# ***Resume and Cover Letter Assignment Instructions and Evaluation***

## **603-LPE-MS Business Communication Resume and Cover Letter**

### **Grading and Submission**

This assignment is worth 20% of your final grade. The resume and cover letter is due in class on Wednesday February 8 as two paper versions: one single-sided copy of the cover letter must be stapled to and on top of a copy of the one-page resume, and the other single-sided copy of the cover letter must be stapled to and on top of the other copy of the one-page resume. Do not attach the two paper versions together. Also, the assignment must be uploaded as a single PDF file to the appropriate Omnivox assignment the same day.

Missing one of Class 9 or Class 10 when students are interviewing or being interviewed without my approval will result in this assignment being penalized 10%. Missing both of those classes will result in this assignment being penalized 20%.

### **Resume and Cover Letter Design**

Produce both a resume and cover letter that convey your real background and that are a customized response to your assigned job posting. Whenever a resume and cover letter are submitted together, whether via paper or electronically, the cover letter must always come before the resume.

The **cover letter** must be black-and-white, on single-sided 8.5"x11" pages, in block letter format and include the following paragraphs: an opening, more than one body paragraph and a closing. Also, the paragraphs must be in 12 pt Calibri and triple-spaced (do not triple space the addresses), and the word count of all of the paragraphs together must be between 300-400 words (not more). This length and formatting will result in a multi-page letter, although real cover letters should be single-spaced and almost always kept to one page. A cover letter whose opening, body and closing paragraphs contain more than 400 words will result in the assignment grade being penalized by 5%.

The **resume** must be black-and-white, on one single-sided 8.5"x11" page and chronological (not functional) in type. Also, the primary text (e.g. bullet points describing skills/accomplishments/duties/etc.) must be 11 pt Calibri; other parts of the resume (e.g. the name, the headings) may be other fonts and larger (not smaller) in size. The following sections must be included, although you are welcome to play with how section titles are worded, place them in whatever order you wish and add further sections:

- A heading indicating your name and contact information
- Skills/qualifications and/or career objective (i.e. you must have at least have one of these sections)
- Education
- Work experience
- Extracurriculars/activities/interests

You can find many examples of resumes and cover letters on the Internet; they would be an excellent resource to find ideas for document design and content topics. Also, Thompson Rivers University has published some excellent university-level sample resumes here: <https://resumecatalogue.pressbooks.tru.ca/>. Scroll down to “Sector Specific Resumes” and take a look at some examples, all of which feature simple yet thoughtful formatting.

### Interpreting and Responding to a Job Posting

- The **Responsibilities section** lists what you would be expected to do; consequently, verbs are significant and prominent (e.g. they begin each bullet point). Verbs like “support” and “aid/assist” reflect how the successful candidate will have limited responsibility for a given task (remember these are internships, not executive roles)
- The **Qualifications and Experience section** describes what the company is looking for in a candidate. Some elements in this section may be labelled “required” (i.e. a candidate absolutely must have them) or “would be an asset”/“is preferred” (i.e. a candidate doesn’t absolutely need to have them, although it would be nice if they did)
- In the cover letter, aim more to demonstrate that you possess the required qualifications and experience than to demonstrate that you can perform the job’s responsibilities; the logic here is that these are internships, and so any reasonably capable college graduate should be able to rapidly learn how to perform the job’s tasks

### Miscellaneous Resume and Cover Letter Tips

- In the cover letter opening, feel free to make up an engaging story about how you came to know about the job (e.g. make up a contact, invent a funny story)
- In the cover letter, do not address so many points that it becomes impossible to adequately support each one with evidence and discussion. It may be possible to use the resume to address points that could not be addressed in the cover letter, either in the skills/qualifications section or in bullet points describing work/volunteer experience
- If you have no paid work experience, do not include a work experience section; instead, relabel your extracurriculars/activities/interests section as your experience section, and that section will stand in for a work experience section
- When developing the education section, bear in mind the following:
  - This is an English document: you are earning a Degree of College Studies (DCS), not a Diplome d’études collégiale (DEC)
  - You have not completed your college degree, and so you should use words/phrases like “ongoing” or “graduation/degree expected by month/year” to avoid falsely giving the impression that you already have your DEC, whoops, I mean DCS 😊
  - Given that you likely graduated from high school only 1.5 years ago, having a section for it would be normal and even a very good idea if that section somehow casts you in a positive light. However, if you judge you can use that space in a more effective way, you have the option of only mentioning your college studies

- On the cover letter and especially on the resume, avoid having orphaned words, i.e. one or two words that are all alone on a line; editing to increase concision is the simplest solution to this problem.

### **Privacy Concerns**

Other students will read and analyze both your resume and cover letter. For this reason, do not include any information about your grades/averages/R-Score or academic awards that reflect grades. Also, you are welcome to use the College's address and phone number in order to not divulge your own. If you have any other privacy concerns, please discuss them with me.

