RÉSUMÉ AND COVER LETTER GUIDE

Middlebury College
Center for Careers and Internships

GETTING STARTED

Your application, which typically includes a résumé and cover letter, is a first step in securing an internship or job. It tells your story with context and impact. It is easy to list all the experiences you have had and the details of what you've done, but that will generally not get you noticed. Tell your story so that you reveal the skills you have developed, as opposed to having them only linked to a particular company, organization, or situation.

You may draft your résumé before you have identified an internship or job description that suits your interests, but you must target your cover letter for a specific opportunity. To begin, make a "master résumé" that includes all of your experiences. Then pull from it to create various targeted résumés.

Before you start to apply for specific opportunities, research and learn as much as you can about the position, employer, and industry. Think about how to present yourself in a way that will show how you will fit in. Then evaluate your fit based on your interests, skills, and experiences and how they align with the opportunity. Have you told your story using the same words that the employer uses to describe itself? You should demonstrate that you have transferable skills that are relevant to an employer.

RUBRIC FOR RÉSUMÉ IMPROVEMENT

SELF-REVIEW	CCI REVIEW	FORMAT
☐	☐	**Name and contact information:** Name is prominent; includes address where you can be reached through your search, telephone number, and email address.
☐	☐	**Education section:** Each institution is listed in reverse chronological order and includes institution name, location, and relevant date(s); degree is spelled out (Bachelor of Arts); major and minor (if declared) and graduation month/year are indicated (e.g., May 2018); GPA is accurate and formatted correctly using two decimal places (e.g., 3.45 ; major GPA may be included).
☐	☐	**Experience section(s):** Organizations/companies are listed in reverse chronological order and include name of organization, location, position title, and relevant dates.
☐	☐	**Appearance:** Fill one page without overcrowding; use consistent formatting (sections, paragraphs, lines, and words are spaced correctly); use appropriate font style (e.g., Garamond, Calibri, etc.) and font size (10–12 point), and formatting (indentation, bold, italic, caps, symbols); margins are at least a half inch and no more than one inch.
☐	☐	**Grammar, spelling, and punctuation:** Error free; verbs are active, in first person, and in the correct tense; personal pronouns and extraneous words are omitted; all words are familiar to most people and spelled correctly; use of punctuation is consistent; only proper nouns are capitalized.

SELF-REVIEW	CCI REVIEW	CONTENT
☐	☐	**Target:** Résumé is targeted for desired position, field, and/or industry; include specific examples to emphasize transferable skills and knowledge; relevance of study abroad experience is explicit; relevant course work is listed; section labels reflect content and content substantiates headings; résumé "tells a story."
☐	☐	**Descriptive statements:** Begin with strong action verbs that are not repetitive or passive; avoid "duties included" or "responsible for"; include concrete examples and numbers whenever possible; descriptions are direct, concise, and indicate one's impact; describe accomplishments (not duties), quantify results (time, percent change, etc.) and list in order of importance to the reader; omit irrelevant and/or outdated information; do not exaggerate details.

THE RÉSUMÉ

A recent study conducted by the Ladders career website indicated that employers spend as few as six seconds scanning a résumé before forming an impression of a candidate. A clear, concise format that is easy to read and key words that match the requirements listed in the job description will help your résumé stand out. Make sure everything on the résumé tells your story, as if you were answering the request "Tell me about yourself."

• Read and reflect. Think about what qualities are most important in your field of interest. If you are applying for a specific position, read the job description. Identify key words, such as "teamwork," "creativity," "leadership," etc. Check out Core Professional Competencies on the CCI website. *go/corecompetencies*

Formatting

Employers prefer that you present your résumé in a simple, direct, and easy-to-read format. Do your research to determine the expectations for résumé presentation for your field of interest. Keep the following in mind:

• Employers will skim your résumé. Make sure that the most important information is easy to find and not hidden in a lot of text.

• Keep your résumé to one page, especially if you are applying for a business-related position. Exceptions are common when applying for a position that requests a curriculum vitae (CV) with extensive laboratory and research experience or if you have more than five years of full-time experience in the field to which you are applying.

• Margins should be 0.5–1 inch.

• Everyone reads from top to bottom, so put the most important information on top.

- Your font should look professional and consistent. Garamond, Calibri, and Times are all good choices. Text should be between 10- and 12-point type; your name and section headings can be slightly larger.

- Use bold, all-caps, and italics sparingly to emphasize section headers and company/organization names.

- Locations or dates can be right justified, but all other text should be left justified.

