

# RESUME & COVER LETTER WRITING Guide



Health  
School of Nursing

## Introduction

A human resources assistant at the hospital for which you would like to work has begun to check her email. She's received 100 this afternoon, all with resumes attached. Forty of the resumes are for the same nursing position for which you have applied. She'll also have to collect those in the mail and fax machine—close to 150 in all.

She is the first to review the resumes. Her job is to scan each one in a computerized database. She'll then query the database based on specific key words identified by the nursing supervisor. Those resumes that meet the requirements will be forwarded to the human resources manager for further review. Those who submitted resumes that don't meet the criteria will get a polite rejection letter—or hear nothing at all.

In other hospitals that do not use a database, a staff person will visually scan each resume to see if minimum qualifications are met. On average, he'll spend 10-20 seconds screening each one. In these organizations, your employment future depends on a favorable first impression from an overworked human resources staff member.

**Which pile will your resume end up in after a 10-20 second review?  
Yes? No? Maybe?**

These scenarios are not unlikely. If your resume doesn't capture the immediate attention of the person or computer screening it, you may not be interviewed for the position—even if you have the required experience. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to increase the likelihood that your resume will get a second look. The purpose of this guide is to help you create a resume that keeps you in the running. That is, it motivates a potential employer to call you in for an interview.

### **What Is a Resume?**

A marketing tool that sells YOU not a listing of Education and jobs

- It must convince potential employers to learn more about you
- They must believe that you have the skills to be a successful nurse
- A winning resume generates a positive message about your experience and doesn't raise questions or confuse the reader

Your resume must describe what you can do. Have you treated critically ill patients? Can you demonstrate that you can work well under increasing pressure? Have you developed new health programs? The hiring manager has to see how your previous accomplishments are relevant to her needs. If she sees a link, chances are you will be called in for an interview.

### **Preparing to Write Your Resume**

- Work up a spreadsheet with all your Educational, Clinical, Professional & Volunteer Experience with Dates and bullets of your responsibilities and skills used
- Plan on taking 2 hours to get a draft done and then let it sit for a few days and edit it
- Let an objective person read over the job to which you are applying and then give you feedback on your resume

### **Recommended Style: Targeted Reverse Chronological**

Although there are many types of resumes, this guide will focus on targeted, reverse chronological resumes as they best communicate an individual's skills and accomplishments. Provide an overview of your background and outlines specific accomplishments and experiences.

Remember, the person reading your resume has a problem. Your job is to demonstrate that you have the requisite skills to meet their needs. A targeted, reverse chronological resume is the best way to achieve this objective.

After you have completed a basic resume, develop resumes that are individually targeted to the positions you are seeking. Be sure your resume reflects back specific job description philosophy & duties. It is far more effective to spend the extra time to do this than to have a resume that is too broad and vague. We recommend that you develop a template and adapt it according to the positions for which you are applying.

## **Formatting Your Resume**

- Avoid using templates – they can be difficult to alter
- Choose a basic readable Font – Calibri or Arial are good choices
- 16 pt max for titles, 10-12 pt for text
- Avoid all caps. Instead you can use a bold font. Consider carefully what you want to stand out
- Keep margins at 1” on all sides
- Include Month, Year for dates and right justify
- Be sure verb tense is accurate and consistent
- Be sure your name is at the top of each page
- One to two pages are an acceptable length for your resume

## **A Resume includes...**

### **Caption:**

- Your name, telephone number and personal email address. Re: email address – have it be similar to your name and avoid numbers which are too easily misread (Example first name-last name@gmail.com)
- List your physical address if you are applying nearby, otherwise it can be a deterrent
- Usually centered at the top of the page. Type your name in boldface at 13-14 font size
- Be sure your name is at the top each page

### **Caption Example**

**Mary Smith**

409 555-1234

Mary-Smith@gmail.com

### **Summary Statement vs. Objective Statement:**

Today’s trend is to summarize yourself to be market yourself to a potential employer vs. using an objective stating what you want. Referencing the job description may help with this. Brainstorm on adjectives that describe you – high energy, calm, detail oriented, organized, compassionate, etc

**Summary Example:**

Compassionate patient centered graduate nurse eager to work with multidisciplinary staff to utilize my interpersonal skills and critical thinking skills to provide safe, quality care, and comfort for patients and their families

Versus an Objective Example: Challenging RN position in pediatric critical care unit where I can grow professionally and help others

**Qualifications Summary:**

A qualifications summary has become very common. In 3-5 bullets it describes broad skills and highlights how they relate to the position you are seeking. It is a teaser that encourages the reader to learn more about you by reading the rest of your resume. (Recent nursing graduates may choose not to include a qualifications summary. It may appear redundant if your qualification summary repeats the experience included in your education and professional experience sections.)