### **Grade Bonus for Getting Hired**

Students' resumes and cover letters will be forwarded to hiring committees made up of students as the basis for an interview and ultimately a hiring decision. Each student who is hired will receive a 5% grade bonus on their Resume and Cover Letter assignment, or in other words a course grade bonus of 1%. The decision regarding who gets hired is entirely in the hands of the hiring committees. Regardless of any bonus, no student's grade may exceed 100% on this assignment.

### **Academic Integrity**

What constitutes academic integrity for this assignment reflects the following factors:

- Organizations expect that applicants' resumes and cover letters be flawless, notably in terms of their writing and their formatting
- Organizations are unlikely to have objections to an applicant seeking assistance to achieve this standard
- Plagiarism and cheating are concepts that non-academic organizations conceptualize and prioritize very differently than academic organizations

Thus, while working on this assignment, students may seek assistance from others (e.g. other students, parents, grammar checkers, AI chatbots) regarding content, writing and formatting. The only sense in which a student might cheat is if they submit a resume and/or cover letter that do not reflect their real background.

### **Using ChatGPT**

Students are encouraged to make use of ChatGPT, an AI chatbot, although students must critically evaluate ChatGPT's output since in the words of OpenAI's CEO Sam Altman "ChatGPT is incredibly limited, but good enough at some things to create a misleading impression of greatness. It's a mistake to be relying on it for anything important right now. It's a preview of progress; we have lots of work to do on robustness and truthfulness."<sup>1</sup>

Also, John Warner, a former college-level writing teacher, explains that "it's important to understand what ChatGPT is, as well as what it can do. ChatGPT is a Large Language

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<sup>1</sup> Altman, Sam [@sama]. "ChatGPT is incredibly limited . . ." *Twitter*, 10 Dec 2022, 7:11 p.m., [https://twitter.com/sama/status/1601731295792414720?fbclid=IwAR3MvfKIFSn9PnJgFjEXoOYNUW-Xu1cqED\\_LG15ywVdlI508xVq9k8VmZcMU](https://twitter.com/sama/status/1601731295792414720?fbclid=IwAR3MvfKIFSn9PnJgFjEXoOYNUW-Xu1cqED_LG15ywVdlI508xVq9k8VmZcMU).

Model (LLM) that is trained on a set of data to respond to questions in natural language. The algorithm does not 'know' anything. All it can do is assemble patterns according to other patterns it has seen when prompted by a request. It is not programmed with the rules of grammar. It does not sort, or evaluate the content. It does not 'read'; it does not write. It is, at its core, a bullshitter. You give it a prompt and it responds with a bunch of words that may or may not be responsive and accurate to the prompt, but which will be written in fluent English syntax."<sup>2</sup>

Here are some articles that explore the use of ChatGPT to generate cover letters and resumes:

- [This article](#) explains what the AI does well (e.g. producing correctly written English) and where it tends to fall short (e.g. failing to support claims by providing and analyzing specific evidence)
- Regarding another shortcoming, as this [experiment](#) demonstrates, if you feed ChatGPT a job posting and ask it to produce a cover letter or resume, it will copy the language of the job posting liberally, which would alienate anyone who knows the job posting
- Some [hiring managers said](#) they might follow up a Chat-GPT cover letter with a phone call, but they also said they weren't very impressed by the tone and level of detail, and so they recommend that any AI-generated cover letter be modified extensively

Especially, watch out for ChatGPT's tendency to produce vague, impersonal, wordy, off-topic and/or rambling prose featuring disconnected sentences, punctuation mistakes, etc.

With the above caveats in mind, here are some ways students might constructively use ChatGPT:

- Generating example cover letter paragraphs to edit/be inspired by
  - "Write a cover letter body paragraph that argues that the candidate has strong people skills on the basis of their having worked as a camp counsellor, which notably required leading six campers on a multi-day canoe expedition"
  - "Write a cover letter closing paragraph for an application to a manufacturing internship with Big Company Inc."
- Generating example career objectives to edit/be inspired by
  - "Give an example of a resume career objective for an aerospace internship that conveys what the intern will do for the company using CAD proficiency and people skills"
- Generating example resume bullet points to edit/be inspired by
  - "Give examples of resume bullet points for a McDonald's cashier"
- Critiquing the content of resume bullet points
  - "Is this resume bullet point effective?" or "Could this resume bullet point be improved?"
  - "Is the following an effective resume bullet point for a McDonald's cashier? Why or why not?"
  - "Could this resume bullet point be more concise?"
  - "Could this resume bullet point feature more quantification?"

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<sup>2</sup> Warner, John. "ChatGPT Can't Kill Anything Worth Preserving." *The Biblioracle Recommends*, 11 Dec. 2022, <https://biblioracle.substack.com/p/chatgpt-cant-kill-anything-worth>.

