



Creating a Dynamite Job Portfolio

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Speak about yourself using descriptive language.
- ✓ Apply the essential elements of cover letters and resumes.

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Course Overview

The job market continues to change, as does the way we look for work. This course examines the value of presenting yourself as a complete package by using a resume as an introduction to an employer and backing it up with a portfolio presented at the interview.

In order to make the most of this course, participants need to have recently completed the Getting Your Job Search Started workshop, or identified target positions and completed a full skills assessment and goal setting exercise.

Learning Objectives

At the end of this workshop, you will be able to:

- Ñ Speak about yourself using descriptive language.
- Ñ Apply the essential elements of cover letters and resumes.
- Ñ Understand the need for pre-employment testing and what to expect in your target market.
- Ñ Design a personalized portfolio.
- Ñ Develop a plan that moves you to a new job within 60 days.

Personal Objectives

Unit 1

Essential elements of Cover letters and Resumes

Who Are You?

Exploration

What is a Portfolio?

We may think that only creative individuals (such as graphic artists, writers, and teachers) would use a portfolio in a job search. This is not always the case, however. The portfolio is evolving into a popular tool for all types of job seekers.

Your portfolio is a part of your job interview. You can use it to illustrate your strengths by including examples of your work. Putting your portfolio together is a lot of work, but once you have completed it, it is easy to keep it up to date.

The first thing that you must focus on as you create your portfolio and resume is a good description of what you offer to an employer. Describing yourself, what you are good at, and what you want are important steps. What are your strengths and skills?

Creating Target Statements

Outline your target job or industry below by completing the following statements.

My ideal job right now is to work as a _____.

Research in the open and hidden job market indicates that I must consider these things:

Your top skills are the statements on which you will focus. They will become the central ideas behind your resume, cover letter, and portfolio. These statements (which may be on your current resume or on the worksheet that you completed for your pre-assignment) need to be full of active language (strong verbs) and adjectives. If possible, include numbers and achievements to enrich each statement. This helps employers to understand how you do what you do, and how valuable you are.

Imagine that you worked as a medical transcription clerk in your last job. Now, compare these two statements and decide which one is stronger:

- Ñ Responsible for transcribing medical file updates from doctor’s recorded messages.
- Ñ Consistently transcribed physician’s medical files at 65 words per minute with 99.25% accuracy.

Now imagine that you were a taxi driver. Compare these two statements and decide which one is stronger:

- Ñ Safely operated a taxi.
- Ñ Operated two different cabs (sedan and mini-van) and was commended for customer service six times per year on average.

A Few Guidelines

Use each verb only once. If you say “accomplished” ten times, it becomes boring to the reader. Vary your language.

Tell the truth and keep industry jargon to a minimum. You might think that you are using standard terms, but the person screening your resume might not understand the intricacies of your profession. You need to be able to explain yourself to whomever could be reading your resume.

Most strong resumes are composed of short, punchy sentences. Aim for sentences between 15 and 20 words. If your sentences are too long, break them into shorter ones. If they seem short and choppy, vary your presentation to combine sentences with bulleted lists.

Use common words to communicate quickly and effectively. Avoid words that readers have to look up in the dictionary. For example, don’t use “obfuscate” when “confuse” will do or you will lose your reader.

You can skip pronouns (I, you, he, she, they) and articles (a, the) to keep your statements fresh and save space. In some environments, this also seems more professional, while other people might like a more personal touch. Think about your intended audience when choosing your approach.

Now, rewrite your top five skills. If you need some ideas for verbs, have a look at the box of helpful verbs on the next page.

