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Tailoring Documents

What does it mean to tailor employment documents?

Employment documents include resumes, cover letters, and any business message that concerns employment. Your message will be directed to your contact(s) in the organization and will vary depending on what your intent is upon writing. Regardless of the type of message, it is very important to make sure that you use a writing strategy that will effectively reach your reader.

In any piece of writing it is important to keep your audience in mind. Ask yourself, who will read my document? When you tailor a document to a particular audience, you are adapting your writing for a reader. It is important to consider what you want your message to convey to the audience.

Why is it important for me to tailor my employment documents?

It is important to tailor your employment documents for a specific audience in order to convey your message clearly and convincingly. Considering your audience will help you to personalize the document and make it relevant to the reader. If you write without a specific audience in mind, the document might be far too general and vague, or it might include too much information. When you tailor a document to a specific audience, the document will have better "unity of purpose and style," and it will make the reader feel more involved (Hale).

Audience is important for all pieces of writing, and even more so for any employment document because employment documents must be able to persuade the reader that what you are saying is true in order to be effective. You are directly communicating with the organization, and you want the reader to understand your message and its relevance.

For what types of readers should I tailor my employment documents?

There are two kinds of readers that an employment document should be tailored for: **Skimmers** and **Skeptics**.

Skimmers are readers that are typically very busy. Pressed for time, they often skim employment documents in a rather short period of time. Consequently, the documents you prepare for this particular reader should:

- State the main point clearly and up front
- Place the most important information at the beginning or ending of paragraphs
- Highlight key dates or figures

Both of the following examples represent the same experiences. A skimmer would be able to understand Example 2 much more quickly, though.

Example 1

Managed $10,000 in project accounts, compiled and published engineering reports as assistant to Vice President, coordinated registrations, payments, and literature for software training seminars.

Example 2

- Managed $10,000 in project accounts.
- Compiled and published engineering reports as Assistant to Vice President
- Coordinated registrations, payments, and literature for software training seminars.

The second type of reader is a **Skeptic**. A Skeptic is a reader that is cautious and doubtful. Skeptical readers will tend to read a document carefully, questioning its validity. Ultimately, they will question the writer's claims. In order to meet the needs of the Skeptic, it is necessary to support your statements with sufficient details and evidence. Provide specific examples, numbers, dates, names, and percentages to meet the needs of the skeptical reader.

For example:
NOT: I performed very well in my classes.
BUT: I received the Dean's List Honors 7/8 semesters and received a Women in Communications Scholarship in May 2001.

You may also reference the OWL's Professional Writing **Audience Analysis (../../../subject_specific_writing/professional_technical_writing/audience_analysis/index.html)** resource for more information on learning about your readers.