

# RÉSUMÉS, COVER LETTERS & REFERENCES

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## Tips & Strategies



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access hyperlinks.



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CAREER CENTER

# Résumé Writing: Getting Started

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Your résumé is your first introduction to a potential employer or person in your network. It is a marketing tool, and as such, its purpose is to create enough interest in you to generate an invitation to an interview. Employers will spend **only 10-20 seconds** reviewing your résumé. Thus, you have to be FOCUSED and FORTHRIGHT. The goal is to articulately show the “fit” between your skills and experiences and what the employer needs (typically stated in the job description). An effective résumé will follow the guidelines in this guide, while highlighting your most significant transferable skills and accomplishments.

## STEP 1

Before writing your résumé, it is critical for you to answer the following questions:

- **Know your audience.** *Who will be reading my résumé?*
- **Know what they’re after.** *What skill sets and qualifications is the employer looking for in my résumé?*
- **Know how to articulately convey your fit for the position.** *How can I demonstrate, through specific examples, my skills and experiences to a potential employer?*

The content and design of your résumé should reflect your responses to these questions. Remember we read top to bottom and left to right. So, the information that is most important to your reader should generally appear closer to the top of your résumé.

## STEP 2

Research the area of work you are interested in and review job descriptions. If you were to pursue a specific position, what skills and experiences would the employer or recruiter expect?

*To find out what skills are desired for a particular occupation, consult the following resources:*



- **FOCUS** – a career exploration system housed in the Career Center.
- **Occupational Outlook Handbook** – Published by the U.S. Department of Labor, this resource provides comprehensive overviews of specific occupations.
- **O\*Net** – Search occupations based on your self-prescribed skill sets.
- **Professional Associations in Your Field of Interest** – not sure who or what this might be? Ask a faculty member or career coach for suggestions.
- **Company Websites** – if there are organizations in which you’re particularly interested, really get to know them (search through their website, follow them on Twitter, etc.).

## STEP 3

An employer is interested in the [transferable skills](#) you have developed through a variety of experiences, including your liberal arts education. Transferable skills are qualities or abilities sought by a majority of employers which are useful in multiple areas. Develop a list of your accomplishments, skills, and personality characteristics. This will help you match your skills and abilities to the position requirements. Transferable skills demonstrate to the employer your extensive range of abilities including:

Communication (verbal and written)  
Critical thinking  
Problem-solving  
Leadership

Teamwork  
Multicultural understanding  
Motivation  
Integrity

# RÉSUMÉ CHECKLIST

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- One page in length most preferred (*talk with a career coach if you're having difficulty keeping it to one page*).
- Clearly reflects your fit for the position and employer's needs.
- Showcases your strengths and transferable skills as they relate to the position.
  - Includes all **relevant** and **transferable** experiences such as internships, international experience, research experience, part-time jobs, volunteer work, involvement in student or community organizations, leadership experience, significant class projects, etc.
- Is neat and well-organized, is easy to be scanned quickly and is visually appealing.
- Has consistent format, font, and grammar usage.
- Avoids a template format. Work from scratch! This will be easiest to customize and edit.
- Is error/typo-free; contains correct grammar and punctuation.
- Is printed on quality résumé paper.
- Presents a professional image.
- Uses compelling **action verbs** and "buzz words" (*For a comprehensive list of sample action verbs, visit our website: [www.messiah.edu/offices/career/students/resumes.html](http://www.messiah.edu/offices/career/students/resumes.html)*).
- Displays action-oriented and results-oriented bullet points under each experience.
- Avoids personal pronouns and lengthy paragraphs.
- Is proofread by several individuals, including a career coach!
- Avoids high school information.
- Does not list references. (see page 14 for more information)
- Does not use anything smaller than 10-point font and .5 inch margins.
- Objective, if used, is concise and to the point; avoids flowery language.

Bring your resume to the Career Center during **Drop-In Hours** to have it reviewed by a career coach!

