

Business Résumés for Liberal Arts Students

By Susan de la Vergne

www.LiberalArtsAdvantage.com

It's a Buyer's Market

It's a buyer's market, as they say in real estate. Too many sellers, not enough buyers, therefore buyers have the advantage. A buyer's market drives housing prices down and makes sellers exceedingly willing to compromise, desperately frustrated and sometimes downright furious.

You could say the same thing about the current job market: Too many applicants, not enough jobs. Recruiters and hiring companies have the advantage. That leaves applicants in somewhat the same emotional state as sellers—eager, anxious, frustrated, perhaps even angry.

Whether you're just entering the job market or you've been at it a while, you probably recognize these effects and find yourself wondering how in the world you're going to land any meaningful work with your humanities or social sciences preparation in a job market that's seems to be shrinking before your very eyes. Maybe you've bought into the under-informed, conventional opinion that the only academic preparation with a prayer of being hired are business and engineering majors. If so, you're talking yourself out of your job search before you've even started.

Yes, it's a discouraging job market—for everyone (even those “hot” majors are having a tough time!). But what we're witnessing is a transformation, not The Beginning of The End—although certainly the media would prefer you believe that (boosts ratings, you know).

You may remember that one of the things Socrates said about courage is that it calls on the ability to recognize real danger and to distinguish it from perceived threat. As you enter and navigate the job market, courage is required—especially the ability to differentiate substance from hype. One advantage you have as a liberal arts major is not only that you've heard of Socrates but that his teachings, and the wisdom of many thinkers, writers and researchers, are not lost on you. They've given you an opportunity to develop some clarity of thought. Your job search will call on that ability repeatedly.

Introductions

I put in a lot of years on the hiring side of the interview desk. No, I wasn't a "recruiter" and I promise you I never worked in Human Resources, not once. My experience is as a functional manager in Information Technology departments in large companies. I'm not suggesting HR types are less than "functional," but their role is as a front end to the hiring process. They don't ultimately "own" the hiring decision; they don't live or die by it.

Okay, that's a little over the top, perhaps. I've never personally known anyone whose life was saved or ended because of a good or bad hiring decision. Still, the fact is functional managers have considerably more at stake in the hiring process than HR people do. So what I will share with you here comes from the perspective of a hiring manager who has worked directly and indirectly with, but never in, Human Resources.

I also bring to this discussion the unshakable opinion that liberal arts students (i.e., humanities and social sciences grads) are *exceptionally* well prepared for a variety of careers in business. I know this firsthand because I was one (humanities) and I went on to a long career in corporate management which I now know my education prepared me for.

Why Liberal Arts in Business?

Liberal arts studies prepare future professionals (that's you) to perform important work that business desperately needs to be done well—analysis, management of qualitative information, supervision, writing, public speaking, and research, to name a few. In addition to all that, there's something else business is always looking for. They call it "leadership potential," a combination of interpersonal acumen, natural curiosity, and critical thinking.

You see, therefore, that it's worse than unfortunate that liberal arts students aren't encouraged to see themselves as viable prospects for business careers. Who's discouraging them? Far too many people, I'm sorry to say, including:

Mom, Dad and other well-meaning family members who try to steer their students to “lucrative” majors like Accounting;

The media—pundits, journalists—who carp about the tight job market, whipping everyone into a frenzy about a dangerous future world in which only vocationally prepared students are safe. Occasionally they point out an *astonishing* variance from the norm, i.e., a liberal arts major who made it in business (a favorite: Michael Eisner, former Disney CEO, majored in English);

Corporate recruiters who, upon hearing you majored in, say, Sociology, say “How nice for you,” and move on because they don’t know what they’re dismissing;

Faculty members who either (1) prefer that the liberal arts remain pristine and unsullied by the wiles of commerce or (2) think their students do have a lot to offer the “real” world but aren’t sure how to connect them, having never been there themselves; and last but not least

University admissions staff, who insure freshman prospects they’ll be able to pay off those student loans in no time, once they major in Business and join the ranks of their well-paid graduates.

If you’re going to enter the job market looking for opportunities in business despite these formidable naysayers, you need to know (1) what you have to offer and why it’s so important, (2) how to describe most effectively what you have to offer, and (3) what you can do position yourself to be ready for job opportunities.

