



Career Transition

Resource

Version 2.0

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What Is a Career Transition?

Basically stated, a career transition is a period of time between one type of career and another. For instance, when a stay-at-home parent (SAHP) transitions to the workforce or vice versa, that is a career transition. This period includes the process of deciding whether or not to make a change, finding that new career, and moving into it. The amount of time this process takes will vary from individual to individual. For some, it may take years, while for others it takes hardly any time at all. Don't be afraid, though—Powerhouse Planning is here to break it all down for you!

We go through many career transitions in our lifetimes. Landing that first job out of college, leaving the workforce to stay home, reentering when we feel the time is right, or transitioning simply because our family is moving and so must we. The following pages address some of the main concerns each of these transitions engenders and offer tips, tricks, and resources to make your career transition easier no matter what it is.

The Dreaded Resume

No matter what career transition we are in, most of us dread writing a resume. There are so many options. For some of us, we aren't sure what our skill sets are; some of us wonder how to organize our skills and experience; and some of us just wonder how and where to start. For those who have been out of the workforce for a few years, or are just entering it after undergraduate or graduate school, we wonder how to write a resume that makes us competitive with those who have never left the workforce. Never fear—we have a breakdown of all you need to know to get started.

First, there are two basic types of resumes: the **skills-based**, or **functional**, resume and the **timeline** resume. Each is basically what it says. A **skills-based/functional** resume is one that lists a person's qualifications in skill and experience categories. This is different than the traditional **timeline** resume, which lists the jobs a person has held in reverse chronological order. There are benefits to both types of resumes. Think about the job you are applying for: What type of job is it? Is it more important to highlight your unique skill sets or the previous jobs you've held that emphasize your experience in this field? Have you been working or volunteering the last several years in a non-traditional field? Are there any large gaps in your work history? Do you have a diverse work history? These are all questions to consider when building your new resume. If you still can't decide what type of resume to build, experts suggest using a timeline resume, with experience listed in reverse chronological order.

There is no right or wrong answer as to which type of resume you should build, especially if you feel more comfortable with one over the other. Just keep in mind that you are the best candidate for this job and make sure that comes across in your resume. Write your resume to showcase what you bring to a potential employer and not what you're looking for in a job/career. Don't be afraid to include any volunteer work and the skills/experience you gained. Even if you "just" organized your child's school bake sale or were president of your college sorority/fraternity, you have essential skills to offer—more than you probably realize. Start by making a list of everything you've done in the last year. Expand from there to the last three years, five years, etc. until you reach the beginning of your work history. Include any paid and nonpaid jobs you held. Then think about the skills each job required of you. Did organizing that bake sale require managerial skills such as creating work schedules (volunteer shifts), marketing skills used to advertise the event, or leadership skills such as building an effective team? See, you have more experience than you thought and you are well on your way to writing that dreaded resume!

On the following page you will find a questionnaire to help you brainstorm and gather all the information you will need to get that resume written.

Questionnaire for Resume Building

1. What is your job history? Remember, if you're writing a timeline resume, you will list these in reverse chronological order; this is still the preferred order for recruiters and managers.
2. What skills do you have? Managerial? Administrative? Technological? What software programs do you have a working knowledge of? Expert knowledge of?
3. What is your educational experience? College? Professional?
4. What other information do you wish potential employers to know? For example, if you are applying for a job that would have you working with children, have you done any volunteer work with children currently or in the past (e.g., a children's Sunday school teacher or classroom volunteer)? Include any information you think might set you apart from other candidates.

Use the answers to the above in building your resume. Online resume templates are available on a variety of websites, some of which are listed in the "Resources" section at the end of this document. These sites also provide additional advice, tips, and recommendations to help you build a highly competitive resume. If you prefer to speak to a person or someone who can provide information on job searching as a military dependent, a fantastic resource is the [Military Spouse Advocacy Network](#).

Cover Letters

What is a cover letter?

Simply put, a cover letter is an introductory letter you write that accompanies your resume when you apply for a job. It is your “first impression” and a lot of times can be the difference between your resume being read or not. A cover letter should include four pieces of information: 1) Header with your name, current position, and contact information, 2) salutation, 3) body paragraphs (three at most), and 4) closing.

1. Header

Provide your name and current position title. Also include all your contact information to include mailing address, email address, and any and all phone numbers by which an employer can contact you.

Pro Tip: Make sure your email address contains your first and last name (or some version of that) and comes from a reputable provider or your own server, if you have one.

2. Salutation

If at all possible, find out whom your resume is going to at the company to which you’re applying. Address that person by name. Research company policy to determine if you should use a first name or last name. If it’s for a corporate company, use a last name. This detail shows a potential employer that you are committed to the job for which you’re applying, you’re interested, and you’re a self-starter.

Pro Tip: If it’s not possible to know to whom your resume is going, do not use “To Whom It May Concern.” Instead, use the name of the department or even the company name.