Sample Objective for a Job Fair: *To obtain an internship within the government or nonprofit setting.*  
Sample Objective for a Specific Job: *To obtain the position of Admissions Counselor at Messiah College.*

# GENERAL FORMATTING

<b>Organization</b>	Well organized; indent beneath headings; bullet points to list info; <b>bold</b> to highlight titles or important info; consistency
<b>Page Length</b>	1 pg (with few exceptions); single-spaced
<b>Font</b>	10-12 pt; black; simple style – Calibri, Arial
<b>Margins</b>	.5" – 1" – should be same on all sides
<b>Paper</b>	Resume-quality paper; save in PDF for emailing
<b>Templates</b>	Avoid resume templates or wizards. Make it your own!

# RESUME COMPONENTS

<b>HEADING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full name</li> <li>• Address</li> <li>• Email (professional!)</li> <li>• Phone (cell preferred)</li> </ul>
<b>EDUCATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No high school info</li> <li>• Name of institution</li> <li>• Full degree/major title: "Bachelor of Arts in Communication; Concentration in Film"</li> <li>• GPA (if &gt; 3.0)</li> <li>• Honors/scholarships</li> <li>• Study abroad</li> </ul>
<b>EXPERIENCE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MUST be relevant to job for which you're applying</li> <li>• Can be broken into several "experience" sections (leadership, relevant, work, volunteer, etc.)</li> <li>• List in reverse chronological order</li> <li>• Include: org name; location; position; dates</li> </ul>

## MORE ON EXPERIENCE...

- Craft descriptions in a way that relates to target position
- Use **ACTION VERBS** to describe duties/accomplishments
- No need to include every task
- Quantify when possible
- Emphasize **TRANSFERABLE SKILLS**
- Include **RESULTS-ORIENTED** points



## SAMPLE TECHNIQUE

### For Writing Résumé Bullet Points

- 1) Duty → Skill**  
What did you get out of performing this duty? E.g. – paperwork/attention to detail
- 2) Structure**  
“I learned \_\_\_\_\_ by doing/as a result of/while \_\_\_\_\_.”
- 3) Verb**  
Replace “I learned” with a compelling action verb: “demonstrated attention to detail while developing brochures.”
- 4) Clarify**  
Review original duty. Ask yourself, “who, what, when, where.” Fill in the blanks... “demonstrated excellent attention to detail while developing brochures for marketing company distinctives to target audience.”

# Sample Résumé

Please note that résumés are unique to each individual. You may choose to use other formats or headings for your experiences.

Length should be one page unless you have extensive experience

## Your Name Here

Address: Messiah College, PO Box 0000, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055

Email address Phone number LinkedIn/Twitter or own URL Website listed here

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### OBJECTIVE

Use concise language to describe the position you are seeking

### EDUCATION

**Spell out degree** (ex. "Bachelor of Arts in Psychology")  
Messiah College, Mechanicsburg, PA, Graduation Date (Month/Year)  
List GPA if over 3.0 and academic honors/scholarships if desired

**Semester Abroad, Program Name**

School, Country

- If you have spent a semester abroad, this is a good place for your information
- If applicable, include bullets detailing significant experience you gained

### RELATED EXPERIENCE

**Job Title, Name of Organization**  
City and State, Dates (Use consistent format throughout résumé)

- Start in reverse chronological order, most recent experience first
- Begin bullet points with action verbs to describe responsibilities and accomplishments
- Include examples of transferable skills such as teamwork, leadership, organization, and communication

**Job Title, Name of Organization**  
City and State, Dates

- Be sure to list internships or field projects
- Include campus or other organization involvements that are relevant to the position
- List both paid and unpaid experiences that are related to the position you are seeking

### ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE

**Job Title, Name of Organization**  
City and State, Dates

- List other unrelated work experiences in this section
- Include the transferable skills utilized in this position

### SKILLS

Optional section; list any special skills (i.e., computer/other technical skills; language skills)

### INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

If you have had extensive cross-cultural experience (including service trips), it's appropriate to create a separate category for those experiences. Make sure to mention skills that you gained as a result of your experience which relate to the position for which you're applying.

### ACTIVITIES

Include extracurricular activities and volunteer or service projects. Mention membership and leadership positions on campus or professional organizations.

**\*TIP:** Do not list references on your résumé. Prepare a separate reference sheet to take to your interview. See sample reference sheet at the end of this handout.