That’s what we’re going to do here.

What You, Liberal Arts Students, Have to Offer and Why Business Wants You

There are three abilities that students of the liberal arts have in their professional trick bag when they graduate from college that prepare them to move into successful business careers. The first is the one you hear about the most often. Liberal arts students can write, read and speak. (In business we call those “communication skills,” but in the liberal arts we call them by their real names.)

The second is liberal arts students learn to analyze, think critically, and deal with abstraction, even ambiguity. Business today depends on intangibles. It's a knowledge-based economy, after all. Some companies do nothing but make and sell intellectual property. How do you organize knowledge? How do you continuously improve intellectual property? The answers to those questions are vitally important.

In order to answer them, you have to be comfortable thinking about, arranging, managing and writing about abstraction. If you are, you have an advantage over, say, engineering and finance types who usually hate that. Abstraction? Ambiguity? Not their thing.

The third ability that liberal arts students have is they know something about people and their behavior in various situations, about complexity of events and outcomes. They've examined human motivation and elements of character (in literature), complexity of the psyche, of relationships (in psychology, sociology), not to mention things about other cultures and other times (history, anthropology). Why are these important advantages? Because in business, we get work done through and with other people. "Social networking" isn't just some fad brought into consciousness by trendy new internet offerings. It's just the latest development in about a fact of business that's been around forever: *relationships matter*. Knowing what motivates individuals and groups to do what they do, knowing something about how culture affects behavior have become important elements of success on the job, important contributor to teamwork, planning, strategy, marketing, and supervision.

These three things—communication, analysis, motivation—are things you learn when you study English, history, sociology, anthropology, foreign languages, classics. Not so much in the College of Business.

Another term you hear for these kinds of things—communication, analytical ability, understanding organizational culture and human motivation—is "leadership." If that surprises you because you're thinking "leadership" means you're in charge, in a management

role, think again. Leadership, in a business context, is broader than simply being the boss. Leadership shows up at work in many desirable forms, among them: taking initiative, communicating with empathy, using emotional realities to guide decision-making, being adaptable, thinking strategically, and being politically aware. They are elements of outstanding leaders, but they can reside in anyone, regardless of position. People who have these abilities are said to have “leadership potential.” Employers are more than eager to find it.

You might notice that list of abilities has little or nothing to do with technical proficiency and is more about how insight and understanding of human dynamics and complexity guides behavior.

Okay, so who teaches that? What department in your university is preparing students with the kinds of critical thinking, cultural awareness and understanding of human motivation that leadership requires?

I know: Computer Science! (*Not.*)

Don't get me wrong. I love computer science. I was, after all, in Information Technology for 20+ years, and if there are abilities I've come to appreciate and admire during my career, they're creating and improving technology products, designing, coding, testing, integrating systems. There's an extraordinary elegance to complex software, and I'm in awe of people who have the intellectual capacity, the technical prowess, and the tenacity to create it.

I am in no way underestimating the value of it. It's just not the same as leadership, and business needs both technical acumen *and* leadership abilities.

Which takes us to the essence of the problem: How do you present these leadership abilities, with which you've been equipped, for positions that aren't in leadership? Or, to say it another way, how can you present yourself as a candidate who has sought-after skills?

That, my friends, is what we'll do right now as we build your résumé and cover letter.

THE RÉSUMÉ

All résumés have, of course, the same basic parts in roughly this order:

Name and Contact Info
Summary of Qualifications
Objective
Education
Experience
Other

We'll tackle these in order.

Name and Contact Info

Summary of Qualifications

Objective

Education

Experience

Other

You get to begin with the easiest part: your name and address. Make sure you include your street address because people want to know where you live. Yes, that sounds incredibly obvious, but I'm surprised some students include only their email address and cell phone number assuming, in these virtual reality times, that's enough. It isn't.

Recruiters and hiring managers want to know where you are in relation to where they are for a number of reasons, like how far do you have to travel for an interview or in what time zone they might be calling you, if they call you. It also might matter whether you work across state lines in cases where there are differences in transportation benefits the company might offer depending on where you live. So be sure to include your snail mail address.

Your email address should be yours alone (not a family address like JonesFamily@wherever.com). It should certainly reflect professionalism, like allison.walters@wherever.com, not allisonwiggiechick@wherever.com.