It should be brief and focused, and incorporate phrases that pique the reader's attention

- Summarize your abilities in 3-5 categories or functional skill sets
- Include only the skills you wish to emphasize for the position job description
- Write as a broad overview. Specific examples that demonstrate your abilities should be outlined in the Professional Experience section of your resume
- Include key words (usually nouns) that can be incorporated in a search

**Qualifications Summary Example**

- Nursing experience including clinical rotations in episodic care, maternal and newborn, pediatrics, medical/surgical, psychiatric, community health
- Extensive experience with children and adolescents as Child Life inter and Student Athletic Trainer
- Managerial experience including small business ownership specializing in security and customer service

**Headings:**

Following the qualifications summary, headings define information sections that describe your unique skills and experience. Headings may include: All headings should stand out on the resume and be consistent, using same typeface, boldness or capitalization.

**Education and Certifications**

**Clinical Experience**

**Professional Experience**

**Volunteer/Community Experience**

**Awards and Honor, Professional Organizations, etc**

**Education and Certifications**

- Education should be your first heading if you're a recent grad or will be graduating soon, or if you are changing careers and your education is directly related to the position you are seeking
- Include undergraduate GPA if above 3.2 and graduate GPA if above 3.75

**Education and Certifications Example**

University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston, Texas  
**Bachelor of Science of Nursing – GPA: 3.7/4.0**

December 2012

Baylor University, Waco, Texas  
**Bachelor of Business Administration**  
 Major: Management Information System; Minor: Spanish

May 2004

### **Certifications**

NCLEX Exam Date: January 14, 2013  
 Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS)  
 National Nurse Emergency Preparedness Initiative (NNEPTI) Certification

### **Clinical Experience**

If you have been in clinicals as part of your education it's very important to have this section. Organize them in one of two ways: by Hospital or by Department (Med-Surg, Pedi, NICU, etc)  
 Beware of only listing your clinical locations since this tells the resume reviewer very little.

**Bulleted Statements:** Well-written bulleted statements are a critical component of the professional experience section of your resume. They tell the reader what you have accomplished. When writing these statements, remember to:

- Begin with action words (see list at end of Guide) and be consistent with verb tense
- Terms like “responsible for” or “participated in” do not strengthen your resume
- Emphasize skills/experience, type of patients, tasks completed
- Include both nursing skills and customer service skills
- Continually ask yourself, “Is this relevant to the position for which I would like to be hired?”  
 “Are the skills stated, transferable to a nursing position?”
- Do not use the pronoun I in a bullet – it's inferred
- Keep bulleted statements short and use them rather than complete sentence
- Avoid using periods with bullets

### **Clinical Experience Example**

#### **UTMB School of Nursing, Nursing Student**

Galveston, TX, Jan. 2012 – Dec. 2012

- The Methodist Hospital (Neuro Med-Surg, Telemetry)
  - Reinforced education for patients for procedures and upon discharge from the hospital under supervision
  - Alerted nursing staff immediately to changes in patient level of consciousness and orientation. Reoriented confused patients to help reduce their anxiety and confusion
  - Provided Spanish to English translation for patient and doctor during a physical assessment
- Memorial Hermann Main (Labor and Delivery)
  - Encouraged new mothers when experiencing difficulty breast-feeding and reinforced teachings from lactation consultants
  - Took the lead in ensuring family members were updated and comforted to reduce anxiety when a patient required an emergency procedure
- Texas Children's Hospital (Cardiovascular ICU, Transplant, Adolescent Pulmonary Med-Surg)

### **Professional Experience**

Headlines explain the where and when of your experience. In a reverse chronological order typically not going back more than 15 years. Include a headline for each relevant place of employment. Include all experience related to nursing in this section, such as internships, part-time nursing assistantships, research projects. Of course, you may have others. It is acceptable to include experience that is not paid since this section is called Professional Experience and not Work Experience. Although some of your

professional experience may not be related to nursing, if it includes transferable skills (customer service, organization, working as part of a team, etc) be sure to include it.

