

How to Write Professional Documents:

- Resume
- Cover Letter
- Reference List



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240.895.4203 • 210 Glendening Hall

General tips

Use all three documents

- **Q: What is the purpose of each document?**
 - **A:** A **resume** connects your skills, characteristics, and experience directly to the opportunity you're applying for.
 - A **cover letter** is like a "love letter" to the employer—it tells them why you are truly interested in their specific organization and opportunity, and gives additional detail on why you'd be an asset to their team. (You do *not* need this at hiring fairs.)
 - A **reference list** is a brief list of people the employer can call to confirm you're as skilled and trustworthy as you say you are. (You do *not* need this at hiring fairs.)
- **Q: What if there's no space to add my cover letter and/or reference list?**
 - **A:** If the application system doesn't have spots for every document, you can combine them into one PDF and submit them, in this priority order:
 - If there's only **one spot for documents**, create a PDF with your cover letter first, then your resume, then your reference list.
 - If there are **two spots for documents**, submit your resume separately, and combine your cover letter and reference list with the cover letter first.

Matching is essential

- Your documents should match each other—use the same header and fonts on each. That way, they're clearly branded as coming from the same person: you!

Tailor for each opportunity

- Invest the time to customize your documents—it will pay off, because employers quickly see that you care about their specific organization and opportunities.
- **Q: Do I customize my documents for a hiring fair?**
 - **A:** No. For general events, bring a general resume—you don't need a cover letter or a reference list.

Keep it professional

- These are formal business documents, so avoid contractions and casual language.

Name your PDFs

- Always send PDFs when you apply—they look the same on all devices.
- Name your files clearly by including your name and the document type:
 - Solomon Seahawk - Resume.pdf
 - Solomon Seahawk - Cover Letter.pdf
 - Solomon Seahawk - References.pdf
- **Q: Should I send a PDF for a resume review?**
 - **A:** If you're getting help with a resume review, please share/send an editable Google Doc or Word Document. That way, we can help you make changes on the spot!

Resume tips

Write for the reader

- Write a good general resume first, then tailor your resume for each specific opportunity you apply for.
- Use simple past tense throughout your resume, even for employment/classes/volunteer work you are currently doing. It's easier for the reader to follow, and it means you don't have to change the verbs every time you move on to the next opportunity.

Know the industry

- The principles here apply generally across industries. However, you need to confirm details specific to your industry and target employer(s).
 - **Q: How do I confirm the best resume format for my industry and target employer(s)?**
 - **A:** Reach out to Seahawks working in the industry. One great way to find them is on LinkedIn at [linkedin.com/school/st.-mary's-college-of-maryland/people](https://www.linkedin.com/school/st.-mary's-college-of-maryland/people).
 - **Q: How many pages should my resume be?**
 - **A:** Usually just one, but there are exceptions, such as for federal government jobs and graduate school.
 - **Q: Should I include a photo?**
 - **A:** Usually no, but there are exceptions, such as for some marketing or teaching positions.
 - **Q: How many sections should I use?**
 - **A:** Usually just four: header, summary, education, and experience.
 - **Q: Should I use colors or fancy layouts?**
 - **A:** Almost always no, unless you are a graphic designer, visual artist, or marketer. One column makes it easier for the employer to see all your information from top to bottom.

Keep it concise

- In most cases, you're better off with just four sections: header, summary, education, and experience. Exceptions include federal resumes and resumes/CVs for grad school.
- Cut anything that doesn't add value!
- Omit all first-person pronouns (I, me, my, mine), and also omit articles (the, a, an) if the bullet point makes sense without them.

Use a "Summary" section

- Don't make employers dig for the information they need. Put a summary at the top to help employers quickly identify the skills and characteristics you have.
- You can more easily tailor the information in your summary than the information in your experience section. This helps impress AI systems and human recruiters with keywords.
- The first line should give you a title (like "Education professional" or "Aspiring psychologist").
- If you're applying for a position with a job ad (only 20% of jobs), use the qualifications and responsibilities/duties sections to tailor your information. Copy and paste phrases that are true for you, and then reword them as needed to fit.

- **Q: How do I tailor my summary if I'm applying for one of the 80% of jobs that are not publicly posted?**
 - **A:** Use related language from the organization's mission and vision statements, on their website, in LinkedIn profiles of people in similar roles, and similar job postings.
- "Objective" statements died in 2008. They're not retro cool, they're redundant—so skip them!