Include both your cell phone number and a landline if you have one, especially if your cell service is at all iffy. You wouldn't want to miss an important message from a prospective employer just because your cell phone coverage let you down. Landlines, though they're on their way out in residences, still serve a purpose.

Your name and contact information, then, should look something like this:

Carlos Sanchez
100 Williams Ave., Apt. 209
San Jose, CA 95405
(408) 777-7777
carlos.sanchez@mailcomeshere.com

Easy enough, no?

Name and Contact Info
Summary of Qualifications
Objective
Education
Experience
Other

Summarize your qualifications at the top of your résumé. A recruiter may not read beyond your summary of qualifications, especially in this market, so make it count. Think about the one or two things you'd like your reader to know about you, what differentiates you from others that could add value to their organization. Be honest, fresh, modest, and creative.

Your summary should just be a short (no more than three or four lines) bullet list of your highlights. What makes you different? How would you quickly tell someone what you have to offer? That belongs in your "summary of qualifications," nothing else.

Remember your audience is made up of business people. What do they hope to find? Here are some business buzzwords you may be able to use as you write your own:

Buzzword	Definition
best of breed	highest quality
big picture	strategic view
buy-in	agreement
customer-focused	customer service
cycles	energy required to do something
drill-down	dig into the detail
go forward	proceeding ahead
high profile role	leader
niche	niche
opportunities	a more optimistic term for "problems"
proactive	looking ahead
problem(s) and solution(s)	stating things as solvable problems is appealing
product	anything packaged
program	an organized work effort; several projects linked together
project	discrete work effort with start and stop dates
spearhead	to initiate
synergize	get the most out of
teamwork	getting things done in collegial groups

Create Your Summary of Qualifications

Here are some examples of liberal arts students' summaries:

*Experienced researcher, voracious reader, quick learner
Two years' experience in communication/editorial work
Proficient in desktop publishing software*

*Literate, responsible self-starter
Fluent in Chinese
Experienced English tutor for international students
Studying influence of Asian culture on Asian commerce*

*Economics major, adept at high level math
Problem solver
Especially interested in the relationship of money and
human behavior*

*Experienced event organizer
Self-starter, student leader for international organization
Studying the influence of language on behavior (double
major in Linguistics and Psychology)*

It's time to create your own "Summary of Qualifications." What's different about you that you want employers to know? Think of describing yourself at the "summary" level in three ways:

- 1) What you're naturally good at
- 2) Your experience
- 3) What you're interested in and/or learning about

Grab a pencil.

Step 1: What You're Naturally Good At

Peruse this list to help you think of what you're naturally good at:

<i>Organized person</i>	<i>Consensus-builder</i>
<i>Someone who takes initiative</i>	<i>Catalyst</i>
<i>Capable of working independently</i>	<i>Patient and diligent</i>
<i>Disciplined</i>	<i>Tech-savvy</i>
<i>Curious</i>	<i>Observant</i>

You can also say here that you have "excellent communication skills" because that's certainly something business wants. One caution: If you say you're an "excellent communicator," be sure you also *demonstrate it*. Many people say they have "excellent communication skills," but few of them do, so don't lump yourself in with them. Be sure you're writing a literate, clear, audience-focused résumé, as well as an articulate, circumspect, detailed

cover letter, and then the recruiter will know you have “excellent communication skills.”

List three things you’re naturally good at:

Which one of those three are you best at? Make a notation beside that one. Which of the three is the most business-relevant? Make a notation beside that one.

Step 2: Summarize Your Experience

What two or three things have you done that are relevant to your job search? Possibilities:

Internships

Awards

Travel

Volunteer work

Work experience

Student organization activities

Participation in sports

Use business-friendly language. If you’ve volunteered at a food bank, you can say it offered you an opportunity to learn about “production line efficiency during packaging.” If you participated in a student organization, maybe you had an opportunity to “manage a team of volunteers” or “organize an event.” If you’re an athlete, maybe you’ve discovered that the “discipline of training improves performance.”

Now list two or three things you've done:

Which do you think is the most significant or which do you think will get a business hiring manager's attention?