### Professional Experience Example

#### **Manager of Data Privacy and Security**

ABC Company, Houston, Texas

October 2010 – January 2012

- Led teams of consultants on local and national client projects to produce deliverables within allotted budgets with a focus on security and customer service
- Instilled a service commitment in those supervised by leading by example; ranked in top 95% of organization
- Encouraged team members to seek out opportunities to add value on all client projects, to work as a collaborative team, and to maintain a positive work environment; Evaluations consistently high.

#### **Child Life Intern**

ABC Hospital, Houston, Texas

Summer 2010

- Built relationships with long term patients while assisting them with school work
- Supported parents by taking note of child's activities and emailing them photos

#### **Student Athletic Trainer**

ABC College Athletic Department, Conroe, Texas

September 2005- December, 2006

- Encouraged injured students while tracking their recovery progress
- Trained athletes on training equipment; discussed strategies to work exercises into daily routines
- Assisted trainers by acting as a liaison with coach staff

#### **Customer Service Representative**

Smith County Social Services

August 2006- June 2008

- Served as greeter and receptionist to social service clients spanning a diverse population
- Provided translation for Spanish speakers; encouraged them to ask questions of case workers without being concerned about the language barrier.

\*The job title need not be first. Choose the information that you would like to emphasize. Whatever you choose is consistent. If you start with a job title, always list the job title first. List dates to the right.

### Volunteer and Other Relevant Experience

If appropriate, you may choose to include other information. Consider the following headings: professional memberships, publications/presentations, security clearances, language skills, and volunteer/community experience. Focus on those that support your career goal.

#### Volunteer Experience Example

- UTMB School of Nursing BACC2 Program Class Representative
  - Represented the BACC2 program at meetings each semester with UTMB School of Nursing administrators.
- St. Vincent's Clinic Volunteer - Galveston, TX
  - Assessed patients from the Gulf Coast community and reported finding to students from UTMB's School of Medicine to assist in diagnoses.

### Honors and Awards

Include honors and awards if they are unique, fairly recent, and ideally relevant to your education and career goals.

#### Awards Example

Nursing Education and Placement Program Awardee

Office of Student Affairs

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August 2013

Roberts Scholarship Fund for Geriatric Nursing Awardee  
Jones Community Leadership Scholarship Awardee  
UTMB Dean's List 2012

## **Refining Your Resume**

Congratulations!! You have just completed the most difficult part of writing a resume. Now, you should plan to edit and refine your draft. It may be helpful to put this draft of your resume down for a day or two. Looking at it with fresh eyes may make editing it easier. This is a terrific time to have your resume critiqued by the SON career consultant. Half-hour resume critiques--which are free of charge to SON students--can be arranged. You can meet in person or, if more convenient, send us a copy of your resume, and we'll be happy to critique it by telephone. Your resume will be reviewed and you'll be given suggestions regarding style, content, and organization. This step may mean the difference between getting a call for an interview and receiving a polite rejection letter.

## **Tips for Scannable Resumes**

- Begin with a summary or qualifications summary containing selected words related to the position you are seeking. Use nouns to highlight your qualifications.
- Avoid use of italics, graphics, and shading. Use horizontal and vertical lines sparingly.
- Avoid fancy serif fonts. Instead use Calibri, Arial or Times New Roman
- Use bold, capitalization and indentations carefully. Use bullets or dashes, not plus signs or asterisks, to emphasize phrases.
- Don't use acronyms unless they are spelled out the first time used.

## **Other Suggestions**

- Don't force your resume onto one page but don't go beyond two. Include your name on the second page
- Do not include irrelevant information. Employers do not need to know your weight, height, age, or marital status. Besides, it's illegal for an employer to ask these questions.
- Do not include your picture
- Do not include salary information in your resume
- Avoid using "the", "a", "an" or other articles throughout your resume.
- Keep most important information along the left margin and closest to the beginning of each section of your resume.
- Use capitalization and bold throughout the resume to highlight important information. Don't overdo it – and be consistent.
- Proofread! Proofread! Proofread! Do not send out your resume if there are any typographical errors. That alone could eliminate you from further review.
- Save your resume as a PDF before emailing or attaching it to an application

## **Mary Smith Sample Resume**

409 555-1234

mary-smith@gmail.com

### **Summary**

Compassionate patient centered graduate nurse eager to work with multidisciplinary staff to utilize my interpersonal skills and critical thinking skills to provide safe, quality care, and comfort for patients and their families