**\*TIP:** It's recommended that you have a one-page résumé. If you go to two pages, be sure that it is two full pages which contains strong, relevant material. Because you do not staple a résumé, make sure you put your name on page two in the upper right hand corner.

Keep font size between 10 and 12pt.  
Avoid decorative or embellished fonts that may not copy or scan well

# CORY R. MITCHELL

corymitchell@messiah.edu | 555.555.5555

Messiah College, P.O. Box 0101, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055

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## OBJECTIVE

To obtain the position of Financial Representative at XYZ Corporation.

## EDUCATION

**Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration**, May 2011

Messiah College, Mechanicsburg, PA

- Cumulative GPA: 3.5/4.0; Major GPA: 3.8/4.0
- Financed 70% of college expenses through summer jobs and HOPE Scholarship

## COMPUTER SKILLS

- **Programming Languages:** Visual Basic, SQL, C, C++, Java
- **Operating Systems:** Windows NT/2000/XP/Vista, Linux, Unix
- **Database:** SQL, Server, MS Access, Oracle
- **Internet:** ASP, VB Script, JavaScript, HTML, XML, Dreamweaver, ASP.NET, Java Server, Perl
- **Software:** JCL, SQL, DB2, MS Visio, MS Excel, MS FrontPage, MS Word

## RELATED EXPERIENCE

**Financial Network Services**, Sydney, Australia, May-August 2010

Unix Administrator Assistant

- Operated Unix Hp/Ux 11i in the transferring of files between development and testing regions
- Led team of four to configure notebooks and install multilingual software for overseas consultants
- Created user accounts and set permissions and passwords with UNIX – SCO
- Performed hardware maintenance, technical support, and software research

## PROJECT EXPERIENCE

**Mechanicsburg Area Humane Society**, Mechanicsburg, PA, January 2009-Present

MIST 4620: Systems Analysis and Design

- Served as project team leader and developed a database to track the adoption of animals
- Designed website that allowed viewing of specific animals for adoption
- Used Visual Basic to set up the user interface
- Incorporated Java, HTML, and Flash interactive website ([www.aahumane.gov](http://www.aahumane.gov))

## ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE

**Student Government Association (SGA)**, Messiah College, September 2009-Present

Treasurer

- Managed a budget of \$10,000 and allocated funds as needed
- Handled all transactions and purchases while ensuring proper account balances

**Self-Employed Lawn Service**, New Cumberland, PA, Summers 2008-2010

Lawn Maintenance

- Established and retained customer base in local neighborhoods
- Gained experience establishing a small business

## HONORS/ACTIVITIES

- Boyer Scholar Recipient – recognizes academic accomplishments, distinguished leadership, and service
- Member of Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE)

# Michelle L. Brooks

Mbrooks@messiah.edu | 25 Falcon Avenue, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055 | 555.555.5555

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## EDUCATION

**Bachelor of Arts in Politics** (Honors Program), Expected May 2013

Messiah College, Mechanicsburg, PA

GPA: **3.7/4.0**

### **Certificate in Personal and Organizational Leadership**

- Participant in highly selective, individualized two-year leadership development program including academic courses, personal assessments, externships, team building, and community service

### **Study Abroad: Oxford University, Oxford, England**, Summer 2012

- Earned 6 credit hours while developing skills in cross-cultural communication and adaptability

## INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE

**Marketing Consultant**, ABC Company, Harrisburg, PA, August 2010 – Present

- Analyze market investment trends in business and real estate
- Create strategic marketing plan for business-to-business and consumer marketing
- Partner public and private interest groups for common development goals
- Manage external communications and lead consulting team project

**Intern**, The Population Institute, Washington, D.C., June – August 2011

- Conceptualized, created, and negotiated student scholarship program that serves 15 students per year
- Managed public relations for World Population Day Symposium with international press, NGOs, and government employees
- Successfully wrote grant proposals and worked to improve the effectiveness of direct mail fundraising
- Advocated with Congress and NGOs for issue awareness in legislative decisions

## LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

**Resident Assistant**, Messiah College Department of Residence Life, Mechanicsburg, PA, August 2011 – Present

- Designed, implemented, and evaluated educational programs for up to 100 residents
- Extensively utilized communication and counseling skills in supervising 65 women in residence hall
- Responded to various crises in a building housing 200 residents
- Explained, interpreted, and enforced College housing policies
- Compiled an annual facility inventory and report

**YMCA Camp Program**, Carlisle, PA

**Leadership Counselors Program**, June – August 2010

- Developed leadership training curriculum to be used by 36 counselors
- Taught leadership lessons to groups of 5-15 children ages 10-15
- Managed cabin of 12 students

**Head Counselor**, June – August 2009

- Interviewed, hired, and trained 35 counselors
- Designed camp schedule; maintained order in daily activities involving 250+ campers

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

**Mentor**, Harrisburg City Mentor Program, September 2010-May 2012

- Mentored a sixth-grade student bi-weekly at an alternative school



# SUSAN B. MEYER

MESSIAH COLLEGE • ONE COLLEGE AVENUE • BOX 5555 • MECHANICSBURG, PA 17055  
717-555-5555 • SW1440@MESSIAH.EDU

- OBJECTIVE** To utilize my organizational, leadership and team work skills in community development through a non-profit organization.
- EDUCATION** **Bachelor of Arts in Sociology**, Minor in Peace and Conflict Studies, May 2012  
Messiah College, Mechanicsburg, PA  
GPA: 3.8/4.0
- Chiang Mai University**, Chiang Mai, Thailand, January-May 2011
- Engaged in intensive Thai Language and Culture Study
- Messiah College Philadelphia Campus: Temple University**, Philadelphia, PA, August-December 2010
- Developed skills in community engagement within an urban context through education and service
- RELATED EXPERIENCE**
- Student Director**  
Agapé Center Outreach Teams, Messiah College, Mechanicsburg, PA, September 2010 - May 2012
- Coordinated and led 13-person team in organizing local service opportunities
  - Managed the Outreach Team budget of approximately \$6,500 in funds
  - Communicated with the student body about Outreach activities through email, print publications, and various social media sites
- Delegate Member**  
NGO Committee on the Status of Women 2010, New York City, NY, February 2010
- Attended the conference with the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom delegation
- Development Intern**  
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Philadelphia, PA, September - December 2009
- Assisted in fundraising work and development for national campaigns
  - Organized lodging arrangements for the fall board meeting
  - Attended the United National Security Council meeting on Resolution 1325
- Student Member**, MICAH Committee, Messiah College, Fall Semesters 2008 and 2009
- Participated on a student-faculty committee on racial reconciliation and multicultural education
- GLOBAL EXPERIENCE**
- Service Work**
- Thailand**, May – August 2011
- Interned for eight weeks at Chiang Mai Home for Boys and assisted staff in English translation
  - Cared for children of migrant workers for six weeks at Burmese Childcare Center
- Bolivia**, May - August 2010
- Cared for young girls at Bolivian Youth Ministries for five weeks
- Mexico**, December – June 2008
- Worked at a home for children, facilitated youth activities, and built homes
- ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE**
- Food Service Worker**, Messiah College Dining Services, Mechanicsburg, PA, August 2009 – May 2010
- Planning Team Member**, Unlearn Week, January – May 2009
- Member**, Alpha Kappa Delta International Sociology Honor Society, April 2008 – Present
- Student Member**, Student Government Association Forum, Fall 2010 and 2011
- Chairperson**, National Marrow Donor Program Drive, January – May 2009

# Cover Letters

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The cover letter, along with your résumé, is often your first introduction to a prospective employer. Unless otherwise specified, you should always send a cover letter with your résumé. An effective cover letter will provide an introduction, explain the purpose of writing (to apply for a specific job or internship opportunity; to inquire about opportunities with the organization; to request an information interview), and create enough interest to generate an interview. The letter should demonstrate excellent written communication skills, outline how your skills and experience match the employer’s needs, and express your interest and enthusiasm for the position. Do not use a generic cover letter for each résumé that you send. Instead, compose a letter that responds specifically to the organization’s needs.