Step 3: What You're Interested In and/or Studying

Here's an opportunity to say not only what you're majoring in but also what you're interested in, especially as it relates to commercial endeavors. As a liberal arts student looking for a job in business, one would assume you have an interest in some aspect of business. Now's your chance to say so.

Examples:

- Studying influence of national culture on the media*
- Interested in the relationship of money and human behavior*
- Self-study - international current events*
- Independent investor in stock market*

Write down three of your areas of interest:

Which of the three fascinates you the most? Mark that one.
Which of the three seems like it might be the most interesting to a hiring manager, or the most valuable in business? Have you

identified a business-related interest in language that would get a business person’s attention?

Mark the one you think is most interesting or best represents you.

Step 4: Bring it Together

Now review the elements you’ve drafted for your Summary of Qualifications. Try to choose one from each area—what you’re naturally good at, your experience, and your interests. You’ve marked those that are the most relevant. List them here:

Voila! That’s your “Summary of Qualifications.”

Feel free to edit it to make it fresh, modest, and engaging. You’re a liberal arts major, so I’m assuming you can improve on the language you’re using to describe yourself.



Disappointed?

If you’ve come to the end of this exercise and think you don’t have enough to offer, that you haven’t done enough or learned enough to create a compelling “Summary of Qualifications,” then maybe it’s time to go out and amass some experience. It’s hardly too late. Try these:

Volunteer. (Check out www.VolunteerMatch.org, one of many sites that can help you find opportunities.)

Read a non-fiction best-selling business book (*The Tipping Point* by Malcolm Gladwell, *Good to Great* by Jim Collins, or *Freakonomics* by Steven Levitt) or a great but not best-selling business book (*The Power of Design* by Richard Farson).

Take a non-credit workshop that builds on your skills and helps hone them for use in business—like Presentation Skills or Business Writing. Simply Google these course titles, and you’ll be inundated with options.

Get a passport (or dig yours out) and go somewhere. Discover a world beyond yours. Even somewhere as handy as Canada will broaden you.

Sign up for one of many free webinars offered by software vendors promoting their product under the guise of “teaching” you. Yes, it’s a thinly veiled marketing come-on (that’s why it’s free), but you can learn something about a particular market segment by doing so, and you may discover you’re actually intrigued.

A Business professor I met not long ago had decided to go back to school and pursue a Master’s in Liberal Studies. Over lunch, he made the following observation: He said liberal arts students are, in general, naturally curious. They observe, ask questions, and follow lines of thought like a detective pursuing an interesting case. If what he says is true—and I think it is—then it should be fairly easy for you to find some subject area or interest to develop. If not one of the above, then something else.

Who knows? Any one of these might be just the first step towards developing a lifelong interest, and will certainly make you more valuable and interesting to prospective employers.

Name and Contact Info
Summary of Qualifications
Objective Statement
Education
Experience
Other

Here's a typical ho-hum objective statement:

Seeking a challenging position in a competitive organization where I can make a difference.



So help me if I never again read this statement at the top of a résumé, it'll be too soon! Don't include an "Objective" statement if you're going to say something as recycled and meaningless as that.

In the spirit of full disclosure, I must tell you I have a bias against "Objective" statements because they're often vague, trite and lifeless, like the one above. Or they're too specific and therefore can take you out of the running for other jobs that may be open. For example, if you say you're "Looking for a position as a business analyst," even if that's the job title you've applied for, you may be excluding yourself from being considered for other positions. "Oh look, she wants to be a business analyst, and this job is a data analyst, so I guess not."

I say just leave it off unless you have specific constraints, like "Looking for a summer opportunity to work in the retail industry," which explains that you're only available for the summer.

But there are many career advisors who disagree with me, so I'd be remiss to exclude objective statements entirely. Even if you opt not to put it on your résumé, it's good to develop one so you know what you're after.

WRITE YOUR OWN OBJECTIVE

If you're looking for a job in business but you've been a student of the humanities and social sciences all your life, you won't have as easy a time as your business school counterparts in proclaiming what job you want. Still, you can identify what aspects of your background and training you enjoy using the most and describe your objective in those terms.

Step 1: Which of these do you enjoy?

Writing

Reading

Organizing Ideas

Analysis

Working in Teams

Public speaking/presenting

Research

Revising and editing

Brainstorming

Working Alone

Write down which of those activities you enjoy. Feel free to add to the list; these are just suggestions.

