



 PART 2 OF 9

# BUILDING YOUR GRADUATE-LEVEL RESUME & COVER LETTER

— AI-Powered Strategies for ATS Success —

Presented by USI Career Success Center

 [usi.edu/career-success](https://usi.edu/career-success)



# ROADMAP TO EXCELLENCE: THE USI GRADUATE STUDENT CAREER WEBINAR SERIES

**PHASE 2**  
Mastering  
The Market and  
Advancement



**PHASE 1**  
Establishing Your  
Professional  
Brand



# WHY YOUR GRADUATE RESUME MATTERS

**98%**

of Fortune 500 companies use ATS to filter resumes

**6<sup>sec</sup>**

average time recruiters spend on initial resume review

**250+**

average applications received per job posting

## 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 

# GRADUATE RESUME STRUCTURE

1

## Contact Header

Name, Phone, Email, LinkedIn, City/State

2

## Professional Summary

3-4 lines: degree, specialization, key skills, goal

3

## Education

Graduate degree first, GPA if 3.5+, thesis/capstone

4

## Core Competencies

8-12 keywords matching job description

5

## Professional Experience

Reverse chronological, 3-5 STAR bullets per role

6

## Additional Section

Certifications, Publications, Leadership, Languages

## ATS-friendly Rules (Jobscan, 2025)

- ✓ Single-column layout
- ✓ Standard fonts (Arial, Calibri)
- ✓ .docx format preferred
- ✓ 10-12pt font size
- ✓ 1-2 pages maximum
- ✗ No tables or graphics
- ✗ No headers/footers



# Resume Example

**RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS**

## RESUME SAMPLE

Firstname Lastname

17 Main Street • Los Angeles, CA 92720 • youremail@college.harvard.edu • (714) 556-9857

**Education**

**Harvard University** Cambridge, MA  
A.B. Honors degree in History. GPA 3.73.  
Relevant Coursework: International Political Economics and the European Community.  
Commit 25 hours per week to Harvard Varsity Field Hockey Program.  
May 2024

**University of London** London, UK  
Study abroad coursework in European History and Econometrics.  
May - August 2022

**Los Angeles High School** Los Angeles, CA  
Graduated with high honors. SAT I: M: 780 V: 760.  
National Honor Society. Member of Varsity Field Hockey Team.  
June 2020

**Experience**

**Pepsi-Cola North America Beverages** Remote  
**Marketing Analyst Intern** May - August 2023  
Examined profitability of foreign market for new fruit drink using analysis of comparable brands. Managed focus groups and consumer surveys gathering over 500 data points. Created ideas for niche marketing campaigns including use of social networks and viral marketing. Presented findings to senior managers using quantitative analysis and creative visuals in combined PowerPoint presentation.

**Thomas Wilk Associates** London, UK  
**Assistant Account Executive** May - August 2022  
Researched and assembled requests for proposals for medium-sized public relations and communications firm. Actively participated in staff meetings and brainstorming sessions. Generated correspondence with top executive officers.

**Tech Hills** Laguna Hills, CA  
**Technology Intern** May - August 2021  
Implemented new web site, including back end database storage system and dynamic web pages.

**Leadership**

**Harvard Undergraduate Women in Business (WIB)** Cambridge, MA  
**Executive Committee Member** February 2021 - Present  
Organized marketing and advertising campaign to increase membership. Coordinated business conference and networking reception for 50 business professionals and 500 students.

**Harvard College Marathon Challenge** Cambridge, MA  
**Training Program Director** January - May 2021  
Developed training program for 25 charity runners. Raised over \$25,000 to support Phillips Brooks House Association and The Cambridge Food Project.

**Skills & Interests**

**Technical:** Stata, SQL, R (intermediate), SPSS (beginner).  
**Language:** Fluent French and Conversational Spanish.  
**Interests:** Ultimate Frisbee, Bhangra dance, and French films.

**Annotations:**

- Always use your @college email account and check it frequently, even if you have enabled forwarding.
- If an employer asks for your SAT/ACT scores or GPA, include in your Education section.
- If including coursework, be sure it's relevant to the position to which you're applying.
- Use different verbs.
- Note that relevant interests and skills can be demonstrated through campus and volunteer activities as well as through previous employment.
- Be consistent presenting data. Use either numerals or words but not both.

**RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS**

## OPTIONAL CATEGORY EXAMPLES

You may wish to adopt these categories if relevant to your experience or the opportunity you are applying for. If you have significant experience in a specialized category, consider using that as your primary "Experience" section. Both paragraph and bulleted formats are options, but be consistent with the formatting within your resume. Students in creative and performing arts can develop resumes, portfolios, and websites to support their specific job search. MCS advisors can help!

**Leadership Experience**

**Harvard Society of Black Scientists & Engineers** Cambridge, MA  
**President** September 2023 - May 2024  
Provided strategic direction and developed annual goals for this 90-member student group. Organized board and general meetings. Oversaw existing activities, programs, and collaborations with other student organizations. Represented group in Black Community Leaders Organization.

**Harvard Computer Society** Cambridge, MA  
**Membership Coordinator / Board Member** January - May 2023  
Organized marketing and advertising campaign using Mailchimp, resulting in 20% increase in membership. Coordinated tech conference and networking reception for 30 professionals and 75 students. Upgraded and enhanced website.

**Public Service Experience**

**Cambridge Department of Social Services** Cambridge, MA  
**Intern** September 2023 - Present

- Conduct site visits to local social service agencies to assist in evaluating effectiveness of service delivery. Observe experienced counselors and social workers in private settings with clients.
- Analyze data using Python to determine trends in service usage.

**Phillips Brooks House Association** Dorchester, MA  
**Summer Urban Program Senior Counselor** June - August 2023

- Organized activities at summer camp encouraging academic achievement among inner city and under-resourced children. Managed \$1500 activities budget.
- Created and implemented curriculum for girls ages 11-12 connecting campers to female leaders in community, community service, and health education.

**Technical Skills**

**Programming:** C, C++, C#, SQL, R, Perl, Python, MATLAB, JavaScript, OCaml.  
**Operating Systems:** Windows, MAC OS, and Linux.  
**Web Design:** Designed [www.abc.com](http://www.abc.com), [www.xyz.com](http://www.xyz.com)

**Research Experience**

**Stanford Nanotech Research Center** Palo Alto, CA  
**Research Intern** June - August 2022  
Project: Microfabrication of Thin-film Heaters to Simulate Hotspots.

- Fabricated devices for testing effectiveness of nanoscale patch used to cool down hotspots on microprocessors.
- Utilized cleanroom facilities to create devices with hotspot heater and temperature sensors to simulate heat generation.

**Performing Arts Experience**

**Mainly Jazz Dance Company** Cambridge, MA  
**Dancer / Choreographer** October 2022 - Present  
Perform traditional jazz, lyrical, hip hop, funk, and modern dance at performances open to public throughout the year. Teach dance routines weekly to 20+ students at local elementary school.

**Activities**

**Lowell House Committee** Cambridge, MA  
**Member.** Collaborate on social and community service activities.  
September 2022 - Present

**Massachusetts General Hospital** Boston, MA  
**Hospital Volunteer.** Commit 5 hours per week greeting patients.  
January - May 2023

**Annotation:** For tech (computer science) resumes, include Technical Skills after the Education section.



# Cover Letters: Why You, Why This Role, Why Now



# Cover Letter Example

Date of Letter

Use complete title and address. (optional section if you need to save space)

Contact Name  
Contact Title  
Company Name  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

Address to a particular person if possible and remember to use a colon.

**Opening paragraph:** Clearly state why you're writing, name the position or type of work you're exploring and, where applicable, how you heard about the position or organization. A summary statement may work well here by including 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. If you've had relevant school or work experience, be sure to point it out with one or two key examples; but do not reiterate your entire resume. Emphasize skills or abilities that relate to the job. Be sure to do this in a confident manner and remember that the reader will view your letter as an example of your writing skills.

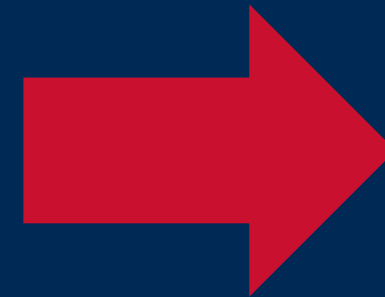
**Closing paragraph:** Reiterate your interest in the position, and your enthusiasm for using your skills to contribute to the work of the organization. Thank the reader for their consideration of your application, and end by stating that you look forward to the opportunity to further discuss the position.

Make the addressee want to read your resume. Be brief, but specific.

Remind the reader of what you can do for the organization.

Sincerely,

Your name typed



September 1, 2025

Morgan Smith  
Director of Communications Jumpstart  
308 Congress Street, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor Boston, MA 02110

Dear Morgan Smith:

I am a senior at Harvard College studying History and Literature. I am writing to apply for the Marketing and Communications position at Jumpstart posted in Harvard's Crimson Careers database. I'm very excited about the field of education, and would welcome the opportunity to bring my strong communication skills, creativity, and marketing experience to your growing team.

Jumpstart's commitment to early education for every child is of particular interest to me and relates to my passion for youth development. This past summer, I worked as a senior counselor in the Summer Urban Program, which is dedicated to preventing summer learning loss for children in the Boston and Cambridge area. I designed and taught fun, interactive classes to a group of 10 fifth graders, and planned and led local field trips and workshops daily with a junior counselor. Throughout the summer, I consistently strived to create math, science, and reading lessons and activities that were engaging and tailored to my students' needs.

Additionally, in my role as the Director of Marketing for the Social Innovation Collaborative, I led our team in creating a social media strategy to drive our member recruitment efforts and promote our programs and events on platforms including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. With so many competing events on campus each day, I had to continually be creative in my approach to developing and delivering content that would be compelling and effective. As a result of my efforts, our group experienced a 20% increase in our membership base and a 15% increase in our social media engagement. I'm excited at the prospect of bringing the skills I developed through this experience to the Marketing and Communications role at Jumpstart.

Thank you for your consideration. I very much look forward to the opportunity to speak with you in person about my interest in this position.

Sincerely,

Alex Crimson



# AI-POWERED RESUME OPTIMIZATION



## Golden Rule:

Use AI to ANALYZE and IMPROVE — never let AI write your resume from scratch (Schifeling, n.d.)



### COPILOT PROMPT 1

#### Extract Keywords

*“What are the key skills and qualifications in this job posting?”*

### COPILOT PROMPT 2

#### Gap Analysis

*“Compare my resume to this job description. What keywords am I missing?”*

### COPILOT PROMPT 3

#### STAR Conversion

*“Help me convert this bullet into STAR format with results”*



### Warning

DO NOT let AI write bullets wholesale or use overused phrases like “leverage” or “synergy”



### Recommended Tool

[Jobscan.co](https://www.jobscan.co) - Scan resume against job descriptions. Aim for 75%+ match.



# PROGRAM-SPECIFIC KEYWORDS

## MBA

Strategic Planning, P&L Management, ROI Analysis, Cross-Functional Leadership

## MSW

Trauma-Informed Care, Case Management, Crisis Intervention, Cultural Competency

## Education

Curriculum Development, Differentiated Instruction, Assessment Design, Student Outcomes

## MHA

Healthcare Administration, HIPAA Compliance, Quality Improvement, Revenue Cycle

## MPA

Policy Analysis, Stakeholder Engagement, Program Evaluation, Grant Management

## Strategic Comm

Integrated Communications, Reputation Management, Crisis Communication, Brand Strategy

## MSN

Evidence-Based Practice, Patient Outcomes, Clinical Leadership, Care Coordination

## Criminal Justice

Criminal Justice Reform, Restorative Justice, Data-Driven Policing, Reentry

## 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



# THE STAR-K FORMULA FOR BULLETS

Recruiters use STAR method questions to predict on-the-job performance—research shows this approach is 55% predictive of success (Hansen, as cited in LinkedIn Talent Solutions, n.d.).

## Weak Example



“Responsible for managing social media accounts.”

*Task-based, no results, no keywords*

## Strong Example



“Increased LinkedIn engagement 47% by developing data-driven content strategy (social media, analytics).”

*Action verb, quantified result, keywords*

Prepare 3–5 stories by jotting down notes or creating a bulleted outline using the STAR method (MIT Career Advising & Professional Development, 2023).

## Powered Verbs by Category



### Leadership

Directed, Championed, Orchestrated



### Analysis

Assessed, Evaluated, Investigated



### Innovation

Pioneered, Transformed, Redesigned




# 7 COMMON GRADUATE RESUME MISTAKES


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- 1 Generic Resumes**  
Using one version for all applications
- 2 ATS-Unfriendly Formatting**  
Tables, graphics, unusual fonts
- 3 Task-Based Bullet**  
Listing responsibilities instead of achievements
- 4 AI-Generated Content**  
Detectable, generic, lacking authenticity

- 5 Missing Keywords**  
Not matching job description language
- 6 Buried Education**  
Education should be prominent for students
- 7 Objective Statements**  
Outdated; use Professional Summary



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



# RESOURCES & YOUR ACTION PLAN



## USI CAREER SUCCESS CENTER



Orr Center, Room 1051



(812) 464-1865



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Appointments via Career Launch

### Expert Resources

- Harvard Mignone Center Resume Guide
- Princeton Career Development
- The Job Insiders ([thejobinsiders.com](https://thejobinsiders.com))
- Jobscan.co (ATS Scanner)

### USI Partner Programs

Ascend Indiana | Parker Dewey | Alumni Mentor Network

### Your 7-Day Action Plan

Day **1-2**

Audit current resume against this framework

Day **3-4**

Use Copilot to extract keywords from 5 job postings

Day **5-6**

Rewrite bullets using STAR-K formula

Day **7**

Schedule Career Success Center appointment

Coming Up Next: **PART 3**

LinkedIn Optimization for Graduate Students  
Building Your Professional Brand with SEO Strategy



# THANK YOU FOR LISTENING!

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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN INDIANA<sup>®</sup>



**CAREER  
LAUNCH**

## NEED CAREER SUPPORT??

- ▶ You can visit us in the Career Success Center (located in the Orr Center) or book an appointment on Career Launch!
- ▶ Questions? Email us at [career.center@usi.edu](mailto:career.center@usi.edu) or give us a call to schedule an appointment (812) 464-1865!

