

# St. Rita's Employment Ministry

## RESUME' & COVER LETTER TIPS

### Resume'

A resume' is a marketing tool that outlines your skills, accomplishments and areas of expertise. The resume' should give a potential employer a clear idea of how you will contribute to the workplace. A good resume' alone cannot get you a job, but it can help open doors and get you an interview. Some readers may spend only ten seconds skimming a resume' to see if you've got what they're seeking. Therefore, a well-written resume' must do its work quickly, in an easy-to-read format.

### Effective Aspects of a Resume':

- Usually 1-2 pages in length, depending on years worked and number of positions held.
- Main sections of a resume':
  - Header with personal contact information. Do not use your work information even if you are currently employed.
  - Summary or Profile – Optional, but should usually be used for resumes longer than one page.
  - Experience
  - Education
  - Additional Information – Optional but can include supplementary skills, qualifications, certifications, or outside interests (i.e. if you speak a second language or participated in a management training course, etc.)
- List experience first, in reverse-chronological order (i.e. current first). Career progression and dates should logically flow. Avoid laying out by function, as it makes the resume' too hard for the reviewer to quickly follow. The exception to this would be if you have limited work experience (like a recent college grad) or if you are applying for a job in a different field (if you are changing careers, for instance). In those cases, a functional format may be more to your advantage.
- Emphasize critical facts – Discuss not just what you did, but the results and impact you had; numbers and quantifying results really help with this.
  - Result/achievement statement: Specific Job Responsibility [what you did] + Related Effect [so what happened] + Outcome Achieved [the result] – e.g., "Implemented new sales tracking metrics that increased sales productivity 23%."
  - Use action words like: increased, grew, built, improved, developed, redesigned, generated, consolidated, reduced, eliminated, avoided, protected, or saved.
- To make visually appealing, avoid writing too much detail (i.e. avoid small fonts, no more than 5-7 bullet points for each section). Also avoid summarizing at too high a level (i.e. large fonts with no supporting bullet points). Do not use fancy fonts but stick with something fairly basic and easy to read.

- Customize for the job you are applying for – You may need to highlight different skill sets, experiences, and accomplishments for different positions.
  - Be careful when using industry/functional jargon if you are conducting a broad search outside your current industry or function.
  - Do take note of key words from the job description and utilize them in your resume’.
- Do not list personal information on your resume’ that companies would not be allowed to ask during a hiring process due to anti-discrimination laws such as age, ethnicity, physical characteristics, etc.

### **Cover Letters:**

A well-written cover letter can make the difference between having your resume’ reviewed or discarded. Do not make the mistake of sending a resume’ without a cover letter. Preparing an interesting and effective one may not be easy, but it is powerful and will allow you to direct the reviewer to the accomplishments, skill sets, and experiences that differentiate you from others. You can mail a cover letter as a hard copy along with your resume’ or just put it in the body of an email. However, if you choose to put it in your email, be sure to use formal language and proper punctuation just as you would in a letter, as you want to make a favorable first impression.

### **Effective Aspects of a Cover Letter:**

- Focused and crisp – no more than one full page
  - Simple language; no jargon or unnecessary words
  - Rule of thumb – 30-40% of page should be blank space
- Tailored to the specific company and position – e.g. “I am interested in the Sales Manager job at Company ABC, and would like to apply for the position.”
  - Specifically addressed to an individual at the company and preferably the hiring manager
  - Tell the reader why you are interested in the firm and/or position. Mentioning specific facts about the company will help the reader see you are sincerely interested and have done your research on the company, helping you stand out.
- Tailored to illustrate the experiences and skills you have that the employer is looking for.
  - Look at the qualifications listed on the job position opening/posting: What are the top 3-5 skills/experiences mentioned? Inform the reader you have them and help them see where they can look for this detail on your resume’.
  - Be honest and don’t stretch the truth about skills you don’t have or about a position you are not a fit for.
  - If there is no specific posting or opening for which you are applying, investigate what skills you think the company values and needs and focus on those in your cover letter.
  - Don’t restate the resume’ with detail but use the cover letter to provide a brief summary of the 3-5 key attributes you bring to the position.
  - Close with both an action item and a means of contacting you: for example, “Attached please find my resume’. I look forward to speaking with you about the position and will call your office within the next week to follow-up. In the interim, I can be reached at \_\_\_\_\_. Thank you for your consideration.” (But you must follow up!)

### **Cover Letter Traps & Pitfalls:**

- Being too humble or negative on your credentials. You want them to know why they should speak to you, not why you may not be the best fit for the position.
- Being arrogant. You are selling yourself so DO use confident language but don't go overboard.
- Using mass-produced, generic cover letters. This is the exact opposite of what a cover letter should do and it will be spotted right away by the hiring manager, ensuring your resume' gets discarded.
- Sending cover letters that contain typos, misspellings, incorrect grammar, improper punctuation, or slang terms.
- Telling the employer what their company can do for you. This is about what you can do for the company.
- Being passive and leaving it to the employer to follow-up. Do not say "I hope to hear from you." Ask for a meeting, a call or an interview and follow-up!
- Rehashing your resume'. Instead, summarize a couple of key points from your resume' that you want the hiring manager to focus on.