Step 2: What kinds of businesses or industries appeal to your interests?

<i>Transportation</i>	<i>Hospitality (hotels)</i>
<i>Utilities</i>	<i>Education</i>
<i>Retail</i>	<i>Banking/Finance</i>
<i>Insurance</i>	<i>Non-profit arts/social services</i>
<i>Professional Services</i>	<i>Technology</i>
<i>Healthcare</i>	<i>Construction</i>
<i>Government</i>	<i>Manufacturing</i>

Write down which industry segments are of interest to you.

Step 3: Identify any, constraints do you have in your job search at this time? For example, are you just looking for summer work? Part time? An internship? List them here:

Step 4: From these three elements, create an “Objective” statement.

Examples:

Looking for a part-time position in a social services organization where I can assist with organizational communication.

Seeking a summer internship in a professional services environment where I can assist with market research while improving my technical skills.

Your objective statement:

Name and Contact Info
Summary of Qualifications
Objective
Education
Experience
Other

I'm often asked "What should you list first? Education then experience? Or experience then education?" The answer, as it is to many of life's important questions, is "It depends."

Students who have majored in something recruiters are actively looking for (e.g., business, computer science) should feature it prominently. If your major isn't one of those (English, sociology, philosophy), list it later. Don't give recruiters a chance to make

hasty assumptions about what you're able to do for them based on generalizations and misunderstandings (like how well humanities majors are suited for jobs in teaching and nothing else). Let them get a sense of you first, and *then* tell them what you majored in.

We're covering it here before Experience, but you know what you majored in and therefore you can figure out where it belongs.

Step 1: GPA: Yay or Nay?

I'm also asked, "Should you list your GPA?" Here's yet another indeterminate answer: "Maybe."

If your GPA is 4.0, and you don't have much work or other relevant experience, then, sure, include it. If not, leave it off. In most industries, by the time you've been working for a couple of years, it becomes immaterial. It's more likely you'll need to prove in the future that you graduated from an accredited institution, but not how you did in class.

If you do include your GPA, don't list your overall and your GPA in your major. List one or the other, not both.

If it isn't outstanding, don't mention it at all.

Step 2: Additional Coursework

In addition to your major, highlight any coursework you think a business hiring manager would relate to, as well as a phrase or two about why it's relevant. So probably not Art History or Advanced Acting. But how about:

Technical Theater – where I learned to operate integrated technology products (software and hardware) during major productions.

Book Publishing – where we studied commercial book production, from initial editing through manufacturing and marketing the finished product.

Marketing Writing workshop – outside my major, a non-credit course where I learned to write proposals and web copy.

Chinese History – where we examined how the nation prepared to become an economic leader.

Advanced Research – focused on discerning fact from distortion, and organizing qualitative information.

Anything you can do to punch up the business relevance of your academic preparation, you should.

What courses have you taken that you would want a business hiring manager to notice? And what about those courses would you want them to know that they probably don't know? Jot that down.

Step 3: Write a concise “Education” section.

Examples:

*San Diego State University
B.A. History, 2010*

Additional SDSU coursework: Chinese History – examined how the nation prepared to become an economic leader; and Advanced Research – focused on discerning fact from distortion, and organizing qualitative information.

If it's not obvious what city or state your college is in, include that as well:

*Macalester College, St. Paul, Minnesota
B.A. Anthropology, 2011*

Name and Contact Info
Summary of Qualifications
Objective
Education
Experience
Other

Organizing your work experience is easy. It should be in reverse chronological order and should include name of the company, where they are, what your job title was, and what dates you worked there. That’s the easy part. It should also say what your duties and responsibilities were there, and that requires a bit of finesse.

Step 1: Capture the Basics:

*Starbucks Coffee, Fairfax, Virginia
Barista, June 2009-present*

*Kids-At-Home Daycare, Springville, Oregon
Part-time assistant, September 2010-June 2011*

Step 2: Write the Description of Duties

When it comes to talking about your duties and responsibilities on the job, don’t just say what you did—“Responsible for this....” “Duties included.... “ Yeah, so what? Say also what good came of the work you did. What were the results? Sales people usually have the easiest opportunity to exploit this—like “Implemented a new cold-calling sales approach that resulted in a 8% increase in sales the first month.” But they’re by no means the only people who can do that.

