



Higher Education Recruitment Consortium

HOW TO APPLY FOR

HIGHER EDUCATION CAREERS



REVISED EDITION



Forward

By downloading this ebook, you're on your way to a fulfilling career in higher education.

Maybe you're looking for a mentor and opportunities to advance your career. Perhaps you're searching for a work environment that offers great benefits, work-life balance, and a collaborative culture. Maybe you'd like to influence and inspire the next generation of leaders.

Whatever your reason for transitioning into higher education, HERC is here to help!

Please visit our website, hercjobs.org, for additional resources to advance your career.

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ABOUT HERC

The Higher Education Recruitment Consortium (HERC) is a nonprofit consortium of over 700 colleges, universities, hospitals, research labs, government agencies, and related groups committed to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the higher education workforce. HERC works to ensure member institutions are sites of belonging, where all faculty and staff can thrive.

HOW TO DRAFT A CAREER-CHANGE RESUME

The average person will have 12 jobs in their lifetime, and in many cases, at least a few of those positions will constitute true career changes. In fact, the majority of early-career workers say they'll likely return to school at some point, with their sights set on changing roles, and 80 percent of workers in their 20s want to change careers.

While a career change puts you in good company, positioning yourself and your prior experience can be challenging. The more competitive the market, the tougher it may be to cut through the clutter and ensure your resume is noticed—especially in a stack of CVs or resumes that seem to be 100 percent in step with the specific role and responsibilities.

The simplest and most effective solution is to unpack your soft skills and other transferable skills—proficiencies that easily translate from industry to industry and are just as highly sought in your new potential field. By telling your professional story and organically weaving in these critical traits and experiences, you'll create instant relevance in a hiring manager's mind and better position yourself to get an interview—and possibly the job.

Some Great Steps for Getting Started

1. Research. Every industry is different. Even if you're shifting niches within the same general area, be sure to do your homework regarding the required skills, training, certifications, and in-demand experiences. A quick search on HERC Jobs or a specific institution's job board should give you a cursory sense. Jot down the key points and requirements—you'll need to have those on hand as you start drafting your resume.

2. Compare and Contrast. Armed with your list of industry must-haves, the next step is to determine how your background compares and contrasts. For example, an analyst may be well-versed in distilling complex research findings into simple, actionable trends, and that's also an important skill for a teacher or someone in a sales or marketing role. As you work through your list of required skills and experiences, chances are you'll spot more than a few that connect your current career path to your new trajectory. Make note of each—these will be central to your updated resume and, more specifically, used to fill in the SKILLS/STRENGTHS section of your resume.

3. Determine Your Objective. A solid career-change resume starts with a clear-cut objective: a short statement at the top of your resume that definitively states why you're applying for the job. Some examples include:

- To transition into an executive-level position in graduate admissions that leverages my experience in diversity initiatives and staff training.
- To bring my decade-plus of experience working with students, educators, and high-level donors and alumni to a student-affairs role.
- To shift from a research-focused position to a classroom-based teaching role, enabling me to bring my experience, insights, and unique presentation approach to graduate students.

Each of these statements weaves in why the applicant is right for the position, without overtly saying it, and hints at their skills and qualifications. Done right, a strong objective should drive hiring managers to lean in and read on—exactly what you want.

4. Draft Your Resume. Many people who are making career changes opt to use a functional resume. While most resumes are chronological—listing your most current experiences first and continuing backward—a functional resume brings your skills and experiences to the forefront. By pulling your best skills forward as they relate to the job for which you're applying, you can better highlight why you make sense for the role.

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For example, a functional resume might showcase your research and presentation skills from all previous roles as well as your training, academic work, and supporting pursuits.

For a functional resume, the format would be:

OBJECTIVE

SKILLS/STRENGTHS (Include relevant skills and experiences as they relate to the role.)

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES (Break down critical experiences and skills into a few relevant buckets. Under each header, bullet out related experiences from previous roles. See examples below.)

Educational Work-Related Experience

Project Management-Related Experience

Managerial-Related Experience

Technology and Administrative Support-Related Experience

WORK HISTORY (List the positions in which you acquired the bulleted experiences above. Because you've already explained your experiences above, there's no need to elaborate here.)

EDUCATION /TRAINING (Conclude with your education and any relevant training or certifications.)

5. Send with Confidence. The final step is to send your resume—with confidence—to prospective employers. Many hiring managers and HR leaders are searching for candidates who meet the needs of an organization or institution. Beyond that, they want engaged, active doers

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who are ready to dive in and learn. Often, a candidate making a career change can check those boxes.

Additionally, candidates from other backgrounds and industries may be positive forces for change by bringing unique perspectives to the departments or divisions. It's easy to become caught up in the status quo when you're surrounded by like-minded professionals. An outside hire can shake things up for the better, pushing everyone to consider new perspectives and think differently—often, bringing about exciting innovations and new ways of looking at old problems. Be that person and you'll be in-demand—no matter what your desired next step.

Voices from the Field

"I know it's so hard not to do the shotgun effect, when you just apply to all these things and see what sticks. But if you spend quality time narrowing down to a few positions as opposed to a lot, you're going to have a lot more success getting the position you really want."