- Formatting should be consistent throughout your résumé. This includes font, spacing, bold, italics, etc. Be a little obsessive about it!

Content

Heading/contact information. Make sure your name is clear and easy to read. Provide an address, phone number, and email address. If you are a current student, use your Middlebury address and email. If you are planning to apply near your hometown, you may use your home address instead. It is also recommended that you include your LinkedIn URL.

Education. List institutions attended and associated skills or affiliations. Place your Middlebury College education first. Indicate that you are a candidate for a Bachelor of Arts, your major(s), minor, expected graduation month/year, and cumulative/major GPA (if over 3.00). If you have not yet declared your major/minor, you may indicate "Undeclared" or cite an intended major. You may choose to include the following in this section:

- Relevant course work. List courses that might be relevant to the industry/employer, even if they are outside your major (these may change for each employer and job description).

- Senior thesis or independent project. List a title or topic and add a short description.

- Honors/awards. Include recognition for academic and scholarly work (e.g., dean's list or writing prize) within the institution or recognition from national organizations (e.g., Posse Foundation Scholar, National Merit Finalist, Davis Scholar, Ward Prize).

- Athletics. List if you play on an NCAA or competitive club team and mention any leadership roles or division titles; (e.g., NCAA Division III, Women's Squash; Team Cocaptain 20XX; NESCAC Champions 20XX).

- Language skills. List languages and your proficiency (e.g., Highly proficient in written and oral Spanish; proficient in spoken Chinese).

- Computer/technical/lab skills. Include any type of technology skills, including statistical, GIS, programming, and design; they do not have to be learned in a classroom, but you should be proficient enough to use the technology when asked.

- Study abroad. If you have studied abroad, details should follow your Middlebury College information. Include name of program and relevant course work.

- High school. If you are an underclassman, you may list your high school on your résumé. If you are a senior, only list your high school if you attended a school that employers may recognize.

- Special skills. If they are particularly relevant to what you are applying for, include them in the "Education" section. Otherwise, put them under "Skills and Interests" at the bottom.

EDUCATION

Middlebury College, Middlebury, VT
Candidate for Bachelor of Arts with a Major in Sociology   May 2020
• **GPA:** 3.75/4.00, College Scholar all semesters
• **Course Work:** International Economic Policy, Economic Development in China,
  Political Geography, Economic Statistics

Middlebury College School Abroad in Beijing, Beijing, China   January–May 2019
Capital Normal University
• **Course Work:** Chinese Language (Mandarin), Chinese Politics and Economics, and
  Chinese Renewable Energy and Cleantech Development

Experience. You are more likely to be invited to interview if you show initiative, passion, and potential as a good "fit" through academic endeavors, work experiences, and extracurricular commitment. Highlight a variety of experiences in this section, paid or unpaid—any activity where you demonstrated competencies that are relevant. Internships, summer jobs, research projects, student employment, volunteer work, and significant extracurricular experiences can be included.

Be selective—you do not have to include all of your experience. Include only the most relevant information and make sure that your résumé is easy to read and concise. List your experiences in reverse chronological order (most recent first, based on end date). Give your title, the name of the organization, the location, dates worked, and a description of your accomplishments. If multiple positions ended at the same time, prioritize them based on the most impressive or relevant experience.

For each experience, describe your major accomplishments and core responsibilities by creating two or three descriptive statements or bullets that answer the following questions:

• What did you do? What tasks did you accomplish? What projects did you complete?

- How did you do it? Outline your process and add quantifying or qualifying details when possible.

- Why did it matter? What value did you add? What was your impact? What results did you achieve?

- Impact: What impact did your efforts have on the organization? The bullet demonstrates your contributions to an organization and any impact you've made; identify who you were doing the work for and be specific.

- Achievements: Specify what you achieved.

- Quantify when appropriate, e.g., ages of children tutored, amount of money raised, etc.

- Avoid phrases that begin with "worked on," "helped with," "responsible for," or "assisted with." Be more specific. Use verbs like "presented," "designed," "implemented," etc. (See pages 14–15.)

- Use present tense for ongoing experiences. Past experiences should be described in the past tense.

- Do not use first person. Start each descriptive statement with an action verb. Avoid passive language and personal pronouns. Eliminate all extra words.

- Prioritize your bullets. To capture attention, list first the contributions and accomplishments that are most relevant and important to the employer.

You may choose to sort your experience into sections that describe how one or more experiences relate to the position you seek. Sample headings:

- Experience—Includes specifically targeted examples of experiences that are relevant to an industry or job description.