For example, a student recently submitted her résumé draft to me. It said she'd worked in the university library as part of a group to assess security issues. Her résumé listed the name of the group she was with and then said "Examined student safety issues at library." Yeah, so what? "What came of the work you did?" I asked her. "Nothing," she said. "Well, except we made recommendations for changes to make in some library areas." "And?" I asked. "And they made those changes, so students feel safer now." Ah ha! She changed it to:

Our group examined student safety issues at the library, made recommendations for physical security improvements which were implemented. Students now have an improved sense of personal security while using those sections of the library.

Another student I know made money in the summer hauling trash and debris in his pick-up to the dump and recycling centers. He asked me "What good came of that?" I asked him who his customers were. "Mostly people at home doing yard projects or home re-modeling, sometimes people who were moving." I pointed out that people in those circumstances, especially remodeling and moving, are people under stress. He agreed. I suggested that people under stress might be tempted to throw things out that should be re-cycled, not willing to sort, organize and distribute what they're thinking is just trash. He agreed:

Serving residential customers, picking up, sorting, organizing and hauling refuse for environmentally responsible disposal. By managing waste product, I was able to save money, improve profit margin and minimize impact on environment.

You want your résumé reader to see not only that you can make a difference but also that you recognize that it is possible to make a

difference! Anyone can perform tasks, but it takes more than the ability to follow instructions to be an outstanding employee.

For one work experience on your résumé, what significant contribution were you able to make?

Name and Contact Info
Summary of Qualifications
Objective
Education
Experience
Other

At the end of your résumé, you could add some personal information if you want.

Hobbies: Mountain-biking, camping, anything outdoors

Other interests: Playing piano, cooking

I got a résumé once that said at the end “Three books on my nightstand,” and then went on to list three interesting books, one of

which was on my very own nightstand. (What are the chances?) I was intrigued, and invited him for an interview. Turns out he was creative and as interesting as the book title suggested. He got the job, Marketing Assistant.

BEYOND THE CONTENT – General Résumé Advice

How Long Should Your Résumé Be?

Not long. If you're under 30 and you have less than five years of work experience, your résumé shouldn't be longer than a page. If by the age of 30 you've written a few books and flown around the world delivering motivational speeches or served in the House of Representatives for a couple of years, then maybe it should be longer. But as a general rule, a page should do it.

Getting Past Online Résumé Parsers

Your résumé is going to be decomposed by online job application systems, so if you're applying for a job you really want, for which you have at least a few of the specific qualifications, make sure you include the exact vocabulary that's in the job posting. No, I'm not recommending plagiarism here, just that you echo some of the keywords in the job ad. If the job requirements say you must “analyze financial reports,” say you have experience “analyzing financial reports.” (Unless you don't. No lying!) Or if it says the successful candidate “will have experience in event planning and management” say you have “experience in event planning.”

Online application systems are looking for skills, not people. These systems de-construct you, reducing you to a bullet list of key phrases (it's disconcerting, I agree, but it's the way it is), so you must be the architect of this re-designed representation of your abilities.

Font Size Rarely Matters, But When it Does ...

For those rare occasions where someone actually sees your printed résumé—not an uploaded version that's lost all the artistry you

thought you were including—make sure the font you use isn't too small. If you've crammed the details onto your one page using a 10-point font, stand back and look at the page you've created as if it weren't your own. Would you want to read it? White space is inviting. Densely packed words on a page aren't. Remember, too, that the hiring manager or recruiter who's reading your résumé might not have the great eyesight you have.

Which of these would you rather read? The one with more white space, of course.

John Schnitzelbottom 101 Evergreen Lane Nowhere, CA 80298
www.mehere.com 619-212-1117

Objective: To obtain the position of my dreams in a company that values my extraordinary abilities and talents

Education: Ph.D. in Rocket Science, 1994, Willful University, Willful, Colorado. Dissertation: *Why Rocket Science is Underappreciated by the Masses.*

Experience: Acme Illustrated, 2004-present, San Diego, CA
Responsibilities include thinking of brilliant things for everyone to do all day long and reporting incredible earnings every quarter, not to mention convincing the SEC and Wall Street of the viability of this company. Which I've done every quarter.

