



Building Your Graduate-Level Resume & Cover Letter

AI-Powered Strategies for ATS Success

WHY YOUR GRADUATE RESUME MATTERS

- **ATS Reality:** 98% of Fortune 500 companies use ATS to filter resumes
- **The 6-Second Rule:** Recruiters spend only 6 seconds on initial resume review
- **Competition:** 250+ applications per job posting on average

Graduate-level Expectations: Employers expect strategic thinking, research capabilities, and advanced competencies.

"The #1 mistake is letting AI turn your unique application into a generic one." - Jeremy Schifeling, thejobinsiders.com

GOLDEN RULE: Use AI to ANALYZE and IMPROVE - never let AI write your resume from scratch

Graduate Resume Structure (ATS-Optimized)

1. **CONTACT HEADER** - Name, Phone, Email, LinkedIn URL, City/State (no headers/footers)
2. **PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY** - 3-4 lines: degree, specialization, key skills, career goal
3. **EDUCATION** - Graduate degree first, GPA if 3.5+, thesis/capstone
4. **CORE COMPETENCIES** - 8-12 keywords matching job description
5. **PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE** - 3-5 STAR bullets per role with quantified results
6. **ADDITIONAL SECTIONS** - Certifications, Publications, Leadership, Languages

ATS-Friendly Formatting Rules

- ✓ Single-column layout
- ✓ Standard fonts (Arial, Calibri) | 10-12pt font size
- ✓ .docx format preferred | 1-2 pages maximum
- ✗ No tables or graphics
- ✗ No headers/footers for contact info (25% of ATS systems miss this content)

The STAR-K Formula for Bullets

Situation + **T**ask + **A**ction + **R**esult + **K**eywords

- **WEAK:** "Responsible for managing social media accounts"
- **STRONG:** "Increased LinkedIn engagement 47% by developing data-driven content strategy (social media, analytics)"

Quantify with: percentages, dollar amounts, time saved, people impacted

Powered Verbs by Category

- **Leadership:** Directed, Championed, Orchestrated
- **Analysis:** Assessed, Evaluated, Investigated
- **Innovation:** Pioneered, Transformed, Redesigned

AI-Powered Optimization Prompts

COPILOT PROMPT: "What are the key skills and qualifications in this job posting?"

COPILOT PROMPT: "Compare my resume to this job description. What keywords am I missing?"

COPILOT PROMPT: "Help me convert this bullet point into STAR format with quantified results"

Warning: DO NOT let AI write bullets wholesale or use overused phrases like "leverage" or "synergy." Recommended Tool: Jobscan.co - scan your resume against job descriptions; aim for 75%+ match.

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC KEYWORDS	
MBA	Strategic Planning, P&L Management, ROI Analysis, Cross-Functional Leadership
MHA	Healthcare Administration, HIPAA Compliance, Quality Improvement, Revenue Cycle
MSN	Evidence-Based Practice, Patient Outcomes, Clinical Leadership, Care Coordination
MSW	Trauma-Informed Care, Case Management, Crisis Intervention, Cultural Competency
MPA	Policy Analysis, Stakeholder Engagement, Program Evaluation, Grant Management
Education	Curriculum Development, Differentiated Instruction, Assessment Design, Student Outcomes
Criminal Justice	Criminal Justice Reform, Restorative Justice, Data-Driven Policing, Reentry
Strategic Comm	Integrated Communications, Reputation Management, Crisis Communication, Brand Strategy
Sport Management	Revenue Generation, Fan Engagement, Sponsorship Activation, Athletic Compliance

Pro Tip: Research 5-10 job postings in your target field to extract common keywords using Copilot.

7 COMMON GRADUATE RESUME MISTAKES

- Generic Resumes** - Using one version for all applications
- ATS-Unfriendly Formatting** - Tables, graphics, unusual fonts
- Task-Based Bullets** - Listing responsibilities instead of achievements
- AI-Generated Content** - Detectable, generic, lacking authenticity
- Missing Keywords** - Not matching job description language
- Buried Education** - Education should be prominent for students
- Objective Statements** - Outdated; use Professional Summary instead

Remember! Research projects, assistantships, and capstone work ARE professional experience!

7-Day Action Plan

- Days 1-2: Audit current resume against this framework
- Days 3-4: Use Copilot to extract keywords from 5 target job postings
- Days 5-6: Rewrite bullets using STAR-K formula
- Day 7: Schedule Career Success Center appointment via Career Launch

TOOL: Jobscan.co - Scan your resume against job descriptions. Aim for 75%+ match rate

USI Career Success Center Orr Center, Room 1051 (812) 464-1865	Schedule an Appointment usi.edu/career-success Career Launch
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Cover Letters: Why You, Why This Role, Why Now

Your Resume's Storytelling Partner

What is a Cover Letter?

If your resume is the highlight reel, your cover letter is the director's commentary—it's where you get to explain why this role, why this organization, and why you. A resume lists what you've done; a cover letter connects those dots into a narrative that shows fit.

THE THREE QUESTIONS: Think of your cover letter as answering three questions in about three paragraphs: (1) Why am I interested in this specific opportunity? (2) What experiences make me a strong candidate? (3) What would I bring to the team?

Cover Letter Best Practices

- **Be Specific:** A generic cover letter that could be sent to any employer is a wasted opportunity. Reference something real about the organization's mission, a recent initiative, or a value that resonates with you.
- **Keep It to One Page:** Respect the reader's time. A concise, focused cover letter demonstrates your ability to communicate efficiently.
- **Lead with Enthusiasm:** Don't start with "I am writing to apply for..." Instead, open with genuine interest in the role or organization.
- **Sound Like a Human:** The cover letter is your chance to show personality, not just list qualifications. When done well, it makes the hiring manager want to meet the person behind the resume.

For Career Changers

For those transitioning careers, the cover letter is your best friend. It's where you can address things your resume can't: why you're pivoting fields, what drew you to this new direction, or how a particular experience shaped your professional goals. The cover letter lets you connect dots that might not be obvious on a resume.

Cover Letter Structure

Opening Paragraph	State why you're writing, the position, and where applicable, how you heard about the position. Include three reasons you think you would be a good fit for the opportunity.
Middle Paragraph(s)	Explain why you are interested in this employer and your reasons for desiring this type of work. Point it out with one or two key examples from school or work, but do not reiterate your entire resume. Be specific—remember that the reader will view your letter as an example of your writing skills.
Closing Paragraph	Reiterate your interest in the position and your enthusiasm for using your skills to contribute to the work of the organization. Thank the reader for their consideration of your application and end by stating that you look forward to the opportunity to discuss the position further.

PRO TIP: Use AI tools like Microsoft Copilot to help analyze job descriptions and identify key themes to address in your cover letter. Remember: AI should help you brainstorm and refine—never write your cover letter from scratch.