



The Firefighter's Toolkit - How to Write a Strategic Resume and Cover Letter

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Introduction: Fire Services Resumes that Get Interviews – A Do-It-Yourself Guide

The goal of your resume is to effectively highlight how your background will make you a productive and capable member of the fire department to which you are applying. From start-to-finish, your resume must demonstrate how your work, education, extracurricular and volunteer experience will contribute to your short-term and long-term success in the role. It is critical to demonstrate this information on your resume in a strategic fashion – the document must be easy to skim-through, information must be relevant to the job, and the details must show the recruiter not only what you did but also what the results were that you achieved. Bottom-line, the document needs to illustrate why you should be called for an interview versus the numerous other applicants who are also applying.

Step One: Consider What YOU Bring to the Table and Decide on Resume Sections

Before you start composing your resume, you will need to think of the sections you will include in the document. The sections you decide to use will depend on the amount of relevant fire services work experience and specialized training you have. If you lack hands-on firefighting experience and/or fire services education, you will need to demonstrate to the recruiter how you have successfully applied the core competencies firefighters need to succeed in other areas of your background. This means addressing the core competencies of firefighting and making a correlation between them and your past/present employment duties to show the recruiter what you can do for them today! In this case, you may want to consider additional headings that other individuals with firefighting background will not have to include. Ideally, your resume should be limited to two pages in length. If your resume is longer than two pages, then there could well be information on the resume that is not relevant. Also, if you have fire services-relevant education, but not experience, put the education first. If you possess fire services experience (ex. Paid On-Call Volunteer background), highlight that section first.

****ALWAYS CHECK THE JOB POSTING TO ENSURE YOU HAVE PROVIDED THE RECRUITER WITH INFORMATION IN THE PARTICULAR ORDER THEY MAY HAVE REQUESTED!****

Heading Titles you may use (alternate titles have been provided for some sections):

1. Contact Information
2. Summary Profile & Objective / Key Qualifications / Special Skills
3. Work History / Employment History / Career Related Experience
4. Education / Education & Certifications (if combining Headings 4 & 5)
5. Professional Development / Training / Certificates / Licenses
6. Volunteer Experience / Community Service / Community Involvement
7. Interests / Extracurricular Activities / Athletic Achievements
8. References (Please note: Depending on the department, they may request references on the resume, as an appendix to the resume, or not at all)

We will take you through each of these headings in this toolkit, to ensure you have provided the recruiter with the information needed to evaluate your background, as compared to other applicants.

Step Two: Writing a Strategic Resume – Let’s Get Started!

This toolkit is written so you may use it as a step-by-step guide to writing your resume. Open your blank document, and let’s get started!

Please remember – the order in which you decide to present your information in your resume will depend on your background. Highlight the most relevant information first (the most fire-specific background, whether that is your education or your experience). Always pay close attention to the details of the job posting for direction as to layout requests!

Section 1: Contact Information

Make it easy for the recruiter to contact you. Outline your contact information in a format similar to this:

Bob Smith
123 Townline Road
Barrie, Ontario L3N 5L6
Home: (905) 905-9050 Cell: (289) 289-2892 Email: bob@gmail.com

There is no rule you need to centre your contact information but use a format that is pleasing to the eye - either center, align to the left or right or a combination. You can use whatever font you want – the easiest to read fonts on-screen include Arial, Verdana, Tahoma, Times New Roman, Calibri and Garamond. 10-12 point sized font is best for the body of your resume – you may make your contact info and your headings slightly larger. Make sure that you have outlined your name, address, and telephone numbers (always provide an alternate wherever possible – you WANT the recruiter to connect with you!) and your email address.

Section 2: Summary Profile & Objective / Key Qualifications / Special Skills

This section has numerous names but the idea behind including a resume introduction is to highlight some of the key qualifications you possess, in relation to the job posting/position. It is a nice place to summarize the “best of the best” in terms of your key skills, both hard and soft, and unique traits/attributes that set you apart from other candidates (ex. Language skills, specialized fire services certifications). The idea is to pique the recruiter’s interest and get them to keep reading and to call you for a phone interview!

The introduction section can appear in any number of ways – use your creativity! Here is one example that uses a heading, a brief introduction, and some bullets of key qualifications:

(CONTACT INFO)

Volunteer Firefighter • Pre-Service Firefighter Education & Training Completed • Trades Background

A fluently bilingual (English/French) leader who brings five years of firefighting experience as a Paid On-Call Volunteer Firefighter with ABC Fire and Emergency Services and specialized fire education to the table. Exceptional mechanical inclination as demonstrated by six years of work experience as a Maintenance Mechanic in an industrial environment. Driving experience includes safe operation of pumper, tanker, and rescue trucks (DZ licensed). Additional skills and training that will allow me to succeed in the role of Operations Firefighter include:

- Standard First Aid, CPR “C” and AED Certified
- NFPA 1001 (FF I & II), NFPA 472, NFPA 1002
- Outstanding communication/interpersonal skills
- Strong knowledge of Building Code (Ontario)
- Able to read blueprints and schematics
- Experience responding to fires, medicals, MVCs

Section 3: Work History / Employment History

This is the section of your resume that takes the most time. Why? Because to write a strategic resume, you need to not only “list” what you did at each job, but also demonstrate the results or achievements that came as a direct outcome of your work! You can do this by using “results statements” to effectively outline your fire services-related core competencies and your fire services-related skills/experience.

We have provided you with details as to key core competencies required for success as a firefighter and the typical skills/background (“must haves” and “nice to haves”) departments tend to seek. We have also provided information for you as to how to write these high-impact statements. For the Work History section, you need to outline the job title, the company name and location, and the dates that you worked in that particular job. You can put the company name OR the job title first. If you’ve had multiple jobs at the same company, it makes more sense to put the company name first and then each job title with the related job descriptors under each job title (see example below). From there, you need to write your results statements. A sample Work History section is provided to you below the Results Statement and Core Competency information.

Checklist of Key Fire Services Core Competencies

The core competencies essential to succeed as a firefighter (and therefore, those competencies that you should ensure the content of your resume demonstrates) include (but are not limited to) the following:

- ✘ Strong oral and written communication skills
- ✘ Appreciation of diversity (demonstrates ability to communicate with various types of people)
- ✘ Relationship building, networking skills
- ✘ Collaboration / teamwork
- ✘ Serving others / coaching / teaching / training
- ✘ Volunteer contributions
- ✘ Community service / activities
- ✘ Self-control - confident and works well/communicates effectively in stressful conditions
- ✘ Dedicated to continuous improvement / learning / driven to succeed
- ✘ Takes initiative / works effectively autonomously
- ✘ Safety-conscious attitude (regard for safety of self and others)
- ✘ Understanding of organizational structure/seniority-based work environment

Typical Qualifications Requested by Fire Departments

Typical Basic (“Must Haves”) Fire Services Qualifications:

- ✘ First Aid and CPR Certification
- ✘ Class DZ or Class 3 or other specific driver’s license
- ✘ Specialized fire education (more and more prevalent on postings as a minimum)
- ✘ Strong command of English language (oral and written)
- ✘ Willingness to work shifts/weekends/holidays
- ✘ Grade 12 education or equivalent

Typical “Nice to haves” for Firefighter Recruits:

- ✘ Technical trades experience (mechanical inclination, use of hand/power/specialized tools/equipment)
- ✘ SCUBA Certification; Swimming ability (and related achievements such as Bronze Cross, Life Guarding)
- ✘ Building inspection / blueprints / schematics reading and understanding
- ✘ Military experience / Coast Guard background (volunteer or paid) / Ski Patrol or other rescue experience
- ✘ Radio operation
- ✘ Advanced First Aid, CPR, AED, or other medical certifications/training
- ✘ College or University education, any fire services-related professional development
- ✘ Volunteer firefighting; other experience in public service (Police – including auxiliary, Nurse, Paramedic)
- ✘ Outdoor skills – knots, climbing, water sports (boating license), survival skills; map reading/orientation

How to Write a Results Statement and What to Include:

A result statement should read as such: WHAT you achieved + LINKING WORD (by, through, using, etc.) + HOW you achieved that

Here are some examples of results statements (use present tense for your current job, past tense for others):

- Ensured optimal output from production line by conducting regular preventative maintenance activities
- Improved fire-related skills and knowledge of new and existing Volunteer Firefighters by coordinating classes and effectively delivering engaging training on fire-related topics
- Preserved life and eliminated potential for property loss by preventing, combating and extinguishing structural fires, handling medical emergencies and effectively dealing with situations involving chemical hazards

Sample Work History Section Layout:

WORK HISTORY

Fresh Made Juices, Toronto, Ontario

September 2007 - Present

Maintenance Mechanic (January 2010 – Present)

- Results statement
- Results statement
- Results statement
- KEEP THESE RELEVANT!!

Machine Operator (September 2007 – January 2010)

- Results statement
- Results statement
- Results statement
- KEEP THESE RELEVANT!!

ABC Plastics, Mississauga, Ontario

January 2004 – September 2007

Machine Operator

- Results statement
- Results statement
- Results statement
- KEEP THESE RELEVANT!!

Section 4: Education

Some people will combine all education, training, certifications, and licenses in one section. This is one section where we see recruiter's preferences outlined in the job postings quite often. Be sure to check the posting for any specific requests in terms of the education and training information layout.

What do you need to include?