Punch Up Your Action Statements

accomplished	achieved	acted	adapted	addressed
administered	advanced	advised	allocated	analyzed
appraised	approved	arranged	assembled	assigned
assisted	attained	audited	authored	automated
balanced	budgeted	built	calculated	cataloged
chaired	clarified	classified	coached	collected
compiled	completed	composed	computed	conceptualized
conducted	consolidated	contained	contracted	contributed
controlled	coordinated	corresponded	counseled	created
critiqued	cut	decreased	delegated	demonstrated
designed	developed	devised	diagnosed	directed
dispatched	distinguished	diversified	drafted	edited
educated	eliminated	enabled	encouraged	engineered
enlisted	established	evaluated	examined	executed
expanded	expedited	explained	extracted	fabricated
facilitated	fashioned	focused	forecast	formatted
founded	generated	guided	identified	illustrated
implemented	improved	increased	influenced	informed
initiated	innovated	inspected	installed	instigated
instituted	instructed	integrated	interpreted	interviewed

introduced	invented	launched	lectured	led
maintained	managed	marketed	mediated	moderated
monitored	motivated	negotiated	operated	organized
originated	overhauled	performed	persuaded	planned
prepared	presented	prioritized	processed	produced
programmed	projected	promoted	provided	publicized
published	purchased	recommended	reconciled	recorded
recruited	reduced	referred	regulated	rehabilitated
remodeled	repaired	represented	researched	restored
restructured	retrieved	revitalized	saved	scheduled
screened	set	shaped	solidified	solved
specified	stimulated	streamlined	strengthened	summarized
supervised	surveyed	systemized	tabulated	taught
trained	translated	traveled	trimmed	upgraded
validated	worked	wrote		

Writing the Resume

Essential Ingredients

Your resume is your marketing sheet. It concisely tells a potential employer what you know and do. Following some guidelines will help you to produce a brilliant resume. The best resume is one for which you generate the content, but if you're struggling, help is available to package it brilliantly.

Length

Your resume should be no more than two pages, although there are exceptions. In today's busy office, the resume screener and manager would love to have a one-page resume, so if you can say everything that needs saying in one page, do so. Otherwise, most resumes stick to an unofficial two-page cut off. If

you cannot say it in two pages, you are probably saying too much. You should know that if your resume is longer than two pages, it probably won't be read.

However, there are exceptions. Academic and scientific resumes are often longer than two pages because they are virtually portfolios. These kinds of resumes are referred to as Curriculum Vitae (CV), and include examples of professionally published work and research. You should only prepare a CV if it is specifically requested for a particular position.

A good rule of thumb is to review your resume and ask yourself if every statement helps potential employers learn something about you. If they won't get any value from what you are saying, leave it out.

Proofreading

Never, ever skip this step. You must proofread your material very closely and then recruit some help. Often, when we re-read material that we have written ourselves, our brain recognizes it as correct, even if it's not. Even keen spellers can find it difficult to see errors in their own work. The spell check function on your computer is of some value, of course, but it will not recognize contextual mistakes, like using "hear" when you should use "here." Don't ask just anyone to help you with this step: ask a strong speller.

Contact Information

All of your important personal data (name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address) must be correct. Be mindful of the e-mail address you use. Sometimes, people tend to have very creative addresses. If you decide to use an e-mail address in your contact information, create one that sounds professional. Save the fun and playful names and creative addresses for your friends.

It is also a good idea to check your spam filter on a daily basis in case employer inquiries are getting stuck there.

Objective

People often use the objective statement incorrectly. They say things like, "Looking for an entry level accounting position." This is a bit too vague. You should take it to the next level and focus on what you can bring to the employer.

How about:

- Ñ Recent graduate who thrives in a busy environment and on challenging assignments seeks entry-level accounting position.
- Ñ Recent accounting graduate with a reputation for exceptional work and focus seeks entry-level accounting position.

Skill Summary

This is an optional section, but excellent if you have done similar work in many different organizations. It should include at least one statement that describes an achievement, and it should support your employment goals.

Work Experience

Use this section to highlight your most qualifying employment experiences. Put them in chronological order to keep it organized. Avoid wasting space. (For example, don't include employer addresses.)

Avoid including information that could cause problems for you. For example, if you are posting your resume online, you will probably need to be discreet about the name of your current employer in case someone from your current workplace comes across your resume online.

