

excerpted from CHAPTER 7

RESUMES

A thought that sometimes makes me hazy, am I, or are the others crazy?
—Albert Einstein

Around campus, folklore abounds about unorthodox methods for landing jobs. Students swap stories about how one woman got her job with a major pizza franchise by having her resume delivered in a pizza box, while another guy fresh out of college took the George Costanza approach—lying his way through the interview, even faking his age. Another one I heard recently was that a software company had hired a skilled hacker, impressed by his ability to access the company's confidential files.

Whether these tales are fact or fiction, I attribute them partly to wishful thinking—we want the hiring process to happen easily, almost magically, without having to do research or traverse hoops. We want the task of landing a job to be as simple as calling in a favor from Aunt Julie, or exchanging a chatty e-mail with an alum who knows of an opening. Mostly, we want to avoid having to *write*. But the fact remains that a perfect resume is usually essential for getting your foot in the door; happily, lots of advice is available to guide you as you tread.

No one expects you to invent your resume from thin air; in fact, employers reading your resume expect you to know and follow the accepted conventions. Remember, you are often competing with hundreds of similar documents at a time, so you want yours to fit in yet stand out for the right reasons. Further, you must treat your resume as a living document that you will revise for the rest of your life. Most professionals change jobs five or more times, so their resumes are always in flux. So begin well by studying the conventions and basing your resume on a good model. And recognize that plenty of options and variations are available within the conventions. This chapter will help you to study the conventions, work within them, and write a winning resume.

*Every job is a self-portrait of the person who did it.
Autograph your work with excellence.
—Unknown*

Nuts and Bolts of Resume Writing

I learned about resume writing from my students. The students with the best resumes, I found, were those who understood that a resume is principally an objective summary of your skills and achievements, secondly a subtly clever argument that you are worth hiring, and finally a reflection of your individuality. The key is to work within the conventions while building a resume that is unique to you. The best way to begin is to study the conventions, then mimic the qualities of a good model, with an eye for places where your individuality can emerge. With the help of your peers, I have provided you with excellent advice and resume models on the following pages. Finally, I should note here that employers sometimes use the terms “resume” and “curriculum vitae” (or “c.v.”) interchangeably, and both terms loosely mean “life summary.”

The conventional resume is organized according to the sections that follow, moving from the top of the resume to the bottom.

Name and Addresses

- There is no title for this section; simply provide your legal name, addresses, and phone numbers as shown in the examples. No matter how attached you are to it, do not use your nickname—use the formal name under which you will be cashing your paychecks. :-)
- Either beneath your name or address, provide relevant e-mail addresses. See sample resumes for format ideas.
- Boldfacing and capitalizing your name is reasonably standard, though not required, and making your name stand out with a larger or fancier font is acceptable, but beware of graphic overkill.
- Never use titles such as “Resume” or “Personal Data Sheet” on the top of the page—redundant and silly; your name centered at the top automatically tells readers that the document is a resume.

Objective

- As a rule of thumb, include a job objective on an undergraduate resume. Keep it as short as is practical, with the goal of taking up no more than two lines of text.
- If possible, use an actual job title (“forecaster,” “engineering intern”) and provide the specific type of employer or type of position that you are seeking (“internship at a research facility,” “entry-level position with a consulting firm”).
- Avoid the overuse of phrases such as “a challenging position,” “a progressive company,” “an established firm”—you need not preach to the employer about its status. Your aim here is to categorize the *role* that you can fulfill.

Excerpted from Joe Schall's Style for Students: Effective Technical Writing in the Information Age, Outernet Publishing, © 2002 by Joe Schall. Available from Cengage Learning at 800-355-9983.

Your job objective can be tailored a bit to the position that you are applying for, but never mention a company's actual name in your job objective—the objective is intended to define a role, not a specific job at a specific place.

Education

In this section, be at your most objective on the resume—simply report the facts. Begin by providing the title and address of your school. On the next line, provide your exact degree title, including a minor or program emphasis if relevant. Include your projected graduation date even if it is years away. Other options that might be included under “Education”:

- *G.P.A.* Generally, include if it is a 3.0 or better; include G.P.A. in major if impressive.
- *Dean's List.* Provide actual semesters or years.
- *Relevant Coursework.* List actual course titles or appropriately worded categories.
- *Curriculum Description.* This could be included to describe your background concretely.
- *Study Abroad.* Always include it and provide the college's name and address.
- *Honor's Program.* Always include it.
- *Thesis.* Always include it and list it by title.

Note the variety of options explored under “Education” in the sample resumes provided.