Course name/Certificate name/Degree name, Organization name

Completion/issue date

Here is one simple example of how you can outline your education section:

EDUCATION

Pre-Service Firefighter Education & Training, Seneca College, Toronto, Ontario

May 2010

Ontario Secondary School Diploma, Thornhill Secondary, Thornhill, Ontario

June 2007

Section 5: Fire Services Related Training, Certifications, Licenses

Again, this may be combined with the Education section, or the recruiter may have very specific instructions for you as to how they would like this laid-out. Here is one example of how this section may be presented:

FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES RELATED TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

- Standard First Aid & CPR Level C, Canadian Red Cross, August 2008
- Confined Space – Entry / Rescue Level II-R, Canadian Red Cross, August 2008
- Introduction to Fall Protection, Response Safety and Rescue Services Inc., August 2008
- H2S Alive, Enform, Calgary, Alberta, Expires August 2011
- Class 5 Driver's License, Air Brakes (Q) Endorsement, 2010

Section 6: Volunteer Service, Community Contributions

In this section, you may outline the places where you have dedicated time or resources to on a voluntary basis. You should note the organization, the role you played, and the dates involved. You may list these volunteer activities as we have outlined below. For those of you who would like to demonstrate core competencies or skills not found elsewhere on the resume, you may wish to outline your contributions in one or two simple results statements under each activity.

Here is an example of how this section might appear on a resume:

VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTIONS

Volunteer Coach: Oakville Otters Baseball (Girls - 9 year olds)	Annually: 2006 – Present
Big Brother: Big Brothers Big Sisters Canada	May 2009 – Present
Coordinator: Habitat for Humanity materials donation event	June 2010

Section 7: Interests / Extracurricular Activities / Athletic Achievements

If you choose to include information pertaining to your interests, extracurricular or athletic activities, you may list them in a similar fashion to the Volunteer section. This section is a great way to demonstrate those fire services core competencies, if you haven't been able to do that elsewhere in the resume document. Again, you may list the items or include results statements BUT remember that keeping your resume to 2 pages is ideal....! A concise document is a winning document! We can't stress **relevance** of information enough – if you use this section, keep the info relevant!

Section 8: References

If the department you are applying to has requested references ON the resume, then check the posting for details as to their layout preferences. If they have specified that references are to be included, but have not requested a particular layout, this will work for you!

REFERENCES

-
1. Bob Smith, Plant Manager – Fresh Made Juices: 905.567.1234 X123, bob@fresh.com
 2. Len Albany, Maintenance Team Leader – Fresh Made Juices: 905.567.1234 x 124, len@fresh.com
 3. Stan White, General Manager - ABC Plastics: 416.123.2345 x 898, stanw@abc123.ca

That wraps-up the resume! Do your best to keep the resume to two pages; however, if you are finding that you have extensive work experience and/or education/certifications, it is okay to go to three pages. The best rule to follow is: **If the data is relevant to the position, include the information - if it serves no purpose, don't include it.**

White space on a resume is a good thing! White space makes a document easier for the recruiter to read/review. Ensure your margins line-up, your tabs are also aligned and your fonts are consistent throughout the document. Use one font for the resume and the cover letter to ensure consistency between the two documents. Speaking of cover letters, the next section will give you a guideline to work with when building your fire services cover letter.

Step Three: Fire Services Cover Letters – A Do-It-Yourself Guide

The cover letter is a strategic tool in and of itself. Many people don't take the writing of a cover seriously, but they should! As writers with recruiting background, we can tell you that cover letters DO get read – maybe not initially when the recruiter needs to skim-through a pile of hundreds of resumes, but typically in the interview, they are reviewed. Take care to provide the recruiter with a professionally-written, business letter. So, how do you best do that? Follow this guideline and you'll be fine! Use the SAME font that you used in your resume!

Your Name
Your Address
City, Province Postal

Date

Recruiter's Name (Whenever possible)
Recruiter's Title (If you have it)
City Name/Department Name
Address
City, Province Postal

Re: Application for Operations Firefighter (Reference Code: 1243ASD)

Dear _____: (OR Respected Recruitment Manager / Human Resources Representative, etc.)

Paragraph one should note the title of the job you are applying for and outline some key highlights of your background that would make you a good fit for the job.

Paragraph two can be used to tell the recruiter more about your UNIQUE strengths and background and how your experience relates directly to their needs.

Paragraph three can be used to tell the recruiter the reasons why you want to pursue a career as a firefighter and why their department is of particular interest to you.

Paragraph four should be used to ask for an interview. Provide your contact info (phone numbers and email address).

Sincerely, (or salutation of your preference)

Your Name

This concludes the Firefighter's Toolkit on How to Write a Strategic Resume and Cover Letter. We sincerely hope that you find some value from this information and encourage you to work outside of these guidelines as you see fit. This is not the "be-all and end-all" of resume and cover letter writing for fire services, but this is a collection of the information that we've found to be most successful for our clients. If you find that you need help composing your documents, we are here to help. Thank you for using/reading this toolkit and if you find it helpful, we'd love to hear from you!

The best of luck to all of you as you pursue a career in firefighting!

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