

# Crafting Your Resume and Cover Letter



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2. Using Strong Action Verbs to Highlight Achievements
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# 1. Tailoring Your Resume for a Specific Position

## Analyze the Job Description Thoroughly

Begin by printing out the job posting. Use a highlighter to mark every required hard skill (such as Python or budget management) and soft skill (such as collaboration or adaptability). Pay special attention to repeated phrases—if “data-driven decision making” appears multiple times, it is a key priority.

A well-tailored resume is not a full life story; it is a focused case showing why you are the best match for this particular role.

On a sheet of paper, create two columns:

- Must-have qualifications (essential skills)
- Nice-to-have qualifications (additional strengths)

According to a 2023 Jobscan study, 63% of recruiters quickly dismiss resumes that fail to align with the job description’s keywords. Aim to naturally reflect the employer’s wording without copying full sentences.

## Rewrite Your Professional Summary

Swap a generic summary for a targeted one. For a role seeking a “bilingual customer success manager with SaaS experience,” try this:

“Bilingual customer success professional with over 4 years in SaaS settings, focused on lowering churn rates through proactive client support.”

This quick update immediately demonstrates fit. Incorporate the exact job title from the posting when it matches your background.

## Prioritize Relevant Experience

U.S. resumes frequently use a hybrid approach: place a “Relevant Experience” section ahead of “Additional Experience.” This highlights your strongest matches right away.

For every bullet point, use the STAR-Lite approach:

1. Situation (brief context)
2. Task (your responsibility)

3. Action (specific steps you took)
4. Result (measurable outcome)

Example:

- Before: Responsible for social media accounts.
- After: Increased Instagram engagement by 34% over 6 months by introducing weekly bilingual story campaigns.

Lead with results whenever possible. Quantified accomplishments help candidates receive about 40% more interview requests (TopResume, 2024).

### **Incorporate Keywords Naturally**

Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) look for precise keyword matches. Integrate terms from the job description into your skills section and bullets:

- If the posting mentions “managed cross-functional teams,” use that exact phrasing rather than “worked with different departments.”
- Include both acronyms and spelled-out versions: Search Engine Optimization (SEO).
- Consider adding a Core Competencies section with 6–8 targeted phrases arranged in columns.

Avoid overstuffing keywords—it must still read smoothly to a human reader. Test by reading your resume out loud; revise if it feels unnatural.

### **Adjust the Education and Certifications Section**

For early-career applicants, move pertinent coursework or certifications closer to the top. For instance, in a marketing role that values Google Analytics, list that certification before degree details. Remove unrelated items—no need to include an Introduction to Philosophy course for a finance position.

### **Final Alignment Review**

Before submitting, use this 5-point checklist:

1. Does my summary reference the target role?
2. Are at least 80% of the must-have keywords included?
3. Do three or more bullet points contain specific metrics?
4. Is the most relevant experience in the top third of the page?
5. Have I removed experience older than 10–15 years (unless required)?

Tailoring requires 20–30 minutes per application but significantly boosts response rates. Create a fresh version for each opportunity rather than reusing one static document.

## 2. Using Strong Action Verbs to Highlight Achievements

### Why Action Verbs Are Important

Action verbs power your resume, turning ordinary lists into compelling stories of impact. Replace “was responsible for” with words like “orchestrated” or “spearheaded.” This change immediately draws attention.

Action verbs demonstrate that you take initiative and deliver results.

Recruiters typically scan resumes in about 7 seconds. Dynamic verbs help your points stand out and improve ATS compatibility.

### Selecting the Best Verb for Each Skill

Choose verbs that precisely match the ability you want to emphasize. Avoid weak options like “did” or “made.”

- Leadership: directed, mentored, chaired, mobilized
- Communication: negotiated, authored, presented, persuaded
- Analysis: evaluated, diagnosed, forecasted, audited
- Creativity: designed, conceptualized, crafted, envisioned
- Efficiency: streamlined, accelerated, reduced, consolidated

Example: Instead of “Helped the team finish a project,” write “Spearheaded a cross-functional team to complete the project 3 weeks ahead of schedule.” The verb conveys leadership, and the number provides evidence.

### Building Strong Accomplishment Bullets

Follow the PAR structure: Powerful verb + Action + Result.

1. Begin with a strong action verb in past tense.
2. Describe your concrete contribution.
3. Quantify the outcome when possible.

Examples:

- Weak: Worked on social media.
- Strong: Amplified brand engagement by 45% through targeted Instagram campaigns.