Experience / Work Experience / Employment

- Any of these three titles is acceptable, though “Experience” is the most standard.
- The convention is to use past tense throughout this section, even to describe jobs that you currently hold. Some students elect to discuss current jobs in the present tense.
- As a rule, list your work experience in reverse chronological order—most recent first—and provide the actual dates of employment. Go back several years, even early into high school if necessary. Provide exact job titles (invent them honestly if no actual titles were used), and give the locations of your employers. All jobs need not be directly relevant to the position you are applying for, but be sure that the descriptions of your job duties are worded such that they enhance your accomplishments and responsibilities.
- Use active verbs to describe your job skills (a list is provided in the next section) and make each job description specific and efficient. Do not feel compelled to describe every job duty (“waiter” and “newspaper carrier,” for example, are self-explanatory).
- As a rule, do not include your supervisor’s name or phone number, unless you are seeking an internship (where formal applications are rare) and have permission.
- Including job salaries is rarely a good idea, but providing the number of hours you worked per week can be helpful.
- Use identical margins and format for parallel items (e.g., line up all of your job titles with each other, and if you boldface one then boldface them all). Again, the sample resumes provided show a variety of approaches.

Computer Skills

Computer Skills is *not* a mandatory resume section, although many students include it, knowing that employers are typically interested in your computer expertise. As you can see in the resume examples provided, some students discuss computer skills in narrative form, others simply list their experience with specific hardware and software packages, others combine computer skills and language skills, and some describe their computer skills in the context of the “Experience” section, linked to particular jobs. Whatever your approach—from no mention of computer skills to providing specific URLs that you have worked on—make an informed choice that considers both your background and the requirements of the job you are after.

Activities / Honors / Volunteer Work

- For this section, choose whichever title or combination of titles best fits your examples. “Activities” is the most commonly used. Honors could be presented separately if they are impressive enough.
- Dates are highly recommended, in that they illustrate your level of participation in activities.
- List the most noteworthy extracurricular activities and include offices that you have held. Include any honors you have received, especially scholarships, but do not repeat items that were included in other sections of the resume.
- Choose descriptions of your leisure activities wisely and sparingly, even to the point of presenting them all on one line for the sake of efficiency.
- Try to include a conversation piece. I know students who have gotten into great discussions in interviews because they listed beekeeping or piano playing or their golf handicap under “Activities.”
- The bottom line in this section is that you want to provide a window into your uniqueness, whatever that uniqueness is. A volunteer firefighter, eagle scout, or licensed pilot can stand out as much as a scholarship recipient or professional sorority officer.

References

Employers generally like to see this section included as a convention and a courtesy, but in truth it is optional because employers already know that you can provide them with references. If you do include this section keep it highly efficient, perhaps just one line long, i.e., “References available upon request.” As a rule, do not include the actual names of your references on your resume unless you have their permission to do so and are simply seeking an internship; for a full-time permanent position you want your resume to inspire the employer to contact you and specifically request your references. Employers are often looking for specific kinds of references, and you do not want to hurt your chances by listing references who might not be quite right for their needs, or giving an employer the opportunity to call or write one of your references without your knowing about it. When references are requested, type up their full contact information, including address, phone, fax, and e-mail, on a page separate from your resume.

Quality Checking Your Resume

Once your resume is composed, it must be quality checked. Three prominent issues that arise in a quality check are content, format, and computer-related problems.

Reconsidering Content

- Look over the resume and be certain you have considered effective wording and strong candidates within each category, as detailed in the previous section of this manual.
- Consider accuracy and professionalism. If you simply volunteered at a position two hours per week, make sure your wording reflects this. Do your examples and wording reflect someone with a professional attitude or are they too informal or vague?
- Look over your job descriptions. You should be reporting exactly **WHAT YOU DID** and **HOW IT WAS VALUABLE**. Make sure we can see that your work was of use to someone and that performance was a concern.
- Browse for any major time gaps between jobs or other activities. If there are any, fill them in or otherwise eliminate them if possible.
- Review your activities section. It should essentially contain an objective listing of information—data, and perhaps some description—unique to you.
- Ask yourself: Have I only included content that I would feel comfortable discussing in an interview? At an on-site interview, your resume might be right on the interviewer’s desk.

Reviewing Overall Format

- With few exceptions, an undergraduate resume should be limited to one page.
- Maintain at least one-inch margins on all four sides of the page, and spread your information out so that it is visually balanced. Do not be afraid of white space.
- Be sure you have used identical margins and format for related information.
- Exploit punctuation marks—especially dashes, semicolons, and colons—to present your material efficiently.
- Be line conscious: if you are fighting for space and you see that just one or two words are gobbling up an entire line unnecessarily, revise accordingly.
- Remember that readers look at your resume left-to-right. Where logical, go to a new line for prominent new information.
- Present the final version of your resume on durable white or off-white paper; absolutely avoid odd colors such as purple, green, or pink (despite implications otherwise in the “Legally Blonde” film).