Benny Bonny Boo, 1998-2004, Los Angeles
Responsibilities include more brilliant things that keep everyone busy all day long

Itty Bitty Bounce, 1990-1998, St. Louis, Missouri
Responsibilities included senior management executioner during significant downsizing efforts at the company.

Hypo Education Consulting, 1988-1990, New York
Responsibilities for advising major universities of the errors of their ways and helping them pump up the enthusiasm level among their undergraduate and graduate students

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Professional References Available Upon Request.

John Schnitzelbottom

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www.mehere.com 619-212-1117

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Los Angeles
Responsibilities include more brilliant things that keep everyone busy all day long ed senior management
Ennervation University, 1996-1998

Education consultant helping business school leaders provide an encouraging environment for students

Should I More Than One Version?

Yes, you should have several versions of your résumé. I've been helping my nephew with his recently. He's been in hot pursuit of part-time work in the food service industry. He has three versions: One highlighting his barista experience, another focused on his general food service experience, and a third describing his customer service abilities. All of them list his jobs and education but they do so in slightly different language, helping prospective managers see his abilities in different ways.

COVER LETTERS

A few years ago, I posted a position in my company for a marketing assistant. In response, I received one of the best cover letters I've ever read. With insignificant revisions (to disguise the identity of companies named within it), here it is:

Dear Ms. de la Vergne,

Professional success is not the result of marketing strategies, efforts and campaigns but rather the product and more importantly the person behind the product being promoted. This is something I believe in and it is why I believe I would be of value to your company in the Marketing Assistant position.

My formal education is in Finance as I have a BA in Finance from Portland State University. However, my work experience lies in marketing and promotion. My background in the two seemingly opposite disciplines has created an out-of-the-box thinker who focuses on details to accomplish the big picture.

I have over three years of experience managing marketing initiatives for small- and mid-sized businesses. In my time at each organization, overall sales increased, as did the company's exposure in its respective market. An example of this increased exposure was that the XYZ was chosen as the preferred provider of long-term care insurance for all AAA Oregon/Idaho members, which was the result of a RFP that I created. XYZ was promoted to all AAA Oregon/Idaho members and found itself with an entirely new book of business.

Your advertisement states you are looking for someone with knowledge of search engine optimization. This is something I have been learning

since creating the website for XX Real Estate Company. I am by no means an expert but am on my way. Additionally, I am very familiar with several publishing software programs including Publisher (my preferred medium) and Illustrator, among others.

The combination of my work experience, education, creativity and organized nature lend itself to this position. I am confident I can contribute to your and your company's success. I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to demonstrate my abilities in person.

Thank you for your consideration. I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Why is it a great letter? Several reasons. First, it didn't start with a predictable phrase ("Please consider my application for the position of...") but demonstrated right away an understanding of the context of the position and company, showing she'd done some research. Second, it's well written (except for the "out-of-the-box" phrase which is a little tired). She didn't have to say she has excellent communication skills; she demonstrated them. Third, the tone is modest—I'm not an expert at SEO yet—but confident, a tough balance to strike. Fourth, the detail level about her experience is just right and it's interesting to read.

When you write a cover letter, demonstrate all of the above.

1. Show you've researched and thought about the position:

Example:

Although I don't know the specifics of your environment, I imagine the role of Communications Assistant is deadline-driven, and that clarity of the message is key to success.

2. Open with something fresh. Avoid the predictable! Start out with a sentence or two that commands attention—not "Please consider my application for the position of . . ." or "Attached you'll find my résumé, which . . ." Instead, say something

different and memorable, something that demonstrates you can write and you've thought about the job you're applying for.

Example:

The Project Coordinator position as you describe it calls for someone who is organized, articulate and deadline-driven. I believe I can offer those abilities to XYZ Company.

Or

XYZ Company's commitment to creativity, as described on your web site, is the sort of environment I believe I can contribute to.

3. Talk yourself up without bragging.

Examples:

I had the opportunity to study with Dr. Brown, whose research is nationally recognized, and I appreciate the two years I spent working with him. (That makes Dr. Brown look good and you the fortunate recipient of his knowledge and wisdom.)