"Make sure those titles are accurate, but also exemplify the work that you did. Some professionals have imposter syndrome and they really don't go into detail about things that they accomplished."

- Stephanie McGrew, Assistant Director for the Department for Diversity & Inclusion, A.T. Still University of Health Services

"When I go to job fairs or do a career counseling session, I'll ask you point blank, "Are you using the same exact resume for every position you apply to?" Typically the answer is yes. The job seeker is going to struggle when they do that. Job seekers need to tailor the resume to each position they're going to apply to, specifically addressing those qualifications."

"Institutions will typically screen your resume submitted based on the qualifications they have listed in the job posting: education, experience, and a few other qualifications needed to be successful in the role. Well, we have to be able to see those in the resume. They have to be addressed. Otherwise, it can't be determined you're qualified."

- Adam Potter, Senior HR Specialist, University of Iowa

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"Don't be afraid to network with old professors or old connections. It doesn't matter if it's been months or years since the last time you spoke to them. Mentor figures are always so excited to catch up and help you with your professional growth."

- Emily "M" Meyer, Accessibility and Wellness Coordinator, Institute for Health Professionals

CURRICULUM VITAE OR RESUME: WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES?

If you are applying for a job with a college or university, you might be hearing a lot about the curriculum vitae (CV). Most faculty positions at these institutions require a CV. If you are applying for staff positions, you will likely be asked to submit a resume. However, some staff positions also require a CV, which is a compendium of all your experiences and accomplishments. The major differences are in academic orientation and page length.

Academic Orientation and Page Length

Curriculum vitae is Latin for "course of life," and that is an apt description of what is included. A CV emphasizes educational and academic accomplishments and grows over the course of an academic's life. In some fields, it is not uncommon to see a CV upwards of 20 pages long.

Resume is French for "summary," and it is just that—a summary of qualifications and skills geared toward a specific occupation. Even with years of experience, your resume should be no longer than two pages.

Which One Should I Submit?

Of course, there are many similarities between a CV and a resume. Both provide a review of qualifications and summarize education. Both also

should be created with attention to detail, as they serve as the calling card you will need to achieve the career of your dreams.

Most job descriptions will specifically ask for either a resume or a CV. If you are applying for a position at a large research university and the posting does not specify which to send, it is perfectly acceptable to ask. If you are applying at any other type of institution within the U.S., it is likely that you will be sending a resume, but again, ask if you are unsure.

CAN YOUR RESUME PASS THE 10-SECOND TEST?

Employers can decide in under 10 seconds whether to put a resume in the dismiss or save pile. Clearly 10 seconds isn't sufficient time to adequately assess whether a candidate can actually perform the job advertised. However, employers are looking for specific ticket items, and if your resume does not address these items, it just may land in the dismiss pile. Here are five resume tips to help you succeed.

1. Keep it Short and Sweet

A career counselor reported that most college student resumes are multiple pages. That is because students tend to treat the resume like it is another college application in which they must tell their entire life story. Far from it, the resume is simply an opportunity to make the case for your hiring in a succinct manner that highlights relevant skills, not everything you have ever done. An employer is simply not going to spend the time reading more than one page from a college student.

2. Relevancy is Key

The traditional resume is written in reverse chronological order. Tradition is good, but in the case of a college resume, it is important that you make the job of the recruiter easy by putting the most relevant experiences where recruiters can quickly find them: at the top of the

resume. After education, include thematized or functional headings that demonstrate your key skills such as employment, leadership, and mentoring. Relevancy also includes a discussion of your experience that specifically highlights key accomplishments. Avoid a laundry list of things you have done and really hone in on your ability to meet project deadlines and deliver results consistently.

3. Make it Pretty

Spending time on how your resume looks will pay off in large dividends in the end. Employers have a mix of subjective and objective measurements when they consider an applicant. Therefore, in addition to including the objective relevant skills, the resume needs to be pleasing to the eye. Typically, this means one-inch margins all around, a nice balance of white space, a 12- inch type (depending on font), and consistent bullets or markers throughout.

4. Do You Speak Resume?

Use action verbs that strongly and succinctly describe your key accomplishments. Avoid using first person pronouns and passive verbs. For example, don't write "I was responsible for organizing monthly meetings." Instead, write "Organized monthly meetings to share new developments and project updates."

5. Objective or Summary Statements

Include a brief statement that communicates your career goals or summarizes your qualifications for the role. If you're a college student, you can reclaim space on your resume by omitting this statement.

So, while 10 seconds isn't a long time, it's certainly long enough for an employer to decide whether you have ticked off these five things on your resume. Pull out your resume and give it to a friend. See how quickly he or she can spot what you are really good at.

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Voices from the Field

“How you present the information is just as important as the qualifications that you’re putting on your resume. I had one resume, but I would change the colors to match the colors of the university I was applying to, and I would make sure that the vision and mission statements of that university were reflected in the wording.”

- Emily “M” Meyer, Accessibility and Wellness Coordinator, Institute for Health Professionals

“I know everyone wants to cram all that information into a tiny space, but I would rather them make sure the font and the spacing is appropriate and go an extra page than to literally have to get a magnifying glass to read their descriptions.”