Highlight relevant education

- List all of your college-level degrees in reverse chronological order.
 - You're a college student (or grad) now, so don't list high school on your resume.
- Type the level of the degree (A.A., A.S., B.A., B.S., etc.) and your major(s) in bold.
- State only the month and year of your graduation—whether that's in the future or the past. No start date, no "expected graduation"—just the month and year. The reset doesn't add value!

Include all your experience

- List all of your experience in reverse chronological order.
- **Q: Should I list my volunteer work and internships?**
 - **A:** Yes! Employers don't care whether you got paid in \$\$\$ or in ♥♥♥. They just want to know how effective you are at getting results.
- **Q: Does my volunteer work go in a different section?**
 - **A:** No! You are writing for the reader, so don't add extra complexity. Highlight the fact that you were awesomely involved in school, work, and/or volunteer work at the same time by listing it all in one section. (Exception: Do list volunteer work separately in your grad school CV.)

Focus on results = PARQ

- For each bullet point, focus on the results—who did you help (clients, community, team, etc.), and how did you make a difference? Whenever possible, *list the result at the beginning.*
 - **Use the "PARQ Rule":**
 - **Power verb** Start with a powerful verb that shows your result
 - **Action** State what you did to get the result
 - **Result** Tell how you made a difference and for whom
 - **Quantify** Use numbers when possible to draw the eye and impress
 - **PARQ rule examples:**
 - ✗ Put appointments on calendars.
 - *Very poor. Just an action—no result, no power verb, and no quantifier.*
 - ✗ Assisted wellness center staff to schedule appointments for students.
 - *Marginal. Still no result here, and "assisted" is not a power verb unless "assisted" was the main, direct action.*
 - ✓ Increased access to wellness appointments and services for 1,500+ students through meticulous organization of staff calendars and schedules.
 - *Impressive! Starts with a power verb, frontloads the result, shows details of the action, and quantifies the result with a number.*

- **Q: What if I can't think of anything to write?**

- **A:** Talk it out! Find a friend, mentor or professor—or even your phone—and tell the story of the work you've done. Then take notes and use this to write your bullet points. We are always happy to help you in the Center for Career & Professional Development! You can visit us at 210 Glendening Hall, email us at careercenter@smcm.edu, or call us at 240.895.4203.

Dates & dashes

- **Types and usage**

- An **en dash** is the width of the letter “n” and is used in dates to mean “from–to”. Use this for all dates.
 - **Example:** Apr 2022–Present
- An **em dash** is the width of the letter “m” and is used to add information (similar to parentheses). Use it sparingly.
 - **Example:** I enjoyed my time there—particularly the opportunity to serve.
- A hyphen is the shortest dash, and in formal writing, should only be used in compound words.
 - **Example:** We drove off-road vehicles to reach the remote site.

- **Symmetry**

- All dashes are symmetrical—you should never have space on one side.
 - Examples:
 - ✗ I worked there from January– March 2022.
 - *This looks ugly, and “from” is redundant, since the en dash (–) means “from ... to).*
 - ✗ The job was off- campus.
 - *Don't add a space, and don't hyphenate the word unless it's an adjective.*
 - ✓ I had an off-campus internship January–March 2022.
 - *Here, “off-campus” is an adjective, and is correctly hyphenated. “January–March 2022*

Margins & tabs

- Start with one-inch margins. If you can't fit all of your information cleanly on one page, you can narrow your margins, but don't go smaller than 0.5 inches.
- **Use “right tab stops” for dates!** If you just space over with the space bar or left tabs, you'll get sloppy-looking, misaligned dates.
- **Q: How do I add “right tab stops”?**
 - **A:** The quickest way to find a video or how-to page is to search online for “how to add right tab stops”.

Power verbs for your resume

Management/Leadership Skills

administered	consolidated	enforced	incorporated	originated	restored
analyzed	contracted	enhanced	increased	overhauled	reviewed
appointed	controlled	established	initiated	oversaw	scheduled
approved	converted	executed	inspected	planned	streamlined
assigned	decided	generated	instituted	presided	strengthened
attained	developed	handled	led	prioritized	supervised
authorized	directed	headed	managed	produced	terminated
chaired	elevated	hired	merged	recommended	
considered	eliminated	hosted	motivated	reorganized	
coordinated	emphasized	improved	organized	replaced	

Communication/People Skills

addressed	consulted	edited	involved	persuaded	solicited
advertised	contacted	elicited	joined	presented	specified
arbitrated	conveyed	enlisted	judged	promoted	spoke
arranged	convinced	explained	lectured	proposed	suggested
articulated	corresponded	expressed	listened	publicized	summarized
authored	debated	formulated	marketed	reconciled	synthesized
clarified	defined	furnished	mediated	recruited	translated
collaborated	described	incorporated	moderated	referred	wrote
communicated	developed	influenced	negotiated	reinforced	
composed	directed	interacted	observed	reported	
condensed	discussed	interpreted	outlined	resolved	
conferred	drafted	interviewed	participated	responded	