## COVER LETTER CHECKLIST

- Do not exceed one page in length.
- Do your best to address the letter to a specific individual as opposed to “To Whom It May Concern.” You may need to contact Human Resources to request this information.
- Avoid starting every sentence with “I”.
- As with your résumé, target content to the position for which you’re applying.
- Refer to specific experiences that will grab the reader’s attention.
- Synthesize and provide examples of your most significant and relevant skills.
- The core emphasis of the letter is stating why you’re a good fit and how you can contribute to the company.
- When emphasizing your “fit” for the position, demonstrate your knowledge of the company.
- Avoid clichés or slang.
- Watch for spelling and grammar errors.
- If being sent hard copy: always sign the letter, use the same high-quality paper that you did for your résumé, never staple your résumé and cover letter, mail résumé and cover letter in a large envelope to avoid folding.

## COVER LETTER DO'S

<b>DO</b>	Tailor to each position for which you're applying
<b>DO</b>	Go beyond general claims “I’m organized,” and include specific examples
<b>DO</b>	Address the receiver by name – avoid, “To Whom it May Concern”
<b>DO</b>	Let your personality shine; don't use words that you wouldn't say in person
<b>DO</b>	Focus on what you have to <b>CONTRIBUTE</b> to the employer – not what you hope to get from them
<b>DO</b>	Write to the point; no flowery language; stick to a few concise paragraphs

# Sample Cover Letter Format

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Your street address  
City, state, zip

Month, Day, Year

Mr./Ms./Dr. Name of contact person  
Title of contact person  
Name of organization  
Street address  
City, state, zip

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. Last Name:

(First paragraph) Explain why you are writing and indicate the position for which you are applying. Tell how you heard about the position and the organization. Introduce basic information about yourself that explains why you would be the best candidate for the position. The first paragraph should catch the attention of the reader and create initial interest in you. If you are not applying for a specific position, still emphasize why you are interested in the organization.

(Second paragraph) Emphasize your skills and qualifications, and demonstrate how your experience meets the requirements for the position. Do not merely repeat the information listed on your résumé; instead, highlight and expand on your qualifications and experiences that are most relevant to this particular employer. Outline the skills you will bring to the position and communicate how you will contribute to the organization. Be specific with the examples you provide.

(Third paragraph) Refer the reader to the documents you have enclosed, such as your résumé, application, transcripts, etc. Reiterate your strong interest in the position/company. Provide contact numbers, email, and indicate the best way to reach you. Specify how you plan to follow up. Thank the reader for taking the time to consider your résumé.

Sincerely,

*(Your handwritten signature)*

Type your name here

Enclosure(s) *(This indicates that there are accompanying documents, such as your résumé, a reference list, etc.)*

# SAMPLE COVER LETTER #1

One College Avenue  
P.O. Box 5555  
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055

February 2, 2012

Ms. Fran Smith, RN  
Director of Nursing  
Children's Hospital Boston  
P.O. Box 549252  
Waltham, MA 02454

Dear Ms. Smith:

I am writing to express my interest in a position as a registered nurse at your hospital. In May 2013, I will graduate from Messiah College with a Bachelor of Science degree in nursing. As one of the top pediatric hospitals in the United States, your hospital offers the opportunity to further develop my knowledge and skills, and to grow as a professional pediatric nurse. I would strongly consider any staff nursing positions that may be available.

As indicated in my résumé, I have worked with children in a variety of settings. These experiences, along with an excellent clinical rotation at Hershey Medical Center, have provided a broad foundational understanding regarding the issues of child health. In addition to my nursing skills, I will bring strong leadership and organizational skills gained through my extra-curricular involvement. Advisors, supervisors, and clinical instructors have commented on my ability to manage multiple tasks simultaneously while maintaining a level of enthusiasm for the project at hand. I would be honored to join Children's Hospital Boston as a highly functional team member, and would be able to contribute to the care of your patients in the manner you so clearly require of your staff.

Thank you for giving my résumé careful consideration. Please feel free to contact me at 717-555-1212 or via email at [doe@internetprovider.com](mailto:doe@internetprovider.com) if you have any questions.