3. Body Paragraphs

This is the “meat” of your cover letter. Spend the first paragraph highlighting your achievements or showcasing your enthusiasm for the company. In the second paragraph, lead off with one sentence about why you’re an expert or the best person for the job, but don’t come across as bragging. The third paragraph should explain why you’re eager to join their company.

Pro Tip: In the third paragraph, include a company fact or some other piece of information that shows you’ve done some research.

4. Closing

Keep it simple and direct. Good closing options include “Sincerely,” “Thank you,” or “Kind regards.” Sign off with both your first and last name.

Pro Tip: Add a postscript (P.S.). It’s guaranteed to gain the reader’s attention. Say something about you or your career and offer to give more details if they’re interested.

How long should my cover letter be?

Brief is best (not more than one page). Employers have many applications cross their desks. Keep it brief, simple, and stellar. A good rule of thumb is to keep your cover letter to 300 words or less.

Is a cover letter really that important?

Yes! The cover letter is your future employer's first opportunity to get to know you and form a sense of whether you will fit in with the company's culture (and we all know that first impressions can be key). While it may or may not be the first thing a potential employer will look at when considering you for a job, if your qualifications meet their initial cut, a cover letter can be crucial as to whether or not you continue in the hiring process. So unless a job advertisement specifically states, "No cover letter," plan on preparing and sending one along with your resume.

How do I know if my cover letter is good or not?

Get someone to read it! Preferably, someone with experience in obtaining a job either in the company you are pursuing or in the career field in which you wish to work. Additionally, there are several organizations out there willing to help. If you are associated with the military, check out a nearby Family Readiness Center. They have staff who would love to help out with all your job application needs. Or there are online resources you can use. A brief list of resources is available at the end of this resource.

I'm applying for my first job after college. I'm not sure I have the detailed skills or experience to make myself competitive in a cover letter.

We're betting you do! Check out the resume-building part of this resource. It'll help you brainstorm and get you thinking on the right track. Consider focusing on your enthusiasm. There's a lot you can bring to a company that isn't "tangible," such as a great work ethic or excitement. Additionally, sometimes employers are looking for that truly unique candidate, one who thinks outside the box and is eager for the experience necessary to make him/herself the best in the chosen career field. It may be hard to put yourself forward, but remember, "Fortune favors the bold!"

Career Transition Checklists

College Senior to First Job

Second Semester Junior Year/First Semester Senior Year:

- Visit your campus' transition center.
- Begin networking with people in your chosen career field.
- Set up a LinkedIn account if you don't already have one.
- Investigate which companies hire new graduates.
- Meet with any recruiters who will be on or nearby your campus.
- Begin to work on a general resume.

Second Semester Senior Year:

- Begin actively looking for a job.
- Finalize general resume. Make sure to tailor your general resume to each job for which you apply.
- Begin sending out applications, particularly after mid-semester. Aim for one-two applications per week.
- Keep studying! Classes are still important, too.
- Make a contingency plan in case you don't have a job lined up by graduation:
 - Where will you live?
 - What temporary job(s) are you willing to take while continuing to search for a job in your career field?
 - What support system do you have?

Stay-at-Home Parent (SAHP) to Workforce

- Figure out why you want to return to workforce (beyond the money factor).
- Figure out what you want to do. Do you want to return to your previous career field? Are you willing to take an entry-level job or do you want to return to your previous level?
- Are you willing to move?
- Are you willing to travel?
- Where (geographically) do you want to work?
- Do you want the option to telecommute?
- Network.

- Update your experience. Volunteer, take classes, etc. in order to make yourself as competitive as possible in your chosen field.
- Update/rewrite your resume. Most likely, you should opt for a skills-based (combination format) resume.
- Practice interviewing.
- Arrange child care/after-school care if needed.
- Discuss and adjust home duties with other family members as needed.
- Allow for an adjustment period for you and your family.

Workforce to Stay-at-Home Parent (SAHP)

- Know why you are choosing to stay at home.
- Are you planning to reenter the workforce at some point? If so, find classes or volunteer work that allows you to keep your skills current.
- Network. Keep those professional connections.
- If not planning to return to the workforce, identify outlets that allow you to maintain some level of adult interaction beyond immediate family members.
- Network. Find other resources or stay-at-home-parents in your community (e.g., playgroups, Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS), neighbors who are also SAHP). They will be your lifeline, especially as you initially transition.
- Create a new budget based on adjusted family income.
- If necessary, cancel current child care/after-school care.
- Discuss and adjust home duties with other family members as needed.
- Allow for an adjustment period for you and your family.

Resources

Resume-Building Resources

[Military Spouse Advocacy Network \(MSAN\)](#)

[The Muse | The 41 Best Resume Templates Ever](#)

[Powerhouse Planning | Career Resources](#)

[Resume Companion | Free Resume Templates: Download for Word](#)

[Resume Genius | Resume Templates](#)

Cover Letter Resources

[Military Spouse Advocacy Network \(MSAN\)](#)

[Powerhouse Planning | Career Resources](#)

[Resume Genius | How to Write a Cover Letter for a Job Application](#)

[Zety | How to Write a Cover Letter for a Job in 2021 \(12+ Examples\)](#)