Making the Computer your Ally

- Change fonts types or sizes if needed to fit the resume to one page, but use just one or two fonts throughout the resume—Times, Chicago, and Helvetica are popular resume fonts—and go no lower than 10-point and no higher than 12-point.
- When lining up material, use tabs rather than space bars; otherwise, your output may appear differently than it does on the screen, or differently from one printer to the next.
- If you need a bit more space horizontally for just a line or two, see if you can “stretch”

Excerpted from Joe Schall’s Style for Students: Effective Technical Writing in the Information Age, Outernet Publishing, © 2002 by Joe Schall. Available from Cengage Learning at 800-355-9983.

the relevant lines by resetting the margin on the ruler at the top of the page.

- Absolutely work with a hard copy of your resume. Do not trust that the way it looks to you on the computer screen will exactly match the output.
- Proofread with perfection in mind, even having someone else proofread the resume too. Do not rely just on the spell checker, and certainly not on the grammar checker—neither will ever be capable of proofing a resume effectively.

As a final quality check, seek help. Other readers—your peers, professors, parents (gasp!), and the staff at your school’s Career Center—can add fresh perspectives (and even corrections) to your resume. You get the last word, of course, but I strongly suggest that you seek collective agreement that you have presented yourself in the best possible way on paper. It pays off.

List of Common Action Words

Action Words to Describe your Skills in the “Experience” Section of your Resume

Accepted	Coordinated	Experienced	Made	Recognized
Achieved	Correlated	Experimented	Maintained	Recommended
Adapted	Counseled	Explained	Managed	Reconciled
Adjusted	Created		Mapped	Recorded
Administered	Critiqued	Facilitated	Measured	Recruited
Advised		Financed	Mediated	Reorganized
Allocated	Decorated	Formed	Modeled	Reported
Analyzed	Defined	Formulated	Moderated	Researched
Appraised	Delegated	Founded	Monitored	Retrieved
Approved	Demonstrated		Motivated	Reviewed
Arranged	Designed	Generated		Revised
Assembled	Detailed	Governed	Navigated	
Assessed	Determined	Grouped	Negotiated	Scheduled
Assigned	Developed	Guided	Nominated	Screened
Assisted	Devised			Served
	Diagnosed	Handled	Observed	Set forth
Balanced	Digitized	Headed	Operated	Shaped
Budgeted	Directed		Ordered	Simplified
Built	Discovered	Implemented	Organized	Solved
	Displayed	Improved	Originated	Sorted
Calculated	Dissected	Improvised	Overcame	Sparked
Catalogued	Distributed	Increased		Strengthened
Checked	Drafted	Indexed	Participated	Supervised
Clarified		Informed	Performed	Supplemented
Classified	Earned	Initiated	Persuaded	Systematized
Collected	Edited	Innovated	Pioneered	
Communicated	Effected	Inspected	Planned	Trained
Compared	Empowered	Inspired	Predicted	Transcribed
Compiled	Encouraged	Installed	Prepared	Transformed
Composed	Enforced	Integrated	Presented	Translated
Computed	Engineered	Interpolated	Presided	
Conceived	Enlarged	Interviewed	Prioritized	Unified
Conducted	Enlightened	Investigated	Produced	Utilized
Confronted	Enlisted		Programmed	
Constructed	Established	Justified	Promoted	Valuated
Consulted	Estimated		Protected	Validated
Contracted	Evaluated	Keynoted	Provided	Verified
Controlled	Examined			
Converted	Executed	Led	Quantified	Weighed
Conveyed	Expanded	Logged	Questioned	Wrote

Excerpted from Joe Schall's Style for Students: Effective Technical Writing in the Information Age, Outernet Publishing, © 2002 by Joe Schall. Available from Cengage Learning at 800-355-9983.

Resume by a First-Year Student

Paula B. Perfect

School Address:

501 Hartranft Hall
University Park, PA 16802
(814) 825-1431
pbp329@psu.edu

Permanent Address:

18 Burger Road
Cheswick, PA 15024
(412) 965-1089
pbperfect@aol.com

Objective Seeking summer internship to enhance my meteorological forecasting experience.

Education Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802
Bachelor of Science in Meteorology
Anticipated Graduation: May 2006

Christiana High School, Newark, DE 15678
Honors Program; Class Valedictorian
Graduation: June 2002

Experience MEMBER, Campus Weather Service, Penn State University, University Park, PA,
June 2002-present
Volunteered for a weekly shift at campus weather station.
Collected weather data and recorded weather reports for broadcast on local
radio stations.

VOLUNTEER, Springhouse Homeless Shelter, Eatontown, NJ
May 2001-June 2001
Supervised children while their mothers attended classes.
Delegated duties to other volunteers.

**Activities/
Honors** Dean's Freshman Scholarship, Penn State, 2002
Bear Creek Township Women's Club Scholarship, 2001
Severe Weather Committee, Campus Weather Service, Penn State, 2001-
Academic Decathlon Gold Medal for Speech, 2000
Volunteer, Bear Creek Nursing Home, 1997-1999
Active in mountain biking, piano, and golf

**Computer
Skills** Working knowledge of PASCAL and BASIC.
Four years experience using Microsoft Word.

References Academic and personal references available on request.