I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe

Enclosure: Resume

# SAMPLE COVER LETTER #2

632 Job Search Lane  
New York, NY 55555

January 12, 2012

Ms. Wanda Miller  
Vice President of Operations and Federal Relations  
The Capitol Association for International Affairs  
9999 Federal Street  
Washington, D.C. 14444-0003

Dear Ms. Miller:

I am writing in response to the email from the International Affairs Organization regarding summer internships with The Capitol Association for International Affairs. As a junior Politics major at Messiah College, I am very interested in applying my academic experience while gaining relevant skills and experience through an internship. Additionally, I would like to explore career options in the field of international affairs, cultivate professional networks, and develop greater awareness of global issues. I believe the combination of my education along with my campus leadership roles make me a strong candidate for this internship.

As the Fundraising Committee Representative for Student Life, I have demonstrated the ability to operate in a complex environment. My duties consisted of marketing fundraising opportunities to members and managing a budget of \$15,000. This responsibility has taught me careful attention to detail as well as working successfully as part of a team. I hope to have the opportunity to apply these skills and experience as an intern at The Capitol Association for International Affairs.

I am a team player and an active and enthusiastic contributor in all of my endeavors. If given the opportunity, I would be committed to contributing my fluency in French and Spanish, leadership and communication skills, and positive attitude to meet the needs and goals of your organization.

Thank you for giving my application careful consideration. I look forward to hearing from you regarding potential internship opportunities. In the meantime, please feel free to contact me at [mwilliams@jobsearch.net](mailto:mwilliams@jobsearch.net) or 555.555.5555.

Kind regards,

Maya Williams

Enclosure(s)

# SAMPLE COVER LETTER #3

85 Unemployed Drive  
Harrisburg, PA 17777

October 1, 2012

Ms. Charlotte Johnson  
Director of College Recruiting  
City Textiles Company  
987 Locust Lane  
Boston, MA 55555

*This is known as a sample **letter of inquiry**. If no positions are publicly posted, you may want to send your application materials expressing your interest and what you have to offer.*

Dear Ms. Johnson:

I am writing to inquire about professional sales opportunities at City Textiles Company. As someone with a genuine interest and respect for the apparel industry, I am very eager to learn about career opportunities with your prestigious organization. My business education, work experience, and strong interpersonal and persuasive skills have provided me with valuable skill sets which could be an asset to your organization.

With a Business Administration major and marketing minor, I have acquired excellent quantitative and analytical skills. In addition to my academic coursework, my internship with XYZ, Inc. and volunteer work with Children First have taught me valuable skills in time management, leadership, interpersonal communication, and self-directedness. During my internship with XYZ, Inc., I was required to meet strict deadlines, learn to be resourceful, and demonstrate flexibility in the midst of a fast-paced environment. These are skills that I know would be useful in a sales position with City Textiles Company.

Attached is my résumé which further details my experiences and qualifications. If any questions arise or you would like additional information, you may contact me at [jfoster12@hotmail.com](mailto:jfoster12@hotmail.com) or 555.555.5555. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Jack R. Foster

Enclosure

# Suzy Jobseeker

200 Seeking Employment Lane | Hireme, PA | 555-555-5555

[givemeajob@zzz.com](mailto:givemeajob@zzz.com)

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## References

Dr. Winnie Pooh  
Assistant Professor of Honeymaking  
1000 Hundred Acre Wood  
Makebelieve, PA 19999  
555-555-5555  
[ilovehoney@zzz.com](mailto:ilovehoney@zzz.com)

Ms. Minnie Mouse  
Social Director, Mickey Enterprises  
999 Disney World Lane  
Orlando, FL 00000  
555-555-5555  
[whenuwishuponastar@zzz.com](mailto:whenuwishuponastar@zzz.com)

Dr. Tinker Bell  
Chair, Department of Fairy Sciences  
1 Neverneverland Lane  
Fairydust, PA 20000  
555-555-5555  
[petespal@zzz.com](mailto:petespal@zzz.com)

References are people who are willing to speak highly on your behalf to prospective employers.

Only submit references when asked; otherwise bring a hard copy along to your interview.

Be sure to communicate to all individuals who are serving as your references so that they are aware of the jobs to which you are applying. For more information on references, visit the Career Center's [website](#).