- XXXXX Experience—Includes targeted headings that can be broken into specific titles, such as Research Experience, Advocacy Experience, Nonprofit Experience, Leadership Experience, etc. Feel free to create a heading that is relevant to your preferred employers.

- Other Experience—May include experience that is not targeted to the job description but that demonstrates transferable skills that are relevant to the company or organization.

EXPERIENCE

National Low Income Housing Coalition, Washington, DC
Operations Intern   Summer 2019
- Composed affordable housing articles for weekly newsletter sent to nationwide housing coalitions
- Developed major donor event and secured benefactors in collaboration with operations team

United Way of Addison County, Middlebury, VT
Grant Review Board Member   Fall 2017–Spring 2018
- Evaluated grant applications and allocated $300,000 in funding to social service organizations
- Advised 15 local organizations on how to successfully implement grant-funded projects

YK Pao School, Shanghai, China
Teaching Assistant   Summer 2017
- Partnered with instructor to manage class flow and operations
- Participated in a cultural immersion experience via living with a native host family in Shanghai apartment complex

Additional Skills and Interests. In this section, categorize your skills and qualify your level of proficiency where possible. You may also include relevant certifications or licenses. If you wish to include conversation starters by mentioning personal interests, be specific (e.g., "contemporary fiction" is more interesting than "reading").

SKILLS AND INTERESTS
- **Language Skills:** Chinese: intermediate high, limited business efficiency; French: beginner high
- **Computer Skills:** InDesign, Microsoft Suite, PC and Mac software, and audio recording/editing software
- **Interests:** FC Barcelona soccer, tennis, Nordic skiing

SAMPLE

Important Reminders

- Have your résumé reviewed by a peer career advisor (*go/pcas*) or career advisor (*go/cciadvising*).

- Be ready to discuss every detail highlighted in your résumé.

- Double- and triple-check for spelling and grammatical errors.

- **Do not ever lie or embellish.** Misrepresentation is a violation of the CCI student code of conduct—all information must be accurate (e.g., do not round your GPA).

- To maintain formatting, save and submit your documents in PDF format.

- Be consistent with format, writing style, font, bulleting, margins, verb tense use, using a period with bullet points, using bold/caps/underlining for text emphasis, proper spacing between dashes and hyphens, etc.

- Do not state a job objective or put "references available" anywhere on the résumé.

- Do not leave email addresses hyperlinked or use ampersands (&), especially if sending your résumé electronically.

THE COVER LETTER

Why is the cover letter important? When employers scan your résumé, they are interpreting your skills and experiences through their own lens. As much as you try to target your résumé to a specific position, it may not convey to the employer all that you have to offer. A cover letter goes beyond the résumé, providing the following:

• A chance to make a case for yourself and your candidacy to the employer so that they want to bring you in for an interview and learn more.

• A targeted introduction to your application that relates specifically to the position.

• An opportunity to make connections between your education, experience, and skills and the qualifications sought by the employer.

• A sample of your writing skills.

Target each cover letter you write to a specific job with its own set of responsibilities and qualifications in a specific organization with its own culture and mission. For this reason, writing a cover letter takes time. Do not rush the process. Do the following before you start writing:

• Read the job description and highlight skills you have and may want to address.

• Research the organization to get a sense of the culture, what the employer values, and what they are looking for in a candidate. These may not be explicitly mentioned in the posting.

- List the skills and qualities you think the employer is looking for based on the posting and your research.

- Identify relevant past and present experiences or accomplishments and describe how you have developed skills that qualify you for this new position. The skills and qualities do not have to relate directly to the opportunity but should be relevant to those the employer is seeking. For instance, if you are applying for a scientific research position but do not have direct experience, think about other positions in which you have developed your attention to detail, your ability to work with others, additional research skills or scientific knowledge, etc.

- Select two or three specific examples of experiences or accomplishments that you think are most relevant or important to highlight in your letter.

- Use the Situation-Task-Action-Result (STAR) method to flesh out your examples with details. The idea is to show how you developed your skills, not just to tell the employer you have them.

  Situation. State the situation you were in, providing background that will help provide context; e.g., title, organization, department, project, time frame.

  Task. Describe the task you were assigned and what was expected or the challenges or obstacles you had to overcome.

  Action. Detail the specific action steps that you took to handle the tasks or address the obstacle.

  Result. Describe your results in measurable terms. What impact did you have? Quantify or qualify your results.