### **Qualifications**

- Nursing experience including clinical rotations in episodic care, maternal and newborn, pediatrics, medical/surgical, psychiatric, community health
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  - Encouraged new mothers when experiencing difficulty breast-feeding and reinforced teachings from lactation consultants.
  - Took the lead in ensuring family members were updated and comforted to reduce anxiety when a patient required an emergency procedure.
- Texas Children's Hospital (Cardiovascular ICU, Transplant, Adolescent Pulmonary Med-Surg)

- Memorial Hermann Prevention and Recovery Center (Psychiatric and Rehabilitation)
- St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital (ICU)

## Mary Smith

### **Professional Experience**

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### **Volunteer Experience**

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  - Served as a liaison between the BACC2 class members and the UTMB faculty to ensure the student's concerns were communicated and to provide class members with updates from faculty.
  - Represented the BACC2 program at meetings each semester with UTMB School of Nursing administrators.
- St. Vincent's Clinic Volunteer - Galveston, TX
  - Assessed patients from the Gulf Coast community and reported finding to students from UTMB's School of Medicine to assist in diagnoses.
- Student Pre-Participation Physicals at The Methodist Hospital
  - Assessed/interpreted vital signs for student athletes to complete their pre-participation physicals.
- Caring Companion at The Methodist Hospital
  - Visited patients on assigned units to assist the hospital staff in providing patient-centered care and customer satisfaction by sitting with patients and family and ensuring the patient's needs are addressed..

## Awards

Nursing Education and Placement Program Awardee  
Roberts Scholarship Fund for Geriatric Nursing Awardee  
Jones Community Leadership Scholarship Awardee  
UTMB Dean's List 2012

## Cover Letter Guide

**The cover letter needs to be individualized specifically to the hospital to which you're applying.** This letter gives you an opportunity to explain why you are interested in a particular position and the organization. This is your chance to highlight the parts of your background that directly relate to the position for which you are applying. Do your homework beforehand to make sure your cover reflects the mission and values of the organization in addition to the skills required of the specific job. The goal of the cover letter is to differentiate you from other applicants. Show in a narrative form how you can meet their needs and communicate your interest, motivation, and self-confidence for the job.

- **Introduction/Why you are applying.** Make sure you mention the specific position and your current status. For example, "I am interested in the Clinical I Nursing Position in (state department if listed) Department. I will receive my BSN degree from University of Texas Medical School in May and am eager to be considered for the position. If you are writing a general letter to an organization and not a specific job, you will want to state why you are applying, "I am sending a copy of my resume to Methodist Hospital because I have a commitment to the ICARE values for which Methodist strives. I will complete my BSN degree from... and would like to be considered for a clinical nurse.
- **What your Experience/Education Offers.** Highlight the key points in your background that sell yourself as the right candidate for the position. You do not want to repeat everything that is in your resume – the cover letter just gives a taste of your accomplishments so the person will want to read your resume. Again, first consider what the employer is looking for. For example, you may want to use a quote that describes your attitude towards patient-centered care and then highlight one or two examples that demonstrate your commitment. If there is something that is not fully explained in your resume, you may want to provide information here.
- **Why you are interested in the position.** Why do you want to work for this particular employer and do this specific job? Why is your experience a good fit for the job? For example, "My clinical rotation at "ABC" hospital impressed me with the high quality standards you apply. I was able to learn the importance of clear communications with the healthcare team and the importance of clear, thorough documentation. While at UTMB, I developed my communication skills through..... (Include your specific evidence of communication skills here).
- **What will happen next?** When appropriate, suggest that you will be calling them (you want to keep control as much as possible). If not appropriate, state that you are looking forward to discussing career opportunities and give a contact phone number and email.

Your cover letter is an example of your communication skills, so draft it carefully and have it reviewed by a trusted person. Most importantly, check and make sure that your passion for nursing comes across in your letter.

**Note: If you're submitting your resume electronically, add your cover letter to your resume as the first page. Recruiters usually only open one attachment. Be sure to PDF together and name it appropriately, for example Mary Smith Resume for ABC Hospital ICU**

## Mary Smith

409 555-1234

mary-smith@gmail.com

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Manager of ICU Unit  
ABC Hospital  
One Medical Center Dr.  
Houston, Texas 77102

Date

Dear Manager:

It is with great interest that I apply for the Clinical I Nurse position at ABC Hospital. ABC's values reflect the reasons I decided to become a nurse. I am graduating in April and plan to sit for the NCLEX in June.