Junior Seeking an Internship, with References Listed

MATTHEW A. SILICA

Home:

1886 Fork Road
York, PA 17407
(717) 238-4486

School:

3007-C Vairo Blvd.
State College, PA 16803
(814) 764-2259

Objective To enhance professional breadth through a summer internship position in materials science and engineering.

Education **Bachelor of Science in Ceramic Science and Engineering**
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802
Anticipated Graduation, May 2004.
Current GPA: 3.05/4.0.

Bachelor of Arts in Natural Sciences, Co-op Engineering Program
Lock Haven University, Lock Haven PA 17745

Work Experience White Rose Roofing, Inc. York, PA.
2001, 2002, during summer and winter breaks.
As part of a team, I installed new roofing systems and repaired old and damaged roofs, sometimes working 50+ hours per week.

Stevenson Library, Lock Haven University, Lock Haven, PA.
2001, 2002, during academic year.
I worked in the Reader Services Office 10-15 hours per week, documenting newly arrived materials and answering questions from library patrons.

Weathershield, Inc., York, PA.
2000, 2001, during summer and winter breaks.
I assisted in the insulation of over 20 new and existing homes.

Activities Sigma Pi Fraternity—treasurer and chair of membership committee.
Member of Management Science Club and the Ski Club.

Language/Computer Skills Six years of written and oral Spanish.
Working knowledge of Pascal, BASIC, and introductory CAD systems.
Working knowledge of word processing using Microsoft Word and Macwrite.

References

Dr. Gary Messing
119 Steidle Building
University Park, PA 16802
(814) 865-2262

Mr. Bruce Bookish
Lock Haven University
Lock Haven, PA 17745
(717) 399-4487

Mr. John Cutter
237 Rosemont Avenue
York, PA 17408
(717) 645-6693

Conventional Resume, Senior Stressing Related Coursework and Experience

JANICE MOBILE

jmobile@psu.edu

Current Address

136 Eden Lane
Pleasant Gap, PA 16802
(814) 236-6778

Permanent Address

1306 North Dallas Parkway
Dallas TX 75420
(214) 609-9612

OBJECTIVE Position with a mining company in production or engineering.

EDUCATION The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA
Bachelor of Science in Industrial Health and Safety, May, 2002.

Relevant Courses:	Mine Maintenance Engineering	Mine Systems Engineering
	Mining Engineering Analysis	Elements of Mineral Processing
	Senior Mining Engineering Project	Rock Mechanics
	Mineral Processing Laboratory	Mine Plant Engineering
	Mineral Land and Mine Surveying	Mineral Property Evaluation

EXPERIENCE

Engineering Assistant, Cyprus, Inc., Waynesburg, PA
6/01-8/01 - Participated in an Engineering Student Co-op program and gained diverse experience in the operation of a longwall mine.
1/01-4/01 - Assigned to Engineering Department but also worked for other departments, including production, safety, and maintenance.
- Performed surveying, data compilation, and time-study tasks.
- Completed computer simulations for ventilation and belt haulage.
- Participated in quantity and pressure ventilation surveys.

5/00-8/00 **Roofbolter Helper**, Solar Fuel Company, Grindstone, PA
- Began as a surface and underground laborer for a room and pillar mine.
- Was promoted to a steady roofbolter helper position on a single-boom machine for final two months; also performed other working face duties.

5/99-8/99 **Laborer**, Deerfield Coal Company, Irwin, PA
- Performed minor land improvements on reclaimed properties.

5/98-8/98 **Laborer**, FCI Corporation, Irwin, PA
- Operated a forklift and made deliveries of machined parts.

COMPUTER SKILLS Experienced with IBM's Lotus 1-2-3, Penn State's Mine Ventilation Simulation program, and West Virginia University's Belt Haulage Simulation program.

ACTIVITIES Student member of the Society of Mining Engineers, 1998-2001.
Active in racquetball, water-skiing, and canoeing.

Conventional Resume, Senior with Unrelated Work Experience

Dennis A. Marble

Present Address

1297 East Hamilton Avenue
State College, PA 16801-5331
(814) 861-3767
dam1@minec.psu.edu

Permanent Address

123 Macintosh Drive
Coraopolis, PA 15108-2757
(412) 230-9208
dam1@minec.psu.edu

OBJECTIVE Seeking an analyst position with a consulting firm where I can apply and enhance my mineral economics and business logistics training.

EDUCATION The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA
Bachelor of Science in Mineral Economics, Minor in Business Logistics
Graduation date: May 2002

WORK EXPERIENCE

- Salesman, The Oxford Shop, State College, PA. June 2000-present.
Responsible for cash register, inventory control, and customer service.
Developed radio and newspaper advertising campaign.
Programmed computer for inventory, mail order, and sales projection.
- Research Assistant, Penn State Department of Economics. Summer 2000.
Assisted Economics professor with library research and computer programming.
Programmed computer code to evaluate data for self-employed US citizens.
Utilized computer packages including SAS, Word Perfect, and Lotus 1-2-3.
- Owner, Manager. Foley Lawn Service, Coraopolis, PA. Summer 1999.
Started own business for lawn service and general handyman work.
Employed three high school students, organized payroll, developed business contracts with residential and civic groups, and developed advertising.