Research Skills

analyzed	detected	extracted	interviewed	summarized	solved
clarified	diagnosed	formulated	invented	surveyed	
collected	evaluated	gathered	investigated	systematized	
compared	examined	identified	located	tested	
conducted	experimented	inspected	measured	researched	
critiqued	explored	interpreted	organized	searched	

Power verbs (continued)

Technical Skills

adapted	constructed	engineered	overhauled	repaired	studied
assembled	converted	fabricated	printed	replaced	upgraded
built	debugged	fortified	programmed	restored	utilized
calculated	designed	installed	rectified	solved	
computed	determined	maintained	regulated	specialized	
conserved	developed	operated	remodeled	standardized	

Teaching Skills

adapted	conducted	encouraged	guided	motivated	taught
advised	coordinated	evaluated	individualized	persuaded	tested
clarified	critiqued	explained	informed	set goals	trained
coached	developed	facilitated	instilled	simulated	transmitted
communicated	enabled	focused	instructed	stimulated	tutored

Financial/Data Skills

administered	assessed	conserved	forecasted	programmed	retrieved
adjusted	audited	corrected	managed	projected	
allocated	balanced	determined	marketed	reconciled	
analyzed	calculated	developed	measured	reduced	
appraised	computed	estimated	planned	researched	

Creative Skills

acted	created	drew	illustrated	modeled	revised
adapted	customized	entertained	initiated	modified	revitalized
began	designed	established	instituted	originated	shaped
combined	developed	fashioned	integrated	performed	solved
conceptualized	directed	formulated	introduced	photographed	
condensed	displayed	founded	invented	planned	

Power verbs (continued)

Helping Skills

adapted	cared for	demonstrated	familiarize	provided	supported
advocated	clarified	diagnosed	furthered	referred	volunteered
aided	coached	educated	guided	rehabilitated	
answered	collaborated	encouraged	helped	presented	
arranged	contributed	ensured	insured	resolved	
assessed	cooperated	expedited	intervened	simplified	
assisted	counseled	facilitated	motivated	supplied	

Organization/Detail Skills

approved	compiled	inspected	prepared	reviewed	systematized
arranged	corresponded	logged	processed	routed	updated
cataloged	distributed	maintained	provided	scheduled	validated
categorized	executed	monitored	purchased	screened	verified
charted	filed	obtained	recorded	set up	
classified	generated	operated	registered	submitted	
coded	implemented	ordered	reserved	supplied	
collected	incorporated	organized	responded	standardized	

Miscellaneous

achieved	exceeded	reduced (losses)	restored	succeeded	transformed
completed	improved	resolved (issues)	spearheaded	surpassed	won
expanded	pioneered				

This list of verbs is adapted from Wake Forest University (n.d.).

Solomon Seahawk

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Summary

- Marine biology professional with field experience in diverse environmental biomes, focusing on environmental preservation and public education.
- Enthusiastic about engaging and communicating with diverse audiences.
- Highly organized, with excellent written and verbal communication skills, strong work ethic, and extensive experience working unsupervised.
- Tech skills include eBIRD, Excel, MS Office, Google Workspace, social media.

Education

B.A., Environmental Studies & Biology; Minor in Philosophy **May 2023**

St. Mary's College of Maryland, *St. Mary's City, MD*

- *Key coursework:* Marine Microbiology • Ichthyology • Topics in Environmental Policy & Social Sciences • Quantitative Methods

Experience

Environmental Restoration Intern **Feb 2022–Present**

Dovetail Environmental Association, *Annapolis, MD*

- Enhanced environmental protection by developing 2 research projects on current environmental problems surrounding the Chesapeake Bay and Annapolis area.
- Proposed 7 new environmental initiatives through collaborative team meetings to showcase research findings and identify the concerns they raised.
- Managed ongoing restoration projects in the field by traversing different environmental biomes to increase awareness of local Maryland flora and fauna.

Treasurer **Aug 2019–Present**

Fishing Club, St. Mary's College of Maryland, *St. Mary's City, MD*

- Solidified the annual budget by assessing financial needs through a survey sent to 24 members plus corporate, non-profit, and alumni partners.
- Raised \$2,500 through collaboration with external partners including the Dovetail Environmental Association and the Chesapeake Bay Amature Fly Fishing Association.
- Ensured accurate accounting of all income by double-checking all cash and digital payments for membership dues, donations, and admission fees at events.