My clinicals showed me the importance of working as part of a team. I was able to build relationships with doctors, nurses, assistants, and other members of the health care team. One of my references, Manager Mary Jones at XYZ Hospital, recognized me for my dedication to my patients and my supportive approach to helping others on the health care team. I took accountability for helping the unit meet the needs of all patients.

In addition to my education and clinical rotations, I worked as youth program coordinator in Houston, TX. I worked with young people from diverse cultural backgrounds. We organized activities and counseled individually regarding substance abuse prevention. This experience showed me how our patients need to be involved in the decisions regarding their health care. I learned to be sensitive to people's emotions and respectful of their culture and boundaries. Most important, it taught me to deal build trust by being honest, showing compassion, and keeping the individual's needs a priority.

I believe that my skills, my dedication to nursing, and my willingness to learn will make me a positive addition to your health care team. I have attached a resume which further outlines my background. You

can reach me on my cell phone 409 555-1234 or email me at mary-smith@gmail.com. I look forward to discussing how I can help your team strive for excellence.

Sincerely,

Mary Smith  
409 555-1234  
mary-smith@gmail.com

## Mary Smith

409 555-1234

mary-smith@gmail.com

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Cassandra Peri, Manager  
ABC Hospital  
1205 Meridian St.  
Dallas, Texas 73010

Dear Ms. Peri,

Your opening for a Clinical I nurse indicated requirements that closely match my background and expertise. I have enclosed my resume to provide a summary of my qualifications and background for your review.

Throughout my work and clinical experiences, I have maintained the highest performance standards. On my clinical rotation at SXY hospital, my manager noted the thoroughness of my written documentation and reports. In addition, our unit was implementing a new customer service approach (AIDET) and I was recognized for the comments received from my patients.

Further qualifications I offer include the following:

- Strong customer service background from retail and volunteer work.
- Evaluated patient priorities and maintained communications with staff, patients, and their families.
- Demonstrated ability in computer systems such as EPIC. Familiar with Office Word: Excel, PowerPoint. Organizational skills resulted in high GPA while working part-time.
- Initiated patient interest information on patients white boards for team to maximize personal relations (ERX Hospital).

I am seeking a position with ABC hospital as the values will support my strong organizational and communication skills, my positive work ethic, and the ability to work well in both team-oriented and self-directed environments. I feel I can both learn and contribute at ABC.

I would welcome an opportunity to meet with you to discuss my qualifications and candidacy in further detail. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Mary Smith

Enclosure

## Action Verbs

Achieve	Define	Judge	Repair
Administer	Delegate	Lead	Represent
Advise	Deliver	Lecture	Research
Analyze	Demonstrate	Maintain	Respond
Answer	Design	Manage	Restore
Apply	Determine	Measure	Retrieve
Arrange	Develop	Mediate	Review
Assemble	Devise	Modify	Revise
Assess	Diagnose	Monitor	Revitalize
Assist	Direct	Motivate	Search
Build	Distribute	Negotiate	Select
Calculate	Edit	Obtain	Sell
Categorize	Eliminate	Offer	Serve
Chart	Establish	Operate	Simplify
Classify	Estimate	Order	Solve
Coach	Evaluate	Organize	Spearhead
Code	Examine	Outline	Speculate
Collaborate	Expand	Perform	Sponsor
Collect	Explain	Persuade	Study
Communicate	Formulate	Plan	Succeed
Compile	Gather	Prepare	Summarize
Complete	Generate	Prescribe	Supervise
Compose	Guide	Present	Supply
Compound	Handle	Process	Support
Compute	Help	Produce	Synthesize
Conduct	Identify	Promote	Teach
Confer	Illustrate	Protect	Test
Conserve	Implement	Prove	Train
Consolidate	Improve	Provide	Translate
Construct	Increase	Realize	Troubleshoot
Consult	Initiate	Receive	Tutor
Contact	Install	Recommend	Unite
Contribute	Institute	Record	Utilize
Control	Instruct	Recruit	Verify
Coordinate	Interact	Reduce	Volunteer
Copy	Interpret	Refer	Write
Correspond	Interview	Regulate	
Counsel	Invest	Relate	
Create	Investigate	Reorganize	