ACTIVITIES

- The 2001 Penn State Dance Marathon, Rules and Regulations Chairperson
Helped organize the largest student-run philanthropy in the country.
Supervised 70 students in the areas of registration and security.
Redesigned rulebook and registration processes. Supervised registration.
- Theta Chi International Fraternity
Held the offices of Vice President, Social Chairman, and Caterer.
Developed chapter philanthropy that benefited terminally ill children.

HONORS

- Theta Chi Penn State Chapter Outstanding Brother of the Year, 1999-2000.
- Theta Chi International Fraternity Key Man Award, 1999, 2000.
- IBEW/NCEA Scholarship, 1998.

Conventional Resume, Senior Stressing Education and Honors

JOANN GLASS
jglass@hotmail.com

Current Address
999 Lions Hall
University Park, PA 16802
(814) 861-2233

Permanent Address
111 East Street
Johnstown, PA 15905
(814) 235-2656

OBJECTIVE To obtain an entry-level position in the testing, analysis, or manufacture of ceramic substrates or integrated circuits.

EDUCATION The Pennsylvania State University, Park, PA
B.S. in Ceramic Science and Engineering, High Honors
Anticipated Graduation—May, 2001

Completed thorough engineering curriculum in the processing and electrical, optical, mechanical, and thermal properties of ceramics and glass, with electives in circuit analysis and semiconductor physics.

G.P.A.: 3.96/4.0

THESIS: Rapid Thermal Sintering of Nanocrystalline Ceramic Films.

EXPERIENCE IBM, Burlington, VT., SUMMER PRE-PROFESSIONAL (5/00-8/00).
- Developed quantitative and qualitative procedures for analyzing solder using x-ray fluorescence.
- Analyzed solder samples to ensure that the solder met purity specifications.
- Evaluated the accuracy and reliability of the x-ray fluorescence results against other analytical tests.

Penn State Dept. of Engineering Mechanics, TYPIST (1/00-5/00).
- Typed course notes for a graduate engineering mechanics seminar.

Penn State Office of Disabilities, PROCTOR (1/99-1/00).
- Proctored handicapped students during examinations and provided physical assistance as needed.

Johnstown Civic Band, Johnstown, PA., MUSICIAN (6/96-12/99, seasonally).

**HONORS/
ACTIVITIES** College Marshall, College of Earth and Mineral Sciences, Penn State (2001)
Dean's List (all semesters, 1997-2001).
Member of the American Ceramic Society (1998-2001).
President of National Honor Society for Ceramic Engineers (2000-2001).
Member of Earth and Mineral Sciences Student Council (1999-2000).
Recipient of the Cook Memorial Scholarship (1999).
Academic Chairperson for Residence Hall (1998).

excerpted from CHAPTER 8

LETTERS, PERSONAL STATEMENTS, AND PROFESSIONALISM

*I don't want to achieve immortality through my work,
I want to achieve it through not dying.
—Woody Allen*

When giving advice about or reading cover letters and personal statements, the key benchmark I use is simple: Do I get to know both the person and the professional? As we read a cover letter or personal statement, we should have a sense that no other candidate could have written this particular document in this particular way. Hence, we respect and honor the individual.

In conversation, the term “cover letter” is used loosely to mean any professional letter that you write in an attempt to get a job, with the term “cover” denoting that the letter is usually a “cover piece” designed to introduce and accompany your resume. Thus, too many writers think of the cover letter as mere mechanical introductory fluff, disposable goods, when in fact it can be more important than your resume. Professional letters you write are likely to be kept in a company file along with your resume as part of your permanent record. Letters are also your opportunity to show professional courtesy, impress companies with your knowledge of and interest in them, and allow readers to know you as a person. Good letters humanize you. And employers tend to choose people they feel they know—not strangers.

Even more humanizing are personal statements or application essays that you write when seeking a scholarship or admission to a graduate program. Here, you are typically expected to reveal something about what drives you as a person and a researcher. I clearly recall a few winning essays from years past: a student writing about his fascination with weather due to a hurricane he witnessed at the age of 10; another student who traced her interest in marine science back to her early days of beachcombing with her parents; a college marshal applying to law school who wrote not about his obvious academic success, but about experiencing discrimination at the hands of his peers because of his embarrassing skin condition. These students, all of whom achieved the goals they were after through writing, are memorable because they understood how to take the simple risk of “being themselves.”

Finally, unless you interview well and know how to approach faculty for letters of recommendation, your cache of professionalism is incomplete. Use the material in this chapter to ensure that employers, selection committees, and your professors get to know the best in you.