Remove all references to salaries, along with any reference as to why you left your former position. Avoid mentioning availability dates as well.

Use job titles that will make sense to a potential employer. Avoid jargon here; if your job title was not descriptive of the work you did, change the language. For example, "WTC" means nothing outside of the company that invented the acronym, even though you know it means "Warehouse Technician in the Calgary office." On your resume, it makes more sense to refer to that position as "Warehouse Technician."

As a rule, include no more than 10 years of work history unless previous experience is important. If you have not used a particular skill in the past ten years, chances are you will need to do some kind of upgrading before using it again.

Accomplishments

Depending on the type of work you have done and the contributions you have made, you may have a lot or a little to say about your achievements. You may want to list some of your achievements with your work experience, or you may want to list them in a separate category.

Businesses have pretty limited interests, most of which focus around profit. Your accomplishments need to show potential employers how good you will be at making and saving them money. If you keep that in mind, you will be able to easily select the right accomplishments to include. This does not mean that you should not include examples that cannot be qualified with numbers and dollars. It just means that you should quantify as many examples as you can.

Education

If you have recently graduated (or are about to graduate) and do not have much work experience, put this section ahead of the work experience section. If your experience is more valuable, then the work

experience section goes before this section. Your highest educational achievement goes first in the list. Include courses and qualifications that you earned outside of school that support your application, like driver's licensing, safety courses, workshops, and certificates.

General Style Tips

List the most recent experience first for each section. If you had more than one position with a company, list the most senior position first. Leave out irrelevant tasks or job titles.

Emphasize your accomplishments by using bold, italics, or underlining.

Include some comments about your work from a supervisor, manager, or customer (like an endorsement you might see on the cover of a book).

Include volunteer or community service involvement that supports your application. (Captain of the marbles team in elementary school does not fit here.) Exclude religious or political comments unless you are applying to a religious organization or political party.

Do not include references on the resume. Instead, add a line that says, "References available upon request."

Check Up On Yourself

Before you send your resume anywhere, go through this list:

- Ñ Have you used short, easy to understand words instead of longer, complex ones that need to be looked up?
- Ñ Are your sentences no more than 15 to 20 words long?
- Ñ Are your paragraphs under five lines?
- Ñ Do your sentences begin with powerful action words wherever possible?
- Ñ Have you weeded out all the jargon you possibly could?
- Ñ Has someone proofread your document?
- Ñ Is there a nice balance of print and white space on the page?

Writing the Resume

Sample Resume One

Rebecca is looking for a job in a new province within the animal care industry.

Rebecca Smith

1627 Main Street
Anytown, Anywhere 55555
(916) 222-9999

Objective

To apply my solid animal care and administrative skills to a position in the animal care industry.

Skills

- Advanced understanding of canine and behavior, in addition to having worked with cats, ferrets, rabbits and some birds
- Certified member of the International Civilian Search Dog program
- Provided excellent customer service in busy environments including sales transactions, selling supplies and services, managing inventory, and mentoring new staff
- Managed multiple demands of office administration, reception and customer service
- Operated several computer programs effectively, including Microsoft Office Suite, Works, and accounting software programs, in busy office environments

Education

- Grade 12 Diploma
- Class 5 Driver's License
- Certified in canine search and rescue, victim recovery, cadaver search, water, ground and disaster search; raised and trained a search dog through to federal certification levels

Work Experience

Canine Behaviorist and Trainer, 2005-present

Developed and implemented canine training system; provided individualized training, and maintaining business records. Participated in a provincial focus group for Service Dog Legislation which took effect January, 2008.

Animal Kennel Manager and Groomer, 2003-2005

Managed a kennel and grooming salon including all aspects of business operations.

Administrative Assistant, Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, 1998-2003

Prepared accurate statistical and written reports, as well as presentations designed to increase the profile of the Society.

Assistant Manager, Pet Food Store, 1991-1997

Started out as front line sales and customer service and progressed to training new staff, ordering inventory, data entry and coordinating warehouse activities.