Administrative Assistant **Sep 2021–Jan 2022**

Wellness Center, St. Mary's College of Maryland, *St. Mary's City, MD*

- Increased access to wellness appointments and services for 1,500+ students through meticulous organization of staff calendars and schedules.
- Provided exceptional customer service via phone, email, and in person by quickly and thoroughly answering questions, scheduling appointments, and resolving concerns.

Use the SMCM template. Create a main resume with all your experience.
Write for the reader: tailor for each opportunity.

Professional-looking email

Solomon Seahawk

Custom LinkedIn URL

240.895.4203 • sseahawk@smcm.edu • linkedin.com/in/solomon-seahawk

Make links clickable (but NOT blue underlined)

Summary *First line should give you a title*

- Marine biology professional with field experience in diverse environmental biomes, focusing on environmental preservation and public education.
- Enthusiastic about engaging and communicating with diverse audiences.
- Highly organized, with excellent written and verbal communication skills, strong work ethic, and extensive experience working unsupervised.
- Tech skills include eBIRD, Excel, MS Office, Google Workspace, social media.

Education *Black text only (unless you're a designer)*

Grad date only (no start date)

B.A., Environmental Studies & Biology; Minor in Philosophy

May 2023

St. Mary's College of Maryland, St. Mary's City, MD

- *Key coursework:* Marine Microbiology • Ichthyology • Topics in Environmental Policy & Social Sciences • Quantitative Methods

Experience *Use consistent fonts, sizes, and formatting*

En dash

Environmental Restoration Intern

Feb 2022–Present

Dovetail Environmental Association, Annapolis, MD

Present not "Current"

- *P* Enhanced environmental protection by *R* developing 2 research projects on current environmental problems surrounding the Chesapeake Bay and Annapolis area.
- Proposed 7 new environmental initiatives through collaborative team meetings to showcase research findings and identify the concerns they raised.
- Managed ongoing restoration projects in the field by traversing different environmental biomes to increase awareness of local Maryland flora and fauna.

PARQ Rule:
-Power verb
-Action
-Result
-Quantify

Treasurer *Include volunteer experience!*

Consistent date format

Aug 2019–Present

Fishing Club, St. Mary's College of Maryland, St. Mary's City, MD

- Solidified the annual budget by assessing financial needs through a survey sent to 24 members plus corporate, non-profit, and alumni partners.
- Raised \$2,500 through collaboration with external partners including the Dovetail Environmental Association and the Chesapeake Bay Amature Fly Fishing Association.
- Ensured accurate accounting of all income by double-checking all cash and digital payments for membership dues, donations, and admission fees at events.

Simple past tense

Administrative Assistant

Align dates: use "right tab"

Sep 2021–Jan 2022

Wellness Center, St. Mary's College of Maryland, St. Mary's City, MD

- Increased access to wellness appointments and services for 1,500+ students through meticulous organization of staff calendars and schedules.
- Provided exceptional customer service via phone, email, and in person by quickly and thoroughly answering questions, scheduling appointments, and resolving concerns.

Edit down to 1 page for most jobs. Exceptions: Grad school, government.

Margins 0.5" to 1"

Save and send file as a PDF (except for edits). Format: "Solomon Seahawk - Resume.pdf"

Cover letter tips

Match the resume

- Use the exact same header and fonts on your resume, cover letter, and reference list. That's good branding!

Be concise

- Keep the letter to one page only, including the header and signature. (The one exception is that a grad school statement of purpose / letter of intent can be longer, since it's essentially an essay in the form of a cover letter.)

Use business letter format

- **Date, address, and salutation**

- Below the header, list today's date.
- Leave a vertical space, then list the full name, position, and address of the person most likely to make the hiring decision.
 - **Q: What if I can't find the name of the person hiring?**
 - **A:** First try searching the organization's website or calling their HR department. If you still can't find a name, you can use "Hiring Manager" or "Selection Committee".
- Leave a vertical space, then write "Dear Mr. / Ms. / Mrs. / Dr. Lastname (or Position Title):"
 - **Q: Can I write "To Whom It May Concern"?**
 - **A:** Never use "To Whom It May Concern" on a cover letter because that includes the entire universe! If you can't find their name, you can use "Dear Hiring Manager" or "Dear Selection Committee".