Excerpted from Joe Schall's Style for Students: Effective Technical Writing in the Information Age, Outernet Publishing, © 2002 by Joe Schall. Available from Cengage Learning at 800-355-9983.

*Whenever you are asked if you can do a job, tell 'em, "Certainly I can!"
Then get busy and find out how to do it.
—Theodore Roosevelt*

Writing Cover Letters

As with resumes, great cover letters tend to be based on excellent models, so the next few pages provide models that you can use. The best tip that I have heard on letter writing is that the letter is for the *audience*, not for you. Certainly you are selling yourself, but you do that by molding your skills to what an employer needs and by knowing all that you can about your audience. This tells you that you should visit a company's website, read the company literature, and have a specific person's name and title to write to (you can always request this by phone or e-mail before you write). In sum, know what your audience is interested in and how you might fit into *a company's* plans, not the other way around. Unless an employer instructs you otherwise, always include a cover letter with your resume as you apply for a job.

Tone: Making it Sound Good

- The proper tone for the cover letter is one of an informed, straightforward, courteous, relaxed, literate writer.
- Use "I" comfortably as a sentence subject, but avoid being too informal—overusing contractions or jargon could make you appear unprofessional.
- Avoid being too cocky, aggressive, idealistic, or unrealistic; come off as mature, self-aware, and confident.

Appearance and Mechanics: Making it Look Good

- Limit cover letters to one page, and type them using single-spaced or 1.5-spaced typing, with one-inch margins on all sides of the page.
- Skip lines between paragraphs.
- Favor short paragraphs over long ones.
- Use highly readable, tight, fonts, such as Helvetica or Times, and point sizes no larger than 12 and no smaller than 10.
- Spell check, then proofread the hard copy carefully. Present the final version of the letter on durable white or off-white paper.
- So that both your letter and resume are easy to read and Xerox, mail them flat in a large envelope rather than folded in a small one.

The Heading and Greeting: Following the Formats

- At the top right or left corner of the page, type your address, your phone number, your e-mail address, and the date. Below that, at the left margin, put the name, title, and address of the person receiving the letter.
- Skip a line or two, then type "Dear," the person's title (Dr., Ms., Mr.), name, and a colon.
- If possible, find out the proper title, spelling, and gender of the receiver of the letter (all it

Excerpted from Joe Schall's Style for Students: Effective Technical Writing in the Information Age, Outernet Publishing, © 2002 by Joe Schall. Available from Cengage Learning at 800-355-9983.

usually takes is a phone call or a little web surfing). If you cannot be certain of the recipient's gender, it is acceptable to use both the first and last name (i.e., "Dear Jan Morris"). If no name is available, use "Dear Human Resources Representative."

The Opening Paragraph: Showcasing Your Homework

- Ideally, open with a reference to how you derived knowledge of the company or position.
- If possible, provide context by some artful name-dropping ("Ms. Judith Sowers, a Quality Control Specialist in your Meredith plant, informs me that you are seeking . . ."). Otherwise, simply be forthright about why you are writing the letter ("I am writing to you because . . .").
- Include particulars about the company's activities and vision—prove that you have done your homework and know something about the company's products and mission. Even quote a mission statement if you can.
- Establish your own professional context by naming your major and school.

The Body Paragraphs: Selling your Skills

- One paragraph may suffice here, but use more if necessary, especially if you have several different skills or experiences to sell. Stick to one topic per paragraph.
- Through concrete examples, provide *evidence* of your work ethic and success—cite courses, co-ops, papers, projects, or internships you have completed. Make your examples both quantitative and qualitative. Some writers use a bulleted list to introduce narrative examples of their skills. Some even provide URLs for their home pages or other web pages they helped to create.
- Introduce your resume ("As the enclosed resume shows . . .") and *interpret* it for your audience rather than simply repeat its details. Apply your education, work experience, and activities directly to the job, proving that you are a highly capable candidate.

The Closing Paragraph and Signoff: Exiting Gracefully

- Keep your closing short and simple. Do not waste time. Be gracious and sincere, not falsely flattering nor pushy. Respectfully indicate your desire for further action, reminding the company of your availability.
- Remembering that a company could try to call you over a break or during the summer, indicate relevant phone numbers right in the text. Provide your e-mail address as well.
- Under the final paragraph, skip a line or two, then, directly under your heading address, type "Sincerely," then *handwrite* and type your name beneath.
- Indicate that a resume is included along with the letter by typing the word "Enclosure" at the left margin near the bottom of the page.

“Blind” Cover Letter Seeking an Internship

444 Montrose Avenue
State College, PA 16801
(814) 235-6783

February 8, 2001

Ms. Gale DeLaveaux
E304/C216
DuPont Experimental Station
Wilmington, DE 19880-0304

Dear Ms. DeLaveaux:

At the suggestion of Dr. John Hellman, Associate Professor of Ceramic Science and Engineering at the Pennsylvania State University, I am writing to inquire about any possible summer internship positions for 2001. I understand that you are working with thermodynamic, kinetic, and finite element modeling of reactions and flow in CVD reactors.