Volunteer Activity

Police Station - Receptionist - 1 year
Search and Rescue Dog Association - 6 years
Humane Society - 4 years

References available upon request

Sample Resume Two

Rebecca is a store supervisor who wants to move into a training and development position with the same company.

Rebecca Smith
1627 Main Street
Anytown, Anywhere 55555
(916) 222-9999

OBJECTIVE

To transfer my knowledge and experience with this organization to a full-time training and development capacity.

SKILLS

Leadership

- Supervised more than 70 staff in a unionized, busy environment including hiring, training and scheduling
- Demonstrated initiative in solving problems, responding professionally to concerns and questions
- Encouraged and supported work accommodations for staff

Coaching and Training

- Presented training to groups of three to 25 people as store-based trainer
- Provided ongoing mentorship and coaching to staff
- Trained assistants, following protocols and managing their time and workload effectively to allow for the best training results
- Learned new skills and developed expertise within the training and development scope of practice

Communication

- Excellent rapport building and presentation skills
- Communicated difficult information (i.e. terminating and disciplining staff) effectively
- Provided exceptional customer service to staff and the public
- Built positive relationships with staff, unions and customers over a 22-year career
- Provided dispute resolution between staff with positive results. Of an average of 30 disputes each year, less than 10% go through a grievance process.

WORK EXPERIENCE

Supervisor, Front End

- In a 22-year career with this company, and having worked in positions such as Assistant Supervisor and previous to that as a cashier, developed excellent knowledge and understanding of the organization
- Computer literate in in-house programs in addition to Word and Outlook.

EDUCATION

- Adult Education Certificate, Community College, 2007
- High School Diploma
- Basic First Aid CPR
- Basic WHMIS
- Fluent in American Sign Language
- Handling Irate Customers workshop

REFERENCES

Available upon request

"Rebecca has demonstrated her ability to be an excellent coach and leader to our staff. In addition, her ability to lead people through our most recent layoff period was an excellent display of her leadership skills."
Joe Carpenter, Store Manager

Sample Resume Three

Rebecca took a bold approach to her job search. She is looking for something in the accounting field, but is ready for a change of industry.

Rebecca Smith
1627 Main Street
Anytown, Anywhere 55555
(916) 222-9999

Introduction

Are you looking for a seasoned accounting clerk with an eye for detail, solid accounting skills and experience? If so, I may be able to help you.

Work Experience

Accounting Clerk, ChecksOn Inc.

2003 to present

- Reconciled banking client positive pay accounts in a busy and time sensitive environment
- Consistently maintained confidentiality and privacy of financial and personal records
- Identified and investigated investigating reconciliation problems
- Balanced multiple cashbooks for general ledgers with accuracy and within deadlines
- Audited outstanding items with investigation and research skills
- Performed a range of accounting services for diverse customers
- Provided support and expertise to customers and clients in business support centers
- Trained and mentored new staff on accounting processes, software and procedures
- Audited to Canadian and American standards, as required by clients

Recent Acknowledgements

- *Elizabeth has great strength in customer focus, better than most. Constantly and consistently one of the top performers.*
- *Elizabeth went above and beyond her call of duty...this was so much work on her part...she exhibits a true team spirit...mere words cannot express my appreciation.*

Accounting Clerk, BigBank

1988-2003

Similar functions as position described for ChecksOn (above). This position was outsourced to ChecksOn in 2003.

Computer Skills

Microsoft Office Suite, Lotus Notes, and in-house systems such as BNS, Check Counter, ODIN, E-disbursement, and Ordeman

Education

Internet and WWW introduction, 2002

MS Excel 2000, 2002

MS Word 2000, 2001

PCs and Application Software, 2001

American Sign Language, 1993

Diploma, Bank Teller Training & Business Skills, Business College, 1988

Diploma, High School

Excellent references available upon request

Sample Resume Four

Rebecca is a recent high school graduate seeking work in the retail sector. She has some experience already and is letting potential employers know that she would like to advance at some point.