Cover Letter Formatting

Cover letters should follow standard business letter format and should be no longer than three to four paragraphs. Use a 10- or 12-point font but nothing smaller. Once you have completed a draft of your letter, meet with a peer career advisor (PCA) or career advisor for review and feedback. Ask a friend to proofread and edit for grammar and spelling. See the next page for information about how to structure your letter. *go/pcas* or *go/cciadvising*

Your Street Address
City, State Zip

Date

Contact Name
Title
Employer
Street Address
City, State Zip

Dear Mr./Ms. _____ : (*Write to a specific person when possible*)

The opening paragraph should pique the employer's curiosity by stating enthusiastically **why you are pursuing the position**. **Name the position** and tell **how you became aware of it**. If you were referred by or networked with someone known to the employer, mention that person's name. **Reveal your knowledge** of the employer. Finish your paragraph with a strong sentence **emphasizing your key qualifications that match the employer's requirements**. Focus on what you can contribute, rather than what you can gain.

The most effective middle paragraph(s) **articulates specific examples** of how your experience will enable you to excel in the position. Use the **STAR** framework to show your **specific qualifications, skills, or accomplishments that match the job description**. These will likely be drawn from past or current academic, extracurricular, work-related, or personal experiences. Refer to the key aspects of your résumé, but avoid restating your résumé's descriptions. If your personal qualities are not obvious on your résumé, this is your opportunity to discuss them.

Close your letter by **thanking the employer, restating your interest, and asking for the opportunity to learn more about the position**. If you say that you are going to follow up, do it. Following up is not necessary for on-campus recruiting opportunities but is highly recommended for other opportunities. Note that your résumé is enclosed. Include your contact information (phone number and email).

Sincerely,

(*Signature here*)

Your Typed Name

ACTION VERBS

Accommodated	Consolidated	Established
Achieved	Constructed	Estimated
Acquainted	Consulted	Evaluated
Adapted	Controlled	Examined
Administered	Converted	Executed
Advertised	Coordinated	Expanded
Advised	Corresponded	Expedited
Advocated	Counseled	Experimental
Analyzed	Created	Explained
Applied	Criticized	Extracted
Approved	Defined	Financed
Arbitrated	Delegated	Fixed
Arranged	Delivered	Formulated
Assembled	Demonstrated	Founded
Assessed	Described	Gathered
Assisted	Designated	Generated
Assumed	Designed	Guided
Attained	Detected	Handled
Audited	Determined	Headed
Authorized	Developed	Hypothesized
Balanced	Devised	Identified
Budgeted	Diagnosed	Illustrated
Built	Directed	Implemented
Calculated	Discontinued	Improved
Charted	Discovered	Improvised
Classified	Dispatched	Increased
Coached	Dispensed	Influenced
Combined	Displayed	Informed
Communicated	Disproved	Initiated
Compiled	Dissected	Inspected
Completed	Distributed	Inspired
Composed	Dramatized	Installed
Compounded	Drew	Instituted
Computed	Edited	Instructed
Condensed	Educated	Interpreted
Conducted	Eliminated	Interviewed
Conferred	Encouraged	Introduced
Conserved	Enforced	Invented

Inventoried
Investigated
Judged
Learned
Lectured
Led
Logged
Maintained
Managed
Marketed
Mediated
Memorized
Mentored
Minimized
Modeled
Modernized
Modified
Monitored
Motivated
Navigated
Negotiated
Observed
Obtained
Operated
Ordered
Organized
Oversaw
Painted
Performed
Persuaded
Photographed
Piloted
Planned
Politicked
Prepared
Prescribed
Presented
Printed

Processed
Produced
Programmed
Projected
Promoted
Proofread
Protected
Provided
Publicized
Published
Purchased
Questioned
Read
Realized
Reasoned
Recommended
Reconciled
Recorded
Recruited
Reduced
Referred
Regulated
Removed
Reorganized
Repaired
Reported
Represented
Researched
Resolved
Responded
Restored
Reviewed
Routed
Scheduled
Selected
Separated
Served
Shaped

Shared
Simplified
Sketched
Sold
Solved
Sorted
Spoke
Sponsored
Strengthened
Studied
Suggested
Summarized
Supervised
Supplemented
Supplied
Surveyed
Synthesized
Systematized
Talked
Taught
Tested
Trained
Translated
Traveled
Tutored
Typed
Umpired
Unified
United
Updated
Upgraded
Utilized
Weighed
Wrote