I am currently a junior in Ceramic Science and Engineering at Penn State. As my enclosed resume shows, I have a thorough background in mathematics, chemistry, and physics, and I am enthusiastic about applying this background in a summer position where I will learn from experienced scientists in a research environment. My primary interests are in thermodynamics and processing, and my interests continue to expand as my education broadens.

I am eager to discuss my background with you at your convenience. Dr. Karl Spear (814-865-4992), chair of the Ceramic Science and Engineering Program at Penn State, is also happy to speak with you about my credentials. My daytime phone number is (814) 235-6783, and a secondary phone number, where you could leave a message, is (814) 236-5609. My e-mail is wls1@psu.edu.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

William Scaffold

Enclosure

Cover Letter Seeking an Internship, Stressing Company Information

8 December 2000

642 Irvin Hall
University Park, Pa. 16802
(814) 862-7650
jm433@psu.edu

Stephen Rometo, Performance Engineer
General Electric International, Inc.
1 River Road, Building 55, Room 236
Schenectady, NY 12345

Dear Mr. Rometo:

Reading the recent *Fortune* article declaring GE the most admired company in America for the third year in a row, I was inspired to learn more about your company. I explored the GE website and attended a recent GE information session held at Penn State, and I am writing to inquire about possible summer internship opportunities for 2001. The valuable experience in manufacturing I gained in a previous internship makes me a strong candidate for an internship position with the Power Systems Performance Evaluations Group.

My search for the best way to apply my electrical engineering degree sent me last summer to an internship with Motorola in a wafer fabrication lab. I found that I thrived in the manufacturing environment. During this time, I was the owner of a metal deposition machine and a screen print tool. I acquired many crucial skills such as writing specifications and maintaining equipment. I also learned many valuable lessons about manufacturing including the nuances of communication between operators and engineers and effective methods of implementing process changes. While completing my internship, three documents I authored made their way into the factory's specification literature and I initiated three process changes. I was also honored with a scholarship award given to one summer intern who shows exceptional leadership skills.

Knowing first-hand the value of an internship with a company well respected for excellence in manufacturing, I am especially interested in GE Power Systems. I am impressed with your company's attention to its customers, especially in its new e-commerce initiatives such as the power turbine simulation web pages—a creative way to include the turbine industry in this new type of business. Finally, I respect your company's attention to the community, as seen in the number of community service projects that GE consistently undertakes.

My resume is enclosed for your reference, and I am readily available for an interview. If you need any further information, I can be reached at (814) 862-7650. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Moxie

Enclosure: resume

Cover Letter Emphasizing Skills

927 W. Barnard St., Apt.#1
State College, PA 16801
(827) 841-6836
April 8, 2002

Wilson Geosciences
379 Sonoma Lane
Sonoma, CA 95476

Dear Personnel Representative:

I will be graduating in May from Penn State University with a degree in Geosciences (emphasizing hydrogeology) and am seeking employment as an entry-level hydrogeologist. There are three primary skills that I have developed to apply as an entry-level hydrogeologist:

1. Field skills and experience, which are usually primary responsibilities in entry-level positions. I have conducted my own research for my senior thesis, which involved implementing borehole dilution tests to determine the groundwater velocity in a coal aquifer. I also have extensive coursework field experience, ranging from summer field school to water and soil sampling at polluted sites.
2. A strong interest in contaminant transport and groundwater modeling. This interest, coupled with good computer skills, provides opportunities for the use of groundwater and chemical modeling software packages. Hydrogeology and geochemistry coursework have equipped me with the theoretical basis for modeling, and an introduction to software packages. My work experience has also involved extensive PC skills. Although I have had only preliminary opportunities to apply these skills to groundwater modeling packages, I am confident that I can become proficient with such packages.
3. Good communication skills. Good writing and speaking skills allow for effective communication within a company and with clients. My studies have provided me with quality writing experience. I am currently completing my senior thesis, which involves a written and a Powerpoint presentation. Throughout my studies, I actively worked to improve my writing and gain experience writing for a variety of audiences.

My resume is enclosed for your reference. I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss my career opportunities with your company. Please feel free to contact me at (827) 841-6836. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Diane Z. Weston
Enclosure

Cover Letter Emphasizing Computer Skills

999 Lions Hall
University Park, PA 16802
(814) 555-1000
October 1, 2000

William Peterson, Director of Development
Atlas Information and Technology Systems
101 Stevens Drive, Suite 303
Lester, PA 19113-1564

Dear Mr. Peterson:

After recently speaking with Dora Plath, Human Resources Representative, I am responding to your advertisement for a Systems Administrator in the "Careers in Science and Technology" section of the September 24 edition of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. I am highly interested in helping Atlas Information and Technology Systems in its "twin mission to provide educational software products and produce state-of-the-art computation accelerators." I will graduate from Penn State in December, 2000, with a B.S. in Computer Science.