Rebecca Smith
1627 Main Street
Anytown, Anywhere 55555
(916) 222-9999

Objective

To apply my excellent customer service and people skills to a role that can lead to growth within the retail/service industry.

Education

- Grade 12 Diploma, 2007
- Fluent in English and French (spoken and written)
- Basic Computer Skills

Work Experience

Sales Clerk, Card Retailer Company B, 2007-Present

- Engaged customers in a positive sales experience by offering support in finding the right purchase for their needs
- Prepared attractive merchandise displays
- Completed accurate sales transactions.

Sales Clerk, Card Retailer Company A, 2004-2007

- Assumed senior staff responsibilities when senior staff were absent
- Coordinated transition between day time and evening staff
- Processed stock through receiving system

Volunteer Experience

- Assisted Grade 3/4 split class at Trudeau Elementary School.
- Chaperoned field trips, worked one on one with students and marked exams.

References available upon request.

Resume Writing as a Profession

There is a branch of career development known as resume writing. A professional resume writer specializes in highlighting your accomplishments and creating a document that markets you as a candidate.

Here are a few caveats if you decide to hire a professional resume writer. All career development professionals should be able to create a resume with and for you, but not all resume writers are career development professionals. Know who you are hiring and what your intentions or goals are. Your resume is best written using terminology and phrasing that you create. If you attend an interview and know nothing about the examples in your resume or what a particular statement means, you won't impress the interviewer at all.

Creating a Noticeable Package

Personal Branding

If you look on the Internet for information on resumes and job searching, in addition to finding out about portfolios, you will likely come across information about branding. Branding works for big companies like Coca-Cola and Google and it can also work for you. Branding, in this sense, means that you offer yourself as a "package." Just as you can recognize a Coca-Cola can anywhere in the world by its swirl of white against red, your information should be immediately associated with you when someone picks up your resume.

You should think about using different resume formats for different purposes. Your resume, cover letter, and references page should all look like they came off of the same printer and that they apply to you. You can create a polished look even with the most basic keyboarding skills.

For example, if you put your portfolio into a binder with a window front on it, you can put that same window design on your cover page to create an elegant, professional, and branded look. Your header (the block with your name and address) should look the same on every document. Your margins should be the same as well (an inch to an inch and a half all the way around; don't skimp on your margins).

If you use color (some people like an accent line or a block of color; others will have a logo), it must appear the same way on all of your job search documents.

In addition to keeping your documents looking consistent, make sure you print your documents on good quality white paper. It does not help your case to use colored paper, card stock, or any other tricks that you have heard of. A good weight white paper is all you need.

Types of Resumes

There are several options for how you can format your resume in terms of layout. The main types are:

- Ñ Chronological
- Ñ Functional
- Ñ Combination

There is no perfect way to set up a resume. You are trying to appeal to a reader that you haven't met and, in reality, most employers do not want to read resumes in the first place. As you read the following descriptions, keep in mind that one is no better than the other. The layout you use will depend on your needs.

Chronological

This type of resume is arranged in chronological order, with the recent experiences listed first. The template that you completed as part of your pre-assignment essentially asks for information in chronological order.

Functional

This type of resume organizes information by function and skill. It is helpful when people are trying to take their current skill set and transfer it into a new or slightly different type of work. These resumes also play down dates or employer names in order to highlight the most important content.

In this format, you will use headings that apply to specific skill areas, such as Management, Training, Sales, etc. The sample resume that we provided for the front-end supervisor that wanted to move into a training and development position follows this format.

Some resume writers may tell you to avoid the functional resume. They will tell you that the hiring manager assumes that you are trying to hide something (like being out of work for a while, being in prison, or job hopping). That is not necessarily the case. Use the style of resume that markets you in the most effective way possible.

Combination

These resumes use a combined approach, as their name suggests. You need to choose the approach that explains you best to the employer.

More Than One Resume?