- Stephanie McGrew, Assistant Director for the Department for Diversity & Inclusion, A.T. Still University of Health Services

“Develop your bullet points that address the qualifications of the job you’re applying to. So if someone needs excellent communication skills, proficiency with Microsoft Office suite and a track record of excellent customer service, I should see bullets under your current position or previous positions that match those qualifications.”

- Adam Potter, Senior HR Specialist, University of Iowa

“One format that is just extremely difficult to understand is when someone lists all of their qualifications and their skills, and you can’t tell if they have learned that skill set over the past two years, five years or 10 years.”

- Michelle Morris, Director of Employment & Clinical Support Services, East Carolina University

10-SECOND RESUME TEST

	Points
1. Is your resume more than two (2) pages?	Yes = 1 No = 0
2. Is your resume in reverse chronological order?	Yes = 1 No = 0
3. Are the margins on your resume less than 1"?	Yes = 1 No = 0
4. Are you using a font size less than 12pt?	Yes = 1 No = 0
5. Does your resume use bulleted lists?	Yes = 1 No = 0
6. Does your resume have any third person pronouns?	Yes = 1 No = 0
Total Points	

6 points

Your resume may not pass the 10-second test. Have a friend review it for exactly 10 seconds. They should be able to tell what you excel at in a few words.

4-5 points

You may need to redraft. If you are using 12pt font, consider rewording and editing. Remember to only include relevant experience.

2- 3points

You're on the right track. Go back through your resume and see where you can summarize in fewer words, increase margins, utilize white space, and keep it to one page.

0-1point

10-second star! It looks like your resume passes the 10-second test and follows our guidelines for applying for higher education careers!



THE TOTAL PACKAGE: WRITING THE COVER LETTER

There is often more to landing a higher education job than just sending a resume. Most positions also require a cover letter. While a resume is designed to show the employer your qualifications, the cover letter is meant to persuade the employer to bring you in for an interview.

Many cover letters are generic, so this is a good chance to stand out. It's important to create a personalized cover letter for each position, and one that isn't just a duplication of your resume.

The introductory paragraph should help the hiring official understand why you are seeking a new opportunity, especially if you are moving forward with a career change.

The next three paragraphs should address the following “Why” questions:

1. Why are you applying for this job?

What is it that makes you excited to submit your application for this role? This also sets the stage for the interview, because this question is asked by almost every employer.

2. Why are you interested in working for this particular employer?

Go to their website and find out what the mission statement or value statement is for the company, department, or organization. Check out their social media posts. What jumps out at you and makes you excited to join that team?

3. Why are you the most qualified candidate for this role?

What are you bringing to the table? What major contribution will you bring to the team? Again, this is not the place to restate your whole resume, but to provide some quick highlights showcasing your biggest strengths.

You can conclude by saying you look forward to discussing your qualifications further during the interview. This basic formula will help in creating a personalized cover letter that will provide deeper insight into your candidacy.

ADDITIONAL TIPS

“Knowledge is power” is a key tenet of higher education. The more you know about a challenge, the better chance you will have of successfully overcoming it. This is also true of the process for applying to higher ed positions. Here is some additional information that should help you during your search.

The Waiting Game

The hiring process in higher education can be much lengthier than in other fields. Often there are layers of approvals hiring managers must go through before making an offer. Set your expectation level accordingly to avoid frustration during the process.

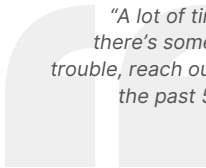
“As someone who came in from a different field, I was used to waiting a week between interviewing and finding out either you got the job or they’re going with another candidate. In higher ed, I was three months into my current job and I was getting institutes finally emailing me back about jobs I had applied to five months ago.”

- Emily “M” Meyer, Accessibility and Wellness Coordinator, Institute for Health Professionals

Take Advantage of (Human) Resources

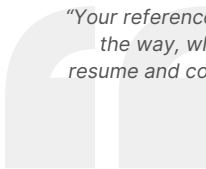
Human resource departments are there to help support applicants, so if you have any questions about the search process or the job you're applying for, be willing to reach out to the institution's HR team.

You should also ask people in your personal or professional networks to look over application materials - especially if those reviewers already work in higher education. Many higher ed employees entered the industry because they want to teach others, and they would welcome the opportunity to help you.



"A lot of times people assume they're on their own, and they become frustrated when there's something about the application process they don't understand. If you're having trouble, reach out to the employer's HR department. We've seen a lot more automation over the past 5-10 years, which is fantastic because it makes applying more accessible to candidates. But remember that HR departments are there for a reason."

- Michelle Morris, Director of Employment & Clinical Support Services,
East Carolina University



"Your references would be great people to look at your applications. You can say, 'Hey, by the way, while you're writing that letter of recommendation, do you mind looking at my resume and cover letter to make sure that they're appropriate for the type of position that I'm applying for?'"

- Stephanie McGrew, Assistant Director for the Department for
Diversity & Inclusion, A.T. Still University of Health Services