As my resume shows, through both coursework and internships I have accrued extensive web experience. By working as a team member in my Computer Project Design class--aiding in the creation of three websites--I developed a fluency in HTML, JavaScript, and Java. I also learned how to administer a website, and I now support several different sites for research groups and students at Penn State.

I also possess large-site administration skills, having assisted with the administration of nearly 100 Unix workstations, spread over several workgroups with over 500 users. Communicating with the users, assessing software needs, debugging user code, and writing scripts to make the administrator's job easier are but a few of my daily tasks.

Finally, my experience is not limited to the Unix world. As a student intern in a computer lab for two years, I have administered over 40 Macintoshes and 20 PC-compatibles, including initial configuration of hardware, software, and network facilities.

I am confident that my package of skills will make me a versatile systems administrator with your company. I welcome the opportunity for an interview, and can be reached by phone at (814) 555-1000 or e-mail at jsample@psu.edu.

Sincerely,

Jane Sample

Enclosure

Cover Letter Stressing Company Information

18 May 2001

RD 6, Box 4500
Stroudsburg, Pa. 18360
(570) 471-4564
jm433@psu.edu

Raytheon Systems Company
300 Science Park Road
State College, PA 16804

Dear Human Relations Staffing Recruiter:

After exploring your website and recently receiving an email about potential positions with your company, I am writing to inquire about full-time entry-level opportunities beginning January 2002. The considerable variety of experiences I have gained in previous internships makes me a versatile candidate for a full-time position with the Raytheon Systems Company.

While completing my B.S. in Electrical Engineering, I have interned with General Electric, Motorola, and Lockheed Martin. All three of these companies have taught me valuable workplace skills such as writing reports clearly, delivering presentations concisely, implementing process changes efficiently, and communicating with suppliers, customers, and other engineers effectively. My experience working for Lockheed Martin Management and Data Systems, most importantly, prepared me specifically for a job in the systems industry. During this time, I worked in both classified and non-classified environments in the area of software development. On the non-classified side, I co-authored software design inspection checklists that made their way into the company's documentation for both external and internal inspections. I was able to apply these quality control measures directly when I entered the classified realm, where I got experience coding and debugging using C++. This experience gave me a window into the daily work-related skills necessary to become a productive engineer in this field.

Knowing first-hand the pride of working for companies well-respected in industry, I am especially interested in Raytheon. Most importantly, however, I respect your company's attention to its responsibility to the community, as seen in the number of environmental groups and programs supported by Raytheon. For this reason, Raytheon is a company I would be proud to work for. Further, as a future Penn State alumna, I would welcome the chance to remain a member of the friendly and spirited State College community.

My resume is enclosed for your reference, and I am readily available for an interview. If you need any further information, I can be reached at (518) 385-0443 until August 17th, when I will return to school for my final semester and can then be reached at (814) 862-7650.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Moxie

Enclosure

Cover Letter Stressing Previous Experience at the Host Company

846 Hammond Hall
University Park, PA 16802
(814) 860-2233
September 23, 2002

Dr. Timothy Brown, Manager
General Technology Division
International Business Machines Corporation
Burlington, VT 19000

Dear Dr. Brown:

After working for IBM and speaking with you about ceramic substrates in electronic packages over the summer, I have become interested in permanent employment in your Burlington branch. As you know, I am currently a senior Materials Science and Engineering student (Ceramic Science Emphasis) at Penn State, and I am seeking an entry-level position that involves working with the materials utilized in electronic packages.

Experiencing IBM first-hand was gratifying and exciting. Not only was I impressed with the concern IBM has for the safety of its employees, but I was intrigued by its constant striving to become a six-sigma company. Along with this goal, IBM faces the challenge of producing electronic packages that operate faster and are not limited by the speed of the substrates. I want to be part of a team that faces and meets these kinds of challenges.

As my enclosed resume shows, I have gained valuable experience from both school and employment. My academic background includes studies of various properties of ceramics with an emphasis in electrical properties of materials and integrated circuits. I have also expanded my studies by taking electives in the computer graphics area. Through my employment as a summer pre-professional for Quality Assurance under Dr. George Slusser, I was exposed to several analytical techniques to ensure the purity of materials used in chip production. In particular, I was faced with the task of developing procedures to analyze materials using x-ray fluorescence. As a result, I was able to validate my findings by comparing them to the findings obtained from accurate though more tedious analytical techniques. I am confident that my background, particularly my previous employment at your Quality Assurance division, will be of interest to you.

After you have reviewed my qualifications, I would welcome the opportunity for an interview. I can be reached at 814-860-2233. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely yours,

Anita Voltz
av23@psu.edu

Enclosure