Don't panic! Not everyone needs more than one resume. However, some people have a diverse background and are qualified for two different jobs. The only difference in their resumes might be the objective statement used for each. For example, a teacher may be qualified to teach and to work as a counselor. One resume will not work for both jobs, even though a lot of the information will be similar.

Many employers require that applicants apply for jobs through their websites. You may be able to send them an electronic copy of your resume or you may have to reformat it so that it fits their requirements for submission.

If an employer has a form that you need to copy and paste your information into, simply take your polished, branded, beautiful resume, select all the text, and change it to one font (often Times New Roman or Arial). Watch carefully as you paste your information into the employer's format, since you might lose some of your formatting. For example, bulleted list formatting may disappear. If that happens, place a dash at the beginning of each line.

Don't shy away from electronic applications. As they become more sophisticated, your information is stored effectively for future job openings. This is slightly better than the old system where you have to re-apply to the same company every three months because they shred paper copies regularly. Do be aware, however, that once a company uploads your information to their database, it may be stored there forever. If you apply for 12 different jobs at one company over an 18-month period, make sure that the information you submit is consistent and honestly presented. Follow their directions for submission closely.

Cover Letters

Essential Ingredients

Your cover letter is an initial introduction to your potential employer, not a regurgitation of your resume. It should entice the reader to jump into your resume with interest and enthusiasm.

The cover letter is written like any other business letter. Your address should look exactly as it does on your resume. Next, add the date and the employer's name and address. The letter should never be more than one page. If it is long winded, the reader will find you boring. Chances are you are simply repeating what is in your resume, so cut it down.

Step One

We're going to present the letter in a form below, but there are a few caveats. This letter has to grab your reader's attention. The first thing that the reader will see is a black and white picture. Make sure you are using good paper and that the print is clear and crisp.

Step Two

Write an interesting letter. Include the potential employer's name and make sure it is spelled correctly!

Some ads will not include a name, but it is possible for a keen job hunter to avoid using "To Whom it May Concern" or "Dear Sir." Make a phone call to the company. Let them know that you are preparing a

resume and that the advertisement did not provide a name. Ask for it. It's very rare for a company to refuse this type of request. Quickly explain what you are offering. A little bit of additional information can really get your letter off to a strong start.

You can modify any of the following examples or come up with a phrase that starts your letter in a compelling way:

- Ñ I came across an article about your company in our local paper. From research on your website and looking at the marketplace, I am sure of a couple of things. First, yours is the kind of company that I want to be associated with, and second, I have the skills that you can use.
- Ñ I am a motivated high school student looking for some valuable experience during the summer break.
- Ñ Staying current in our industry is tough because it changes so rapidly and many professionals find it hard to keep up. I am someone who keeps up on those changes, and I hope that you would like to meet so that we can talk about how I can help you to embrace the future.
- Ñ I read your advertisement in the Daily News on May 17 and, after researching your organization, I think that I have something to offer you.
- Ñ Your May 17 advertisement in the Daily News caught my attention, and your company name caught my eye.

Step Three

Give potential employers a reason to get curious about your resume. Bridge your opening paragraph with something like:

- Ñ If you are looking for someone who can _____, I can help you by _____.
- Ñ If you still have a need in this area, my resume demonstrates my dedication and commitment to what I do.

Then you can include one or two sentences that highlight a special contribution or achievement:

- Ñ I have 15 years' experience in the agriculture industry, built on a degree from Olds College. My background has enabled me to consistently identify and implement the right technology to increase the sustainability of farming in our region.

Your letter can be presented in bullet form or paragraphs.

Step Four

Follow up with an action statement. You want the reader to turn the page and look over your resume as they pick up the phone to call you and invite you to a meeting.

Here are some examples:

- Ñ I will be in your area on Tuesday and Wednesday next week and would be happy to meet with you to discuss the opportunity.
- Ñ I am happy to meet to speak with you about this position. I have a portfolio that I can present to you at the meeting.

Further Reading: