



# RESUMES & COVER LETTERS

*Undergraduate Resource Series*

Mignone Center for Career Success | 54 Dunster Street

Harvard University | Faculty of Arts and Sciences

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08/23

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# CREATE A STRONG RESUME

**A** resume is a concise, informative summary of your abilities, education, and experience.

It should highlight your strongest assets and skills, and differentiate you from other candidates seeking similar positions. Although it alone won't get you a job or internship, a good resume is an important factor in obtaining an interview.

Tailor your resume to the type of position you're seeking. This doesn't mean that all of your experiences must relate directly, but your resume should reflect the types of skills the employer would value.

## GETTING STARTED

- Draft a resume using one of the [templates on the MCS website](#).
- **Attend a Resume Workshop** to learn the nuts and bolts of getting started. See the [MCS events calendar](#) for dates.
- View the [MCS Recorded Resume Webinar](#) on our website.
- **Get advice via drop-ins**. Monday-Friday, 1:00-4:00pm - ask quick career-related questions and have an advisor review your resume.
- **Look for industry specific resume review clinics**, listed on our [events calendar](#) in employer events.

# RESUME TIPS

### RESUME LANGUAGE SHOULD BE:

- Specific rather than general
- Active rather than passive
- Written to express not impress
- Articulate rather than "flowery"
- Fact-based (quantify and qualify)
- Written for people who scan quickly

### DON'T:

- Use personal pronouns (such as I)
- Abbreviate
- Use a narrative style
- Use slang or colloquialisms
- Include a picture
- Include age or gender
- List references
- Start each line with a date

### TOP 6 RESUME MISTAKES:

1. Spelling and grammar errors
2. Missing email and phone information
3. Using passive language instead of "action" words
4. Not well organized, concise, or easy to skim
5. Not demonstrating results
6. Too long

### DO:

- Be consistent in format and content
- Make it easy to read and follow, balancing white space
- Use consistent spacing, underlining, italics, bold, and capitalization for emphasis
- List headings (such as Experience) in order of importance
- Within headings, list information in reverse chronological order (most recent first)
- Avoid information gaps such as a missing summer
- Be sure that your formatting will translate properly if converted to a .pdf

### PLAN TO WORK INTERNATIONALLY?

Resume guidelines can vary from country to country. See our [international resources](#) at the MCS website.

## RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS

# ACTION VERBS FOR YOUR RESUME

LEADERSHIP							
Accomplished	Achieved	Administered	Analyzed	Assigned	Attained	Chaired	Consolidated
Contracted	Coordinated	Delegated	Developed	Directed	Earned	Evaluated	Executed
Handled	Headed	Impacted	Improved	Increased	Led	Mastered	Orchestrated
Organized	Oversaw	Planned	Predicted	Prioritized	Produced	Proved	Recommended
Regulated	Reorganized	Reviewed	Scheduled	Spearheaded	Strengthened	Supervised	Surpassed
COMMUNICATION							
Addressed	Arbitrated	Arranged	Authored	Collaborated	Convinced	Corresponded	Delivered
Developed	Directed	Documented	Drafted	Edited	Energized	Enlisted	Formulated
Influenced	Interpreted	Lectured	Liaised	Moderated	Negotiated	Persuaded	
Presented	Promoted	Publicized	Reconciled	Recruited	Reported	Rewrote	Spoke
Suggested	Synthesized	Translated	Verbalized	Wrote			
RESEARCH							
Clarified	Collected	Concluded	Conducted	Constructed	Critiqued	Derived	Determined
Diagnosed	Discovered	Evaluated	Examined	Extracted	Formed	Identified	Inspected
Interpreted	Interviewed	Investigated	Modeled	Organized	Resolved	Reviewed	Summarized
Surveyed	Systematized	Tested					
TECHNICAL							
Assembled	Built	Calculated	Computed	Designed	Devised	Engineered	Fabricated
Installed	Maintained	Operated	Optimized	Overhauled	Programmed	Remodeled	Repaired
Solved	Standardized	Streamlined	Upgraded				
TEACHING							
Adapted	Advised	Clarified	Coached	Communicated	Coordinated	Demystified	Developed
Enabled	Encouraged	Evaluated	Explained	Facilitated	Guided	Informed	Instructed
Persuaded	Set Goals	Stimulated	Studied	Taught	Trained		
QUANTITATIVE							
Administered	Allocated	Analyzed	Appraised	Audited	Balanced	Budgeted	Calculated
Computed	Developed	Forecasted	Managed	Marketed	Maximized	Minimized	Planned
Projected	Researched						
CREATIVE							
Acted	Composed	Conceived	Conceptualized	Created	Customized	Designed	Developed
Directed	Established	Fashioned	Founded	Illustrated	Initiated	Instituted	Integrated
Introduced	Invented	Originated	Performed	Planned	Published	Redesigned	Revised
Revitalized	Shaped	Visualized					
HELPING							
Assessed	Assisted	Clarified	Coached	Counseled	Demonstrated	Diagnosed	Educated
Enhanced	Expedited	Facilitated	Familiarized	Guided	Motivated	Participated	Proposed
Provided	Referred	Rehabilitated	Represented	Served	Supported		
ORGANIZATIONAL							
Approved	Accelerated	Added	Arranged	Broadened	Cataloged	Centralized	Changed
Classified	Collected	Compiled	Completed	Controlled	Defined	Dispatched	Executed
Expanded	Gained	Gathered	Generated	Implemented	Inspected	Launched	Monitored
Operated	Organized	Prepared	Processed	Purchased	Recorded	Reduced	Reinforced
Retrieved	Screened	Selected	Simplified	Sold	Specified	Steered	Structured
Systematized	Tabulated	Unified	Updated	Utilized	Validated	Verified	

Always use your @college email account and check it frequently, even if you have enabled forwarding.

## RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS

# RESUME SAMPLE

Firstname Lastname

If an employer asks for your SAT/ACT scores or GPA, include in your Education section.

17 Main Street • Los Angeles, CA 92720 • youremail@college.harvard.edu • (714) 558-9857

### Education

#### Harvard University

A.B. Honors degree in History. GPA 3.73.

Relevant Coursework: International Political Economics and the European Community.

Commit 25 hours per week to Harvard Varsity Field Hockey Program.

Cambridge, MA

May 2023

#### University of London

Study abroad coursework in European History and Econometrics.

London, UK

May - August 2021

#### Los Angeles High School

Graduated with high honors. SAT I: M:780 V:760.

National Honor Society. Member of Varsity Field Hockey Team.

If including coursework, be sure it's relevant to the position to which you're applying.

Los Angeles, CA

June 2019

### Experience

#### Pepsi-Cola North America Beverages

##### Marketing Analyst Intern

Examined profitability of foreign market for new fruit drink using analysis of comparable brands. Managed focus groups and consumer surveys gathering over 500 data points. Created ideas for niche marketing campaigns including use of social networks and viral marketing. Presented findings to senior managers using quantitative analysis and creative visuals in combined PowerPoint presentation.

Use different verbs.

Remote

May - August 2022

#### Thomas Wilck Associates

##### Assistant Account Executive

Researched and assembled requests for proposals for medium-sized public relations and communications firm. Actively participated in staff meetings and brainstorming sessions. Generated correspondence with top executive officers.

London, UK

May - August 2021

#### Tech Hills

##### Technology Intern

Implemented new web site, including back end database storage system and dynamic web pages.

Note that relevant interests and skills can be demonstrated through campus and volunteer activities as well as through previous employment.

Laguna Hills, CA

May - August 2020

### Leadership

#### Harvard Undergraduate Women in Business (WIB)

##### Executive Committee Member

Organized marketing and advertising campaign to increase membership. Coordinated business conference and networking reception for 50 business professionals and 500 students.

