

"How to Write a Great Resume and Cover Letter"¹

Here is a summary of the key insights from the Harvard Extension School video,
<https://youtu.be/PAthQKLhBTs?si=olO7Oa2GLZtgICrM>

1. Crafting a Great Resume

- **The 7-Second Rule:** Resumes are marketing documents. Because the average employer only takes about 7 seconds to skim a resume, it must immediately demonstrate how you add value [00:08].
- **Structuring Information:** While a one-page resume is ideal, two pages are also acceptable. Decide whether to place your education at the top or bottom based on which is more marketable for the role: your degree or your work experience [00:22].
- **Action-Oriented Descriptions:** Avoid writing a basic mini-job description. Instead, use "accomplishment statements" built on three specific criteria [00:44]:
 - Start each point with a strong **action verb** [01:01].
 - Focus on the **impact or result** by asking yourself how you made a difference (e.g., did you increase, decrease, or modify something?) [01:13].
 - **Quantify** your information with clear numbers and data whenever possible [01:19].

2. Writing a Cover Letter

- **Tailored and Focused:** Like the resume, a cover letter is a one-page marketing document that must be highly customized [01:43].
- **Two Core Questions:** A great cover letter should explicitly answer: *Why are you the right fit for this specific position?* and *Why do you want to work at this specific organization?* [01:49].

3. The Importance of Networking

- **Don't Be Entirely Reactive:** Relying solely on internet job boards results in slim odds because employers don't know you [02:11].
- **The Best Strategy:** Networking remains the number one job search strategy. Conducting informational meetings allows employers to meet you first, turning your resume into a placeholder rather than the sole factor in your application [02:26].

Here are definitions for 15 of the most important concepts and terms mentioned in the video summary to help maximize your job search strategy:

Resume & Application Terms

- **Marketing documents** — Materials (like resumes and cover letters) designed to strategically present your skills, background, and value to "sell" yourself to a prospective employer.
- **Value** — The specific benefits, problem-solving capabilities, and return on investment an employee brings to an organization.
- **Marketable** — Skills, traits, or credentials that are highly attractive and in-demand by employers in the job market.

¹ Most of this information was compiled by Gemini, 5 June 2026

- **Accomplishment statements** — Bullet points on a resume that focus on the positive results and impacts of your work, rather than just listing daily duties.
- **Action verb** — Dynamic words (such as *managed*, *optimized*, or *designed*) used at the start of resume bullet points to demonstrate initiative and achievement.
- **Quantify** — The practice of using concrete numbers, percentages, or dollar amounts to prove the scale and success of your achievements.
- **Customized** — Tailoring an application specifically to match the exact requirements and culture of a single job opening, rather than using a generic template.
- **Placeholder** — A document that serves as a formal record or reference point after a personal connection has already been established.

The Job Search Process

- **Skim** — To read through a document rapidly to preview the main ideas and overall layout without analyzing every word.
- **Criteria** — A set of standards or rules used to judge, evaluate, or make a decision about something.
- **Networking** — The process of interacting with others to exchange information, build professional relationships, and uncover unadvertised career opportunities.
- **Reactive** — A passive job search strategy where an applicant only responds to external prompts, such as applying to visible public job board postings.
- **Informational meetings** — Low-pressure, casual conversations with professionals in your target field to gather advice, learn about their industry, and expand your network.
- **Odds** — The mathematical probability or likelihood of a specific outcome occurring (such as getting called in for an interview).

Some other words and expressions we saw in class:

- **Application Process:** The series of steps (forms, documents, interviews) required to apply for a job, university, or visa.
- **Sponsorship:** Financial or legal backing provided by a company or organization to support an individual's education, visa, or project.
- **Secondary Education:** Schooling for teenagers, usually covering middle school and high school (roughly ages 11–18).
- **Tertiary Education:** Any formal education completed after high school, including universities, colleges, and trade schools.
- **Selective Entrance:** A competitive admissions system where entry is based on merit, test scores, or auditions rather than location.
- **Conditional Offer:** An official acceptance that is only guaranteed if you meet specific future requirements (like passing final exams).
- **Contact details:** information about how an employer, recruiter etc. can reach you.
- **Soft skills:** the personal attributes, personality traits, and interpersonal skills that determine how well you work and interact with others, including
 - Communication: Explaining ideas clearly and listening actively.
 - Teamwork: Collaborating smoothly with colleagues or classmates.
 - Adaptability: Handling changes or unexpected problems calmly.
 - Time Management: Organizing your schedule to hit deadlines without stress.
- **Alumnus (plural alumni):** a person (people) who have graduated from an institution (like a university)
- **Accomplishment: an achievement:** something you have been able to do (which is not easy)
- **Competence (ies):** ability to do certain things, skills
- **Action verbs:** verbs describe an activity you did (in a previous job)