During my three-month internship, I had the opportunity to improve my time management skills, and I learned to meet aggressive deadlines.

4. Describe your abilities in some detail. Be specific.

Example:

My communication skills include writing for audience, conducting research, organizing qualitative information, writing efficiently, and optimizing both written deliverables and presentation materials.

People who are “excellent” communicators know what goes into being one. People who aren't don't. And one more thing: your cover letter itself demonstrates your abilities as a communicator. Make sure it reflects all you claim—good organizational abilities, proficiency in copyediting, sizing up your audience, etc.

YOUR “ELEVATOR PITCH”

I got an email from an English major the other day who was about to attend a career event at his university. Here was his question:

I am going to an event on Wednesday put on by Career Development called “Evening with Professionals.” The goal of the event is to learn how to network with professionals in a casual setting and also to make connections for potential career opportunities.

They told us to come prepared with short introductions that fill in the following sentence: **“Hello, my name is _____ and I’m a senior ____ major looking into [insert field of work].”**

Maybe it’s just my misunderstanding about humanities’ relationship to the business world, but I have a bad feeling that I may get some raised eyebrows from potential employers when I say I’m an English major looking into project management or business analysis. I’m going to...prepare a case for myself about why I’m qualified for such positions. But in the meantime, do you have any quick thoughts on how I can present myself well at this event?

The student behind the question has great instincts. (And, I might mention, this is an excellent example of sizing up one’s audience in advance—something English majors are notoriously better at than their counterparts in so-called vocational majors, like business and technology.)

Employers are, alas, part of the problem—conditioned as they have become to scouting for a few majors and not considering the outstanding credentials liberal arts majors actually offer. So announcing your major first will baffle some industry professionals. What you don’t want is for a prospective employer to hear your major and think, “Oh, English major. How nice for you. Next candidate please!”

What you need is a ready and well-crafted “elevator pitch.” An “elevator pitch” is an essential asset in your toolkit if you’re looking for a job. In case you’re not familiar with this phrase in the context of job-hunting, an elevator pitch is an intriguing summary of your qualifications, two or three sentences only.

Imagine yourself in an elevator with a hiring manager you’d like to impress. The doors close. She asks you to tell her your qualifications. You have just a couple of sentences (it’s a short building) to make your pitch. Hence the term.

When deciding what to say, save your major for later, and instead say what you want to do and are capable of. You could say something like this:

Good morning. I’m interested in business analysis, helping businesses to become more efficient, to analyze and document how things work. Many people don’t realize that analytical skills and communication are what we specialize in, those of us who study the liberal arts. We manage qualitative information, study global cultures, and analyze behavior and motivation. That’s what I’ve done as an English major.

Or

Hi, I’m Lucinda Loo, and I’m interested in project management—not that I’m ready to start managing a project today immediately, but I’d like to work towards that goal by participating on project teams. I can contribute to projects in a variety of ways—analysis, research, documentation, or administrative tasks. Majoring in the liberal arts has prepared me in all of these ways.

Modify accordingly, of course, to make sure what you say really reflects your actual education and preparation, but to the extent you can include global, culture, foreign language mastery, analytical skills, understanding human motivation, and good writing abilities—do so.

As the conversation progresses, you could point out that better writing skills reduce business expense. Better writing means people don’t waste time reading inefficiently written material. In

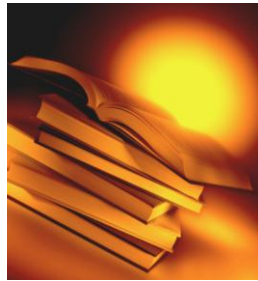
these economic times, anything you can do to reduce expenses or improve revenue will be well-received.

One Last Thing

Now that you're armed with your well-written résumé, your memorable elevator pitch and your compelling cover letter, I'm afraid you'll still find this is a tough market—not just for you but for everyone! You'll have to be resilient. Hiring managers who still don't get what you have to offer are not an indicator you should give up and pursue burger slinging instead to support your used book habit.

The education you've completed so far is a beginning, not an end, and as a liberal arts major you're well-prepared to keep learning, developing, and adding to your value. You're never a finished product.

So be resilient. You're the best judge of your own personal and professional self-worth. Remember that.



For even more help, visit www.LiberalArtsAdvantage.com.