Cambridge, MA

February 2020 - Present

#### Harvard College Marathon Challenge

##### Training Program Director

Developed training program for 25 charity runners. Raised over \$25,000 to support Phillips Brooks House Association and The Cambridge Food Project.

Cambridge, MA

January - May 2020

### Skills & Interests

**Technical:** Microsoft Excel and Access, Stata, SQL, Java and HTML.

**Language:** Fluent French and Conversational Spanish.

**Interests:** Ultimate Frisbee, Bhangra dance, and European films.

Be consistent presenting data. Use either numerals or words but not both.

# OPTIONAL CATEGORY EXAMPLES

You may wish to adopt these categories if relevant to your experience or the opportunity you are applying for. If you have significant experience in a specialized category, consider using that as your primary “Experience” section. Both paragraph and bulleted formats are options, but be consistent with the formatting within your resume. Students in creative and performing arts can develop resumes, portfolios, and websites to support their specific job search. MCS advisors can help!

## Leadership Experience

### **Harvard Society of Black Scientists & Engineers**

Cambridge, MA

#### **President**

September 2022 - May 2023

Provided strategic direction and developed annual goals for this 90-member student group. Organized board and general meetings. Oversaw existing activities, programs, and collaborations with other student organizations. Represented group in Black Community Leaders Organization.

### **Harvard Computer Society**

Cambridge, MA

#### **Membership Coordinator / Board Member**

January - May 2022

Organized marketing and advertising campaign, resulting in 20% increase in membership. Coordinated tech conference and networking reception for 30 professionals and 75 students. Upgraded and enhanced website.

## Public Service Experience

### **Cambridge Department of Social Services**

Cambridge, MA

#### **Intern**

September 2022 – Present

- Conduct site visits to local social service agencies to assist in evaluating effectiveness of service delivery. Observe experienced counselors and social workers in private settings with clients.
- Analyze data to determine trends in service usage.

### **Phillips Brooks House Association**

Dorchester, MA

#### **Summer Urban Program Senior Counselor**

June – August 2022

- Organized activities at summer camp encouraging academic achievement among inner city and under-resourced children. Managed \$500 activities budget.
- Produced and implemented curriculum for girls ages 11-12 exposing campers to female leaders in community, community service, and health education.

## Technical Skills

**Programming:** C, C++, C#, SQL, R, Perl, Python, MATLAB, JavaScript, OCaml.

For tech (computer science) resumes, include Technical Skills after the Education section.

**Operating Systems:** Windows, MAC OS, and Linux.

**Web Design:** Designed [www.abc.com](http://www.abc.com), [www.xyz.com](http://www.xyz.com)

## Research Experience

### **Stanford Nanotech Research Center**

Palo Alto, CA

#### **Research Intern**

Project: Microfabrication of Thin-film Heaters to Simulate Hotspots.

June – August 2021

- Fabricated devices for testing effectiveness of nanoscale patch used to cool down hotspots on microprocessors.
- Utilized cleanroom facilities to create devices with hotspot heater and temperature sensors to simulate heat generation.

## Performing Arts Experience

### **Mainly Jazz Dance Company**

Cambridge, MA

#### **Dancer / Choreographer**

October 2020 – Present

Perform traditional jazz, lyrical, hip hop, funk, and modern dance at performances open to public throughout the year. Teach dance routines weekly to 20+ students at local elementary school.

## Activities

### **Lowell House Committee**

Cambridge, MA

**Member.** Collaborate on social and community service activities.

September 2020 – Present

### **Massachusetts General Hospital**

Boston, MA

**Hospital Volunteer.** Commit 5 hours per week greeting patients.

January – May 2021

## RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS

# RESUME TEMPLATE I (WITH BULLET POINTS)

Firstname Lastname

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Home or Campus Street Address • City, State Zip • youremail@college.harvard.edu • phone number

### Education

#### Harvard University

Degree, Concentration, GPA [Note: GPA is Optional]

Cambridge, MA

Graduation Date

Thesis [Note: Optional]

Relevant Coursework: [Note: Optional. Awards and honors can also be listed here.]

#### Study Abroad [Note: If Applicable]

Study abroad coursework in \_\_\_\_\_.

City, Country

Month Year – Month Year

#### High School Name

[Note: May include GPA, SAT/ACT scores, or academic honors an employer may want to know]

City, State

Graduation Date

### Experience

#### Organization

City, State (or Remote)

#### Position Title

Month Year – Month Year

- Beginning with your most recent position, describe your experience, skills, and resulting outcomes in bullet or paragraph form.
- Begin each line with an action verb and include details that will help the reader understand your accomplishments, skills, knowledge, abilities, or achievements.
- Quantify where possible.
- Do not use personal pronouns; each line should be a phrase rather than a full sentence.

#### Organization

City, State

#### Position Title

Month Year – Month Year

- With your next-most recent position, describe your experience, skills, and resulting outcomes in bullet or paragraph form.
- Begin each line with an action verb and include details that will help the reader understand your accomplishments, skills, knowledge, abilities, or achievements.
- Quantify where possible.
- Do not use personal pronouns; each line should be a phrase rather than a full sentence.

### Leadership & Activities

#### Organization

City, State

#### Role

Month Year – Month Year

- This section can be formatted similarly to the Experience section, or you can omit descriptions for activities.
- If this section is more relevant to the opportunity you are applying for, consider moving this above your Experience section.

### Skills & Interests [Note: Optional]

**Technical:** List computer software and programming languages

**Language:** List foreign languages and your level of fluency

**Laboratory:** List scientific / research lab techniques or tools [If Applicable]

**Interests:** List activities you enjoy that may spark interview conversation

To help you design a strong resume, MCS offers formatted templates. On the MCS website, search “templates” and click on MCS Guides and Templates. Choose bulleted or paragraph style, fill in your information, and then bring your draft to drop-ins for editing and feedback.

# RESUME TEMPLATE II (paragraph format)

## Firstname Lastname

Home or Campus Street Address • City, State Zip • youremail@college.harvard.edu • phone number

## Education

### Harvard University

Degree, Concentration, GPA [Note: GPA is Optional]

Cambridge, MA

Graduation Date

Relevant Coursework or Thesis: [Note: Optional. Awards and honors can also be listed here.]

### Study Abroad [Note: If Applicable]

Study abroad coursework in \_\_\_\_\_.

City, Country

Month Year – Month Year

### High School Name

[May include GPA, SAT scores, or academic honors an employer may want to know]

City, State

Graduation Date

## Experience

### Organization

City, State (or Remote)

### Position Title

Month Year – Month Year

Beginning with your most recent position, describe your experience, skills, and resulting outcomes in bullet or paragraph form. [Note: Begin each line with an action verb and include details that will help the reader understand your accomplishments, skills, knowledge, abilities, or achievements. Quantify where possible. Do not use personal pronouns; each line should be a phrase rather than a full sentence.]

### Organization

City, State

### Position Title

Month Year – Month Year

With your next-most recent position, describe your experience, skills, and resulting outcomes in bullet or paragraph form. [Note: Begin each line with an action verb and include details that will help the reader understand your accomplishments, skills, knowledge, abilities, or achievements. Quantify where possible. Do not use personal pronouns; each line should be a phrase rather than a full sentence. Avoiding the use of articles can make your descriptions flow more smoothly.]

## Leadership & Activities

### Organization

City, State

### Role

Month Year – Month Year

[Note: This section can be formatted similarly to the Experience section, or you can omit descriptions for activities. If this section is more relevant to the opportunity you are applying for, consider moving this above your Experience section.]

### Organization

City, State

### Role

Month Year – Month Year

[Note: This section can be formatted similarly to the Experience section, or you can omit descriptions for activities. If this section is more relevant to the opportunity you are applying for, consider moving this above your Experience section.]