- **Body**

- **First paragraph:** Tell the employer why you're writing to them. Include the title of the position you're applying for and how you found out about it. Find information about the specific organization and tell how it relates to your interests. It's kind of like a love letter—you have to tell them why you're interested in them, not just that you want a job.
- **Second paragraph:** Explain what makes you unique and valuable as a candidate for the position. If you're applying for a position with a job ad (20% of jobs), use the qualifications and responsibilities/duties sections of the ad to tailor your information. Don't just repeat your resume. Be concise in highlighting your skills, experiences, characteristics, and/or accomplishments with a specific example or two.
- **Final paragraph:** Ask for an interview and say thank you.

- **Signature—This is required!**

- Leave a vertical space below the final paragraph. Type “Sincerely,” (with a comma at the end), then leave a vertical space that’s big enough for you to sign your name. Below the signature space, type your full name (the same way you listed it in the header).
- Note: A cover letter is a formal business letter, so it would look unprofessional and quite odd if you didn’t sign it.
- **Q: How do I put a signature on my cover letter?**
 - **A:** There are many ways to get a signature on your cover letter, including:
 - Use a digital device (smartphone, tablet, etc.) to draw your signature.
 - Sign a blank paper, scan it with a scanner, then add it to your document as an image.
 - Sign a blank paper, take a photo with your phone, add the signature to your document, then *adjust the brightness and contrast* until the background is white.

Solomon Seahawk

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May 1, 2022

Shelly Seawater
Assistant Director of Coastal Preservation
Atwater Shoreline Services
632 Bayside Ave
Baltimore, MD 21201

Dear Ms. Seawater:

Thank you for the opportunity to be considered to serve with your team in the role of Coastal Outreach Technician. I was excited to learn about this position from your former colleague, Rashelle M. Osprey, who served as my internship supervisor. Based on the valuable preservation work you do for Maryland's coastal areas and your reputation for a family-friendly work environment, I am excited to apply for this position, and feel that I would be a valuable asset to your team.

I have always been passionate about protecting and preserving our local environment, and working to educate the public on how they can help. For example, during my internship with Dovetail Environmental Association, I worked in a variety of local biomes and developed an environmental protection protocol to enhance the protection of endangered badger-moles. Additionally, while serving as Treasurer of the St. Mary's College of Maryland Fishing Club, I not only raised funds for the club's activities, but successfully advocated for a campus-wide event to promote environmentally safe fishing practices.

I am excited about the potential to bring my enthusiasm for coastal preservation to a quality team like Atwater Shoreline Services. Thank you for considering me for this position. I am readily available for an interview and look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Solomon Seahawk". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Solomon Seahawk

Reference list tips

- **Match the resume**
 - Remember to use the same header and fonts on your resume, cover letter, and reference list to show your professionalism and attention to detail.
- **Ask first**
 - Always ask people before you list them as references!
- **List only three**
 - Unless the employer asks for more or fewer, just list three references.
 - List the name of the reference, followed by their current title, employer, and contact information.
 - **Q: What if I don't have all of their contact information?**
 - **A:** If you can't get everything, include what you have. An email address and/or phone number are definitely more important than a mailing address.
 - **Q: Who can be a reference?**
 - **A:** A good reference could be a current or former supervisor, colleague, professor, classmate, or client who knows your work and your character well enough to recommend you. *Avoid using family members as references.*

Solomon Seahawk

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References

Ms. Rashelle M. Osprey

Conservation Education Specialist
Dovetail Environmental Association
5536 Dovetail Ln
Annapolis, MD 20401
410.555.1234
rashelle.m.osprey@dovetail.org

Ms. Osprey was my colleague while I worked as Environmental Restoration Intern for Dovetail Environmental Association May–September 2021.

Professor Charles Sparrow

Professor of Biology
St. Mary's College of Maryland
47645 College Drive
St. Mary's City, MD, 20686-3001
240.895.3331
chip.sparrow32@smcm.edu

Professor Sparrow was my instructor for Marine Microbiology and Ichthyology at St. Mary's College of Maryland from 2019 to 2022.

Ms. Robin Swansen

Director, Wellness Center
Northern Maryland College of Art
165 College Drive
Parkville, MD 21234
240.555.0005
robin.swansen27@nmca.edu

Ms. Swansen was my supervisor while I worked as Administrative Assistant for the Wellness Center at St. Mary's College of Maryland from 2019 to 2020.

Q: What if I have more questions now or after I graduate?

A: The Center for Career & Professional Development is here to help you, even after you graduate. We can review your documents in depth and give you customized advice.

To schedule an appointment or get more help:

smcm.edu/career-center • careercenter@smcm.edu

240.895.4203 • 210 Glendening Hall

We look forward to helping you!

Works Cited

Wake Forest University. (n.d.) Resumes. opcd.wfu.edu

Southern Utah University. (n.d.) How to Write a Resume, Cover Letter, and Reference List. suu.edu

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