

Cover Letter

The way your cover letter is written tells me whether you did your homework before sending off the résumé. Misspelling the prospective employer's name or that of the firm is definitely not a qualifying asset.

Carefully state your interest and why you want to work for the company and why you think you're just what they're looking for. Generic flattery isn't going to get you anywhere, but a reference to something, which caught your interest might help and tells that you know something about the firm.

Insights on Writing your Résumé

A lot can be read from your résumé. It is probably the first information that an employer will hear of you and therefore it serves as an introduction to you as a person and as a professional designer. It is your one-page portfolio. It is the virtual you.

Your résumé serves as a professional introduction of your related employment experiences, educational history and unique interests in an outline form. It is typically used as a reference sheet by a potential employer to get a sense of your qualifications, interests and experiences related to an employment opportunity. The résumé itself is definitely information, which should demand undivided attention. It needs to be designed. As a designer, it also is an opportunity for you to display your layout, typographic and general visual organizational skills. Therefore, it must indicate clear understanding of grouping and hierarchy, prioritization, and readability of typographic information. Your choice of typefaces and typography, the layout and the organization of information, the paper stock, etc., all contribute to the way you will be perceived as a potential designer. It also shows what you can do on a single piece of paper. But high wire acts are dangerous, so keep it simple and readable. (Even David Carson's business card is ultimately readable.) No elaborate personal logos, please, especially if you're just out of school. It is a bit pretentious. As you create and organize the personal information on your résumé, approach it as a design problem where the subject is you.

Your résumé needs to motivate to ask for your portfolio. Your education and work experiences are very important, but ultimately it's the live you, your work and presentation, which make someone want to hire you.

Typical organization for a recent college graduate might include:

A brief sentence which, indicates what type of work you are seeking (an artist's statement)

A category for educational history, include software proficiency

A category for employment history, include your responsibilities

A category of special interests, hobbies, awards or recognitions

Consistency is extremely important. The order and look you establish for information such as place, address & year for each entry should remain the same for each entry. Use

typographic forms of emphasis such as bold or italics on different information in a consistent manner. The rule here is to treat similar forms of information in a similar fashion.

For example:

Snyder Lithographic Company, Stockton, California,
Pre-press design, bindery—1999–2000.

University of the Pacific, Stockton, California,
BFA—2006.

OR

1989
Rochester, New York
Rochester Institute of Technology
Graphic Design, Computer Graphic Design
Master of Fine Arts Degree

1999 — present
Stockton, California
University of the Pacific
Associate Professor of Graphic Design

Do not write the word *résumé* on the *résumé*
Be sure to proofread and spell check thoroughly
Use correct forms of punctuation such as en and em dashes (not hyphens), typographer's quotes, and typographer's apostrophes (not ditto or foot marks)
References available upon request or supplied reference sheet (have permission to use references).

Get your Book through the Door

Preparation—Send a letter and a well-designed *résumé* in advance. Your *résumé* is a simple typographic design problem, displaying vital information about who you are, where you've been and what you've done in an organized and structured fashion. Follow up with a phone call and make an appointment. Call the day before to confirm that you still have an interview or a drop off, who to see and when. Brush up on the firm's work. It helps to know something about the studio and what they do and have done before you can expect them to be interested in your work.

What is a portfolio?—A portable proof of your design education and a document of your work. It is a display of exercises, talent, thinking and solutions to visual communication

problems. The physical form of the portfolio is completely up to you. It should, however, not be too precious or complicated. Nor should it require delivery by freight elevator. It is a communication tool, not a self-centered reflection of your personality.

Design—A portfolio is a design problem. It contains an assortment of given visual and verbal material. As with all publications, what you put next to one element either plays up that individual piece or fights it for attention. An interesting layout of spreads and pages, color, form and/or thematic relationships, dramatic scale changes, humor, elements of surprise, details and whole pieces, sequencing and rhythm, are all tools to entertain the eye. It is a showpiece in the best sense, and I haven't even talked about the individual work itself.

Organization—A well-structured portfolio has a beginning, a middle and an end. It should be a well-designed book that shows off your work in the best possible light. Samples should be clean and removable. The sequence doesn't have to be chronological, but I wouldn't put early school work at the end. Don't forget that the final image leaves a more lasting impression than the first.

Sketches—Show your sketches separately. This will assist those of us who think of your sketching process as one of the most important and telling parts of your presentation.

Labels—It helps to label your work with very short descriptions, in case you have to drop off your portfolio and don't have a chance to narrate in person. Keep in mind that a first portfolio review gives me only a first impression of you and your work. If I'm interested, you will be called back and you and your work will be scrutinized in more detail. Please forgive me for not reading your books, thesis project, poetry or research papers. I'm getting an overall impression and can usually judge from what I'm looking at. If it doesn't communicate visually, you probably chose the wrong profession.

CDs and web sites—Your digital portfolio should be designed just like the regular portfolio with the same attributes described above. It should be easy to open, navigate and review. I have quite a collection of portfolio Cd's, which are now coasters, because they couldn't be opened. Whatever you do, don't make us work at it. Make it easy to get to your information.

Don't think for a minute that I pay more attention to your e-mail than to a letter or phone call. It is much easier to ignore or delete your e-mail than it is to print it out and keep it on record.

Present in person

I personally prefer, whenever possible, to see you in person, because it is not the work I'm buying—it's you I'm interested in. I want to hear and see you present your work. Your intelligence, enthusiasm, energy and passion are more important to me than your whole portfolio. Besides, I'm always as little suspicious of the involvement and influence in your work by faculty and fellow students.

If I'm criticizing your work, it is always meant to be constructive. It also shows me whether you can take criticism. This is an important factor in evaluating your potential to learn. Actually, my criticism is often directed at the faculty who taught you. Dress presentably. Speak up and narrate your work. Don't just sit there and wait for questions or comments. Be self-critical. It is one of the most useful traits to be able to evaluate your own work in as an objective way as humanly possible. Tell me what you think is good and what is not so good. I want to know whether you know the difference. Most of all I want to see and hear that you love and live this profession with a passion.

Steff Geissbuhler, Principal
Chermayeff & Geismar Inc.