- “Does this resume bullet point feature powerful and specific verbs?”
- Providing feedback on linguistic correctness (be careful; ChatGPT can be very wrong about grammar/syntax/punctuation)
  - “Is this sentence written correctly? Why or why not?”
  - “Is the grammar of this sentence correct? Why or why not?”
- Looking up definitions/synonyms (remember that the college library gives students free access to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, arguably the best English dictionary)
  - “What’s the definition of X?” “What are some synonyms of X?”
  - “How do different dictionaries define the word X?”

An effective way to maximize ChatGPT’s potential is to give it progressively more instructions. For example, here’s what results from telling ChatGPT to “write a cover letter closing paragraph for an application to a manufacturing internship with Big Company Inc.”:

"I am excited about the opportunity to apply my skills and knowledge to the manufacturing industry and to learn from the experts at Big Company Inc. I am confident that my strong work ethic, attention to detail, and ability to work in a team will make me a valuable asset to your organization. I am eager to contribute to the success of Big Company Inc and to gain hands-on experience in the field. Thank you for considering my application. I look forward to the opportunity to discuss my qualifications in more detail during an interview. Please let me know if there is any additional information you require."

While the English is correct, this is a poor closing paragraph, partly because the sentences are disconnected from each other due to a lack of transition words/phrases, partly because it is far too long. Also, there’s no such thing as a “manufacturing industry.” So, a next instruction might be “make the preceding paragraph shorter/more concise.” This results in the following:

"I am excited to bring my skills and knowledge to Big Company Inc. as a manufacturing intern. I am confident my work ethic, attention to detail and team-oriented mindset will make me an asset to the organization. Thank you for considering my application, I look forward to discussing my qualifications in an interview."

This is much better, although now there is a comma splice (i.e. two independent clauses joined by a comma: “Thank you . . . , I look forward to . . .”). Also, “skills and knowledge” is too vague. Here’s what results from the additional instruction to “now remove the comma splice and eliminate the vague phrase ‘skills and knowledge’”:

"I am excited to bring my experience in manufacturing and strong work ethic to Big Company Inc. as an intern. I am confident my attention to detail and team-oriented mindset will make me an asset to the organization. Thank you for considering my application, I look forward to discussing my qualifications in an interview."

The vague phrase “skills and knowledge” has been replaced with more specific qualifications: good. However, the comma splice is still there, and the first two sentences are still disconnected due to the absence of a transition word/phrase. Telling ChatGPT to “make the preceding cover letter closing paragraph better by linking the first and second sentence with a transition word/phrase” produces the following:

“I am excited to bring my experience in manufacturing and strong work ethic to Big Company Inc. as an intern. Furthermore, I am confident that my attention to detail and team-oriented mindset will make me an asset to the organization. Thank you for considering my application, I look forward to discussing my qualifications in an interview.”

Good: the addition of “furthermore” links the first and second sentences, signaling that the second sentence will mention an additional point. It may now be time to say goodbye to ChatGPT and have the human finish the paragraph off themselves; it is still possible to make significant improvements. Also and needless to say, it would be important to replace ChatGPT’s random qualifications with real ones!

## Resume and Cover Letter Evaluation

To determine your grade, I will ask myself the following questions:

### *Resume and Cover Letter*

- Are they obviously customized to reflect a student's experience and the job posting?
- Is the most important/relevant information emphasized?
- Is irrelevant/inappropriate content excluded?
- Are claims proven by offering and discussing specific facts/examples as much as possible?
- Are they black and white?
- Are they effective in motivating the reader to set up an interview?

### *Resume*

- Is the resume well organized and does it include the mandatory sections?
- Is all of the standard information included (see the coursepack for details)?
- Is the CV dense with information, i.e. is there little wasted space?
- Is the primary text (e.g. bullet points describing skills/accomplishments/duties/etc.) 11 pt Calibri and are other parts of the resume (e.g. the name, headings) not smaller in size?
- Is the CV attractive, not obviously based on a template, only one page and is it easy to navigate due to graphic highlighting techniques and the layout?

### *Cover Letter*

- Is the letter well structured? Does it feature an opening paragraph, body paragraphs and a closing paragraph that are triple-spaced and that all together do not exceed 400 words?
- Does the opening paragraph hook the reader and declare two to four main qualifications?
- Does each body paragraph have a focus that is indicated in the initial/topic sentence and exclude content beyond that focus? In other words, are the body paragraphs unified?
- Are each of the main qualifications listed in the opening discussed in a dedicated body paragraph?
- Do the body paragraphs justify their claims by offering and discussing specific facts/examples?
- Does the closing paragraph smoothly finish the letter and suggest a next step?
- Do paragraphs/sentences flow smoothly from one to another? In other words, is there coherence at the paragraph and sentence levels?
- Does the cover letter add value beyond that offered by the resume?
- Does the letter use block format correctly?

### *Language*

- Is wording simple, precise, concise, definite and accurate?
- Are spelling, punctuation, grammar and syntax correct?
- Do verb tenses distinguish between current and past activities?
- Are powerful/appropriate verbs used (e.g. to describe work experience)?
- Are first-person pronouns such as "I" and "my" used to an appropriate degree?
- Is the tone professional?