Resume and Cover Letter Tips

Thank you for your interest in employment with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR). We’re happy you’re considering us, and want to ensure you have the tools to be as successful as possible in your application process. Please consider the guide below as you prepare your application materials.

Be sure to read through the job announcement completely and review the Qualifications section (minimum and well qualified qualifications) in order to understand the requirements of the position. The DNR always asks for a resume as part of our job application process, and in addition we often ask for a cover letter. A cover letter is meant to introduce yourself as a candidate, provide details on your education and work experience as they relate to the specific position you are applying for, and explain why you would be a good fit for the job. A resume summarizes your job experience, work accomplishments, and educational background. Together a resume and cover letter provide a full picture of your qualifications as a candidate.

It is important that these documents clearly describe your background so the job expert(s) evaluating your application materials can make an accurate judgment regarding your qualifications. Your cover letter and resume are critical parts of your application and are used during our evaluation process to determine your qualifications as they relate to the job.

We recommend updating your resume and cover letter for each individual job you apply for. To do this, you should describe your education, training, and life experience related to each of the items listed in the “Qualifications” section of the job announcement. Life experience is not restricted to professional work and education/training. If you are applying for a job at the Wisconsin DNR, it makes sense to include hobbies and life experiences that speak to the qualifications section of the announcement. For example, if you are applying for a fisheries technician position and you have been fishing and boating your entire life, you had better mention those qualifications if the qualifications include knowledge of fish and boats. If your resume does not clearly describe your experience related to these items, then it is important to use the cover letter to provide additional details or examples for clarification. The combination of your resume and cover letter must provide sufficient detail to portray your qualifications as a candidate. If you do not describe your experience, training or education pertaining to the minimally qualified candidate section, you will not be considered further. For example, if in the announcement we describe a minimally qualified candidate as someone who engages in volunteerism and you fail to mention any volunteerism, you will be disqualified. Even if you are otherwise the most qualified candidate, failure to mention experience related to minimum qualifications will disqualify you.

Your resume should include:

• Your educational background, including any certifications, training or coursework you have taken relevant to the position you are applying for.
• Summary of your employment history, including work accomplishments and skills used (avoid self proclamations (I am good at this)).
• Your contact information, including an email address and a phone number.
• Any education, training and life experience you have related specifically to the “Qualifications” section of the job announcement.
• Avoid jargon, acronyms and generalizations. Assume the people reading and grading your resume have no idea what you are talking about. You should explain in detail what your experience is. Example: Work Experience: Officer, village of Plain vs. Wisconsin Law Enforcement Patrol Officer, Village of Plain, May 1998 – Current, Enforcing the laws of Wisconsin and engaging in community policing in the village of plain. The first example is from a real resume and the rating panel had no idea what the candidate was an officer of. Clearly describe your experience!

Your cover letter should include:
• Additional information regarding your past work experience or coursework you have taken. A cover letter supplements and expands on the information provided in your resume.
• Specific examples to clearly demonstrate your level of expertise and past responsibilities.
• Highlights of your most relevant skills and experiences as they relate to the specific job you are applying for.
• Any education, training and experience you have specifically related to the “Qualifications” section of the job announcement.
• It’s recommended your cover letter mirror the format of the "Preview Assessment instructions" such as providing responses in the same order in which they appear in the instructions. See example provided in “Appendix A.” Pay very close attention to key words and the skills desired in well qualified applicants.
• We also recommend reducing or eliminating filler information. Example: describing how you have “always enjoyed the outdoors and that you learned about conservation through your grandparent or how much you want this job, etc. is honorable, but it is information that is not used in rating your responses unless it was specifically asked for in the instructions.
• Emphasize volumes, example; the number of times a task was completed, numbers of people trained/attended sessions, hours a task is performed, months/years of volunteer work, etc.
• Be very cognizant to any imposed limits in the instructions such as page length, font size, margin width, etc. If you exceed the limits, your exceeding information will be cut off and lost.
• Do not assume the interview panel has access to your application materials. If it is not clear when you set up your interview, then take along additional resumes and cover letters.
• It is always a good idea to have a trusted colleague review your application materials. Most DNR supervisors have experience leading or participating on interview panels. Seek a supervisor’s review too. Taking the time to obtain a few reviews will almost always improve your application package.

Please review assessment directions carefully on Wisc.Jobs for document page limits and other restrictions. Typically, there is a 2-page limit for each document, but that may vary depending on the position. Any pages in excess of the page limit will not be reviewed or evaluated, so it’s critically important to make certain that all of your qualifications are portrayed within the page limitations.

Good luck!
Describe the below in your customized resume and cover letter:

1. Experience with widgets and/or inspecting widgets;
2. Experience writing technical documents about widgets;
3. Experience collaborating on teams that develop widgets;

(Suggested cover letter formatting; it’s recommended you respond in the same order in which the requests were made)

1. My experience with widget and/or inspecting widgets involves 15 years of working with widgets. My first position…
2. My experience writing technical documents about widgets began when I was high school and later in college. In college I took a course and created a theme paper on widgets that involved 150 technical widget writing assignments…
3. My experience collaborating on teams that develop(ed) widgets involves…