## Skills & Interests [Note: Optional]

**Technical:** List computer software and programming languages

**Language:** List foreign languages and your level of fluency

**Laboratory:** List scientific / research lab techniques or tools [If Applicable]

**Interests:** List activities you enjoy that may spark interview conversation

## RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS

# WRITE AN EFFECTIVE COVER LETTER

Your cover letter is a writing sample and a part of the screening process. By putting your best foot forward, you can increase your chances of being interviewed. A good way to create a response-producing cover letter is to highlight your skills or experiences that are most applicable to the job or industry and to tailor the letter to the specific organization to which you're applying.

	Date of Letter
Use complete title and address.	Contact Name Contact Title Company Name Street Address City, State, Zip Code
Address to a particular person if possible and remember to use a colon.	<b>Dear _____:</b>
	<b>Opening paragraph:</b> Clearly state why you're writing, name the position or type of work you're exploring and, where applicable, how you heard about the position or organization. A summary statement may work well here by including three reasons you think you would be a good fit for the opportunity.
Make the addressee want to read your resume. Be brief, but specific.	<b>Middle paragraph(s):</b> Explain why you are interested in this employer and your reasons for desiring this type of work. If you've had relevant school or work experience, be sure to point it out with one or two key examples; but do not reiterate your entire resume. Emphasize skills or abilities that relate to the job. Be sure to do this in a confident manner and remember that the reader will view your letter as an example of your writing skills.
Remind the reader of what you can do for the organization.	<b>Closing paragraph:</b> Reiterate your interest in the position, and your enthusiasm for using your skills to contribute to the work of the organization. Thank the reader for their consideration of your application, and end by stating that you look forward to the opportunity to further discuss the position.
	Sincerely,
	Your name typed

### Some general rules about letters:

- Address your letters to a specific person if you can.
- Tailor your letters to specific situations or organizations by doing research before writing your letters.
- Keep letters concise and factual, **no more than a single page**. Avoid flowery language.
- Give examples that support your skills and qualifications.
- Put yourself in the reader's shoes. What can you write that will convince the reader that you are ready and able to do the job?
- Don't overuse the pronoun "I".
- Remember that this is a marketing tool. Use plenty of action words.
- Have an MCS advisor provide feedback on your letter.
- If converting to a .pdf, check that your formatting translates correctly.
- Reference skills or experiences from the job description and draw connections to your credentials.
- Make sure your resume and cover letter are prepared with the same font type and size.
- While you may be tempted to use a generative AI tool to compose your letter, be deliberate and specific with your prompts. Remember to edit the results carefully and add your own voice/style to the letter.

# SAMPLE COVER LETTER

September 1, 2023

Morgan Smith  
Director of Communications  
Jumpstart  
308 Congress Street, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Boston, MA 02110

Dear Morgan Smith:

I am a senior at Harvard College studying History and Literature. I am writing to apply for the Marketing and Communications position at Jumpstart posted in Harvard's Crimson Careers database. I'm very excited about the field of education, and would welcome the opportunity to bring my strong communication skills, creativity, and marketing experience to your growing team.

Jumpstart's commitment to early education for every child is of particular interest to me because of my passion for youth development. This past summer, I worked as a senior counselor in the Summer Urban Program, which is dedicated to preventing summer learning loss for children in the Boston and Cambridge area. I designed and taught fun, interactive classes to a group of 10 fifth graders, and planned and led local field trips and workshops daily with a junior counselor. Throughout the summer, I consistently strived to create math, science, and reading lessons and activities that were engaging and tailored to my students' needs.

Additionally, in my role as the Director of Marketing for the Social Innovation Collaborative, I led our team in creating a social media strategy to drive our member recruitment efforts and promote our programs and events on platforms including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. With so many competing events on campus each day, I had to continually be creative in my approach to developing and delivering content that would be compelling and effective. As a result of my efforts, our group experienced a 20% increase in our membership base and a 15% increase in our social media engagement. I'm excited at the prospect of bringing the skills I developed through this experience to the Marketing and Communications role at Jumpstart.

Thank you for your consideration. I very much look forward to the opportunity to speak with you in person about my interest in this position.

Sincerely,

Alex Crimson