LITTLE BLACK BOOK

People
For the
American
Way
Foundation

YOUNG PEOPLE FOR

PROFESSIONAL WRITING
RESUMES & COVER LETTERS

YP4 Little Black Book:
Professional Writing: Resumes & Cover Letters

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Table of Contents

Resume Writing:
Communicating Your Authentic Self

Writing Cover Letters:
Communicating Your Authentic Self

Resume Writing

Communicating Your Authentic Self

There are some general themes around what constitutes good resume writing but there is no one way of writing one. Rather, there are as many opinions on the matter as there are recruiters! Use the following points to shape your thinking of the resume:

➜ Clearly convey your skills, experience, and knowledge without either underplaying or exaggerating what you have done and with careful consideration of what the organization is looking for
➜ Use a relatively straightforward style of writing and formatting
➜ Make sure your resume content and style reflects your authentic self and you are comfortable with what you have written

Key Steps in Writing Your Resume

Review & Organize Your Professional Profile

Once you have finished all of the exercises in the professional profile, carefully review what you have written.

If you already have a resume, see if it accurately reflects the depth and breadth of the skills, knowledge, experience, and professional passions that you described in your profile. If it does, skip down to the 'Resume Structure' section below to double check that you have all the other elements that make a great resume.

Resume Structure

Consider the following ordering and organization as a good start for your resume's structure. Recall that whether you are new to the job market or a seasoned veteran, there is no one perfect structure for a resume in the professional world. Use the attached edited resume as another example of a well structured resume.

➔ **Your Name & Contact Information**

Your name (usually about 16-22 point font) should go at the very top of your resume with your contact information (usually 10-12 point font) directly underneath it.

If you are applying to jobs while you are still in school you may want to include both your campus and your permanent address. Place your campus address flush against the left margin and your permanent address flush against the right margin, both directly underneath your name. If you include your cell phone number, be prepared for unscheduled calls from recruiters.

If you do not yet have a resume or your current resume does not fully reflect your professional profile, then it is helpful to follow these next steps:

1. List all the titles that you have held over the past few years, grouping them in the following categories:
    ➔ Work Experience
    ➔ Volunteer Experience
2. Within each category, list your most recent title first.
3. Under each work/volunteer title, create 1-4 bullets about exactly what you did. Be as specific as possible without including extraneous information. See the "Things to Watch" on page 11 and the attached edited resume for examples of effective bullets.
4. Make sure that your bullets include the skills and knowledge you applied or gained in the workplace, experience, and professional accomplishments that you detailed in your professional profile.
5. Under each job/volunteer title, put the bullets in order of importance. *Note that this order may change somewhat depending upon different positions for which you may apply.*
6. Follow the guidelines in the 'Resume Structure' section to utilize these bullet points as the foundation of your resume.

More and more, informal pre-interviews are used to screen candidates; think carefully about what phone number you use! Additionally, carefully consider your e-mail address; make sure the address you've used for friends is one that