- Weak: Was part of a sales team.
- Strong: Generated \$120,000 in new revenue in one quarter.

Numbers make your contributions credible and memorable. Use estimates if exact figures are unavailable.

### Avoiding Common Verb Pitfalls

Learners often rely too heavily on “worked” or “helped,” which can obscure personal impact. Steer clear of passive voice—“Was given an award” sounds weak; “Earned the Top Performer Award” sounds strong.

Vary your verbs to maintain interest. If you led multiple projects, mix “directed,” “orchestrated,” and “championed.”

Never overstate your role. Use honest terms: say “facilitated” or “contributed to” if you supported rather than led. Honesty fosters trust.

### Quick Practice Exercise

Pick a recent work task. Write it with a weak verb, then rewrite it three times using stronger options from the lists above. Add a metric if possible.

- Original: Answered customer calls.
- Rewrite 1: Resolved more than 50 daily customer inquiries while maintaining a 98% satisfaction rate.
- Rewrite 2: Clarified complex billing issues for clients, cutting repeat calls by 20%.
- Rewrite 3: Strengthened customer loyalty through empathetic and efficient phone support.

Regular practice expands your verb choices. Maintain a personal list of favorites and consult it when refreshing your resume. Your achievements merit energetic, precise language. 🎯

## 3. Writing a Strong Cover Letter Opening

### Capturing Attention Right Away

Your first sentence needs to engage the reader immediately. Hiring managers often spend only about 7 seconds on a cover letter. Open with a notable achievement or sincere connection to the organization. Skip generic starters like “I am writing to apply for the position.”

Weak: “I saw your job posting and I am interested.”

Strong: “When I improved customer retention by 22% at TechNova, I realized data-driven engagement was my strength—and your Customer Success position strongly appeals to me.”

The introduction should address three points in under 30 words: Who you are, why this company, and the unique value you offer.

### **Linking to the Company's Mission**

Review recent company news, values, or initiatives. Reference a specific element that aligns with your experience to show genuine interest.

- Check the “About Us” page for the mission statement.
- Look for recent press releases or social media updates.
- Mention a product launch, community effort, or award.

Example: “Your dedication to sustainable packaging, featured in last month’s GreenBiz article, matches my three years of experience reducing supply chain waste at EcoPack.”

This turns the opening into a personalized connection between your background and the company’s needs.

### **Emphasizing Your Strongest Qualification**

Choose one measurable achievement that directly addresses the main job requirement. Use numbers, percentages, or dollar figures for credibility.

1. Identify the role’s top priority (e.g., “increase sales”).
2. Recall a matching past success.
3. Summarize concisely: “I increased regional sales by 34% over 18 months through focused outreach.”

Focus on your single best point here. Reserve additional details for the body.

### **Organizing the Opening Paragraph**

Use this three-part structure:

- The Hook: A strong statement or impressive result.
- The Connection: Why this company or role appeals to you.
- The Value Proposition: What you will contribute if selected.

Example: “Leading a team that reduced project delivery time by 40% showed me the value of agile processes. I appreciate FinCore’s focus on iterative innovation in product development. I am eager to apply similar efficiency to your Project Manager role for timely, budget-conscious launches.”

Keep it concise—each sentence should serve a clear purpose.

### **Common Pitfalls to Avoid**

- Clichés: Replace “I’m a hard worker” or “I think outside the box” with concrete examples.
- Irrelevant details: Hobbies belong only if directly relevant.
- Apologetic tone: Focus on strengths instead of limitations.
- Repeating the resume: The letter should expand on and complement it.

Read the paragraph aloud. Revise until it feels distinctly yours.

### **Adapting to U.S. Corporate Style us**

U.S. employers appreciate confident, straightforward, and positive language. Use active voice and avoid overly formal or passive phrasing.

- Confident: “I am ready to lead your marketing team toward record growth.”
- Passive: “It is hoped that my skills might benefit your organization.”

Express enthusiasm with facts. Terms like “excited,” “eager,” and “committed” work well when supported by evidence.

### **Quick Checklist for the Introduction**

- Mentions the company name?
- Includes one specific, measurable achievement?
- Under 75 words?
- Avoids generic language?
- Sounds confident and personal?

Write this section after drafting the rest of the letter for better focus. A strong opening encourages the reader to continue.

## **4. Organizing the Body of Your Cover Letter**

### **Linking Your Background to Their Requirements**

The body proves your fit. It is not a resume repeat but a narrative showing how your experience meets their needs. Each paragraph should connect one key accomplishment to a job requirement.

Select two or three strong examples. Weave in the STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result) naturally without labeling the parts.

The central question to answer: “How will this candidate help solve our challenges?” Every sentence should support that.

## Strong First Body Paragraph

Start with your most impressive, relevant success and include numbers for impact.

- Weak: “I was responsible for social media at my last job.”
- Strong: “I grew organic Instagram engagement by 47% in six months by creating a bilingual content series, directly supporting your need for a Social Media Specialist who can engage varied audiences.”

Structure: Action verb + metric + brief approach + connection to their needs. This works across industries.

## Persuasive Second Paragraph

Highlight a complementary skill, such as leadership or problem-solving, with a short story.

Example: Instead of “I’m a great team player,” say: “When our Mexico City office experienced a sudden system outage, I led a five-person cross-departmental team to restore service in under three hours, reducing client disruption.”

Reference a company value or project: “I admire Acme Corp’s focus on sustainable packaging, and my experience cutting material waste by 15% positions me to support your 2025 environmental goals.” 🌱

## Making It Easy to Scan

Recruiters skim rather than read in depth. Use:

1. Short paragraphs (3–4 sentences max).
2. Occasional bullet points for 2–3 key wins.
  - Increased customer retention by 18% through a redesigned loyalty program.
  - Trained 12 new employees on CRM tools, shortening onboarding by one week.
3. Limited bolding for important metrics or skills.

Use clear American English. Replace tentative phrases like “I believe I could” with confident ones like “I will” or “I am prepared to.”

## Tone for U.S. Business Culture

Emphasize individual contributions: “I led a project...” rather than “We worked on...” Match the company’s style—energetic for startups, formal for traditional firms. Mirror language from their website.

Transition smoothly to the close: “These experiences have equipped me to provide immediate value to your team.”

## 5. Closing Your Cover Letter and Including a Call to Action

### Strong Closing Paragraph

Express authentic enthusiasm and quiet confidence. Connect your skills to the company's future goals. A 2023 TopResume survey noted that 68% of hiring managers appreciate closings that reflect understanding of company objectives.

Structure:

1. Reaffirm your suitability in one sentence.
2. Express interest in discussing how you can contribute.
3. Reference the attached resume.

Example: "My background in project management and data-driven approaches aligns well with your team's growth objectives. I would welcome the chance to discuss how I can support your upcoming product launch."

### Call to Action

End proactively yet politely. Invite the next step clearly.

"I look forward to speaking further about this opportunity and am available at your earliest convenience for an interview."

Include specific offers like requesting an interview or providing more materials. Avoid vague statements like "Hope to hear from you soon."

### Professional Sign-Off and Contact Information

Use standard closings for U.S. business:

- Sincerely,
- Best regards,
- Respectfully,

Follow with your full name. Below that, list:

- Phone number (with country code for international applications)
- Professional email
- LinkedIn URL (customized)
- Portfolio or website if applicable

Example:

Sincerely,

Maria Garcia

+52 55 1234 5678

maria.garcia@email.com

linkedin.com/in/mariagarcia

This setup allows quick contact. Recruiters spend little time scanning, so clarity matters.

### **Final Review and Pitfalls**

- Align tone with company culture.
- Double-check names for accuracy.
- Support claims with evidence rather than generic statements.
- Avoid overly casual closings in formal applications.

Read aloud for warmth and confidence. A polished ending reinforces your professionalism and strengthens your candidacy, especially in competitive bilingual markets.

## **6. Formatting Your Resume for U.S. Standards**

### **Limit to One Page** ☞

For most early- to mid-career professionals, keep the resume to one page. Recruiters scan quickly (around 7.4 seconds initially), so focus on the most pertinent details.

- Use 1-inch margins.
- Choose clean fonts like Calibri or Arial (10–12 pt).
- Skip photos, graphics, or fancy designs that may confuse ATS software (used by about 75% of large U.S. companies).

Prioritization, not crowding, is the goal.

### **Key Contact Information** 📄

Place your name prominently at the top (14–16 pt). Include only essentials below:

- Name: First and last only.
- Phone: Professional voicemail.
- Email: firstname.lastname@email.com style.
- LinkedIn: Clean custom URL.

- Location: City and state/country (e.g., “Mexico City, MX”).

Omit photos, age, marital status, or full addresses.

### Standard Sections

Use clear headings and reverse chronological order:

1. Professional Summary: 2–3 lines on key skills and a major achievement. Skip outdated “Objective” statements.
2. Work Experience: Job title, company, location, dates (month/year). 3–4 accomplishment bullets per role.
3. Education: Degree, institution, graduation year (optional if over 10 years ago).
4. Skills: 6–10 relevant hard skills (e.g., Python, Project Management, B2 English).

### Effective Bullet Points

Focus on achievements, not duties. Start with strong past-tense action verbs.

- Weak: Responsible for social media accounts.
- Strong: Increased Instagram engagement by 40% in six months through targeted content strategy.

Quantify results with numbers, percentages, and amounts whenever possible.

### Final Touches and File Format

Proofread carefully for errors and consistency. Save as PDF to maintain formatting, unless Word is specified. Use a professional filename like YourName\_Resume.pdf.

## 7. Proofreading for Common English Issues

### Catching Spelling Errors

Typos create a poor impression. Manual review is essential beyond spell-check (which misses many issues). Watch for homophones:

- their / there / they’re
- your / you’re
- its / it’s
- affect / effect

Read backward word by word to isolate each term.

## Subject-Verb Agreement

Ensure subjects and verbs match in number. Common challenges:

1. Intervening words: “The list of skills is impressive.”
2. Indefinite pronouns: “Everyone wants success.”
3. “Or” constructions and collective nouns (treated as singular in U.S. English).

Read sentences aloud to check.

## Consistent Tense

Maintain consistent tense. Use past tense for prior roles and present for current ones in resumes. In cover letters, use present for ongoing abilities and past for completed work.

## Article Usage

- a before consonant sounds (a university)
- an before vowel sounds (an hour, an MBA)
- the for specific items
- Often omit with general plurals: “Managers need communication skills.”

## Preposition Accuracy

Common fixes:

- interested in (not on)
- apply for (not to)
- graduate from (not of)
- responsible for (not of)

Build a personal list of frequent issues.

## Proofreading Approach

1. Read aloud for flow.
2. Verify formatting consistency.
3. Use text-to-speech for missed errors.

Take a break (at least two hours) before final review. A second pair of eyes helps catch overlooked problems.

This guide provides practical steps to strengthen your application materials for U.S. opportunities. Apply these strategies consistently for better results.

## 8. Résumé and CV (curriculum vitae) are not Interchangeable.

Résumé	CV
Used for most jobs in business, industry, and private companies	Used primarily in academia, research, medicine, and some scientific fields
Typically 1–2 pages	Often multiple pages
Tailored for a specific position	Comprehensive record of your entire academic and professional history
Focuses on relevant skills and achievements	Includes detailed information about education, publications, research, presentations, grants, and teaching
Updated and customized for each application	Updated regularly as a professional record

In the United States, **résumé** and **CV (curriculum vitae)** are **not interchangeable**. This often surprises people because in many countries, a CV simply means the document used to apply for jobs.

### Quick Comparison

Résumé	CV
Used for most jobs in business, industry, and private companies	Used primarily in academia, research, medicine, and some scientific fields
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## What Is a Résumé?

A résumé is a **marketing document** designed to help you get an interview.

Employers usually spend only a few seconds reviewing it, so it should be concise and focused on the position you're applying for.

A US résumé typically includes:

- Contact information

- Professional summary
- Work experience
- Education
- Relevant skills
- Certifications (if applicable)

## Example

If you're applying for a Customer Service Representative position, you would highlight:

- Customer support experience
- Communication skills
- Problem-solving abilities
- Relevant achievements

You would remove or minimize information that isn't relevant to that role.

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## What Is a CV?

A CV is a **complete professional and academic record**.

It is commonly used when applying for:

- University positions
- Research jobs
- Academic fellowships
- Postdoctoral positions
- Medical and scientific roles

A CV may include:

- Education history
- Teaching experience
- Research experience
- Publications
- Conference presentations
- Grants and funding
- Awards and honors
- Professional memberships
- Certifications
- Academic projects

## Example

A university professor's CV might be 10–20 pages long and contain every publication, conference presentation, and research project completed throughout their career.

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## What Should Not Be Included on a US Résumé?

Many countries expect personal information that US employers generally do **not** want to see.

Avoid including:

- |                  |                          |
|------------------|--------------------------|
| ✗ Photo          | ✗ Nationality            |
| ✗ Date of birth  | ✗ Religion               |
| ✗ Age            | ✗ Social Security Number |
| ✗ Marital status | ✗ Passport information   |
| ✗ Gender         |                          |

These details are typically omitted to help employers focus on qualifications and to reduce the risk of discrimination.

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## Which Term Should English Learners Use?

If you're applying for a typical job in the United States, say:

**résumé**

Examples:

- "I'm updating my résumé."
- "I submitted my résumé yesterday."
- "Can you review my résumé?"

Use **CV** only if you're applying for academic, research, or specialized scientific positions.

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## Simple Rule to Remember

In the US:

- Most jobs → **résumé**

- Universities and research careers → **CV**

If you're unsure, and the position is outside academia, the safest choice is usually **résumé**.

## 9. Mastering the STAR Method

The STAR Method is a proven framework for structuring your accomplishments in resumes, cover letters, and especially behavioral interviews. It helps you tell concise, compelling stories that demonstrate your skills and impact rather than simply listing duties.

### What STAR Stands For:

- **Situation:** Provide brief context for the challenge or opportunity.
- **Task:** Describe your specific responsibility or goal in that situation.
- **Action:** Explain the specific steps you took to address it (focus on *your* contributions).
- **Result:** Share the measurable outcome, using numbers whenever possible.

### Why Use STAR?

- It keeps your responses focused and professional.
- Recruiters and hiring managers love it because it makes your experience easy to follow.
- It naturally incorporates action verbs and quantifiable results, which significantly strengthen your application materials.
- STAR stories help you stand out in the 7-second resume scan and in interviews where behavioral questions (“Tell me about a time when...”) are common.

### STAR vs. STAR-Lite

The document uses **STAR-Lite** for resume bullet points (a shortened version focused on results). Use the full **STAR** for cover letters and interview answers where you have more space to tell the story.

### How to Build a Strong STAR Story

#### 1. Situation (1–2 sentences)

Set the scene. Who was involved? What was the context? Keep it concise.

#### 2. Task (1 sentence)

What was your role or the specific challenge you needed to solve?

#### 3. Action (2–4 sentences)

Detail the steps you personally took. Use strong action verbs. Emphasize skills relevant to the job.

#### 4. Result (1–2 sentences)

Quantify the outcome. What changed? Use metrics like percentages, dollar amounts, or time saved. If results were positive, highlight them; if mixed, focus on what you learned.

### Example Transformation

#### Weak bullet point (resume):

“Responsible for customer support.”

#### Strong STAR-based bullet point (resume – STAR-Lite version):

“Increased customer satisfaction scores by 28% by implementing a new ticketing system and training 8 team members on proactive issue resolution.”

#### Full STAR Example (for cover letter or interview):

**Situation:** At TechNova, our customer support team faced rising complaint volumes after a major product update, leading to longer response times.

**Task:** As the lead support specialist, I was responsible for improving response efficiency while maintaining service quality.

**Action:** I analyzed common issues, developed standardized response templates in both English and Spanish, and trained the team on the new process. I also introduced a priority queuing system for urgent cases.

**Result:** We reduced average response time from 48 hours to under 12 hours and improved customer satisfaction ratings by 28% within two months. This approach was later adopted company-wide.

### Tips for Mastering STAR

- **Tailor it:** Align the story with the job description’s key requirements.
- **Be specific:** Avoid vague statements. Use real details and numbers.
- **Focus on you:** Even in team situations, highlight your individual contributions (“I coordinated...” rather than “We coordinated...”).
- **Keep it concise:** Aim for 60–90 seconds when speaking in interviews. For resumes, condense to 1–2 lines.
- **Practice variations:** Prepare 3–5 strong STAR stories covering different competencies (leadership, problem-solving, teamwork, etc.).
- **Quantify everything possible:** “Reduced costs,” “Improved efficiency,” “Increased sales by X%,” etc.
- **End strong:** Always tie the result back to the value you can bring to the new role.

## Common STAR Mistakes to Avoid

- Spending too much time on Situation and not enough on Action/Result.
- Using “we” instead of “I.”
- Forgetting metrics.
- Sounding scripted—practice until it feels natural.
- Including irrelevant details.

### Quick Exercise:

Take one achievement from your experience. Write it out using the full STAR format. Then condense it into a powerful resume bullet. Compare before and after versions.

Mastering STAR will make your resume bullets more impactful, your cover letters more persuasive, and your interviews more confident. Use this method consistently, and you'll present your experience as clear evidence of your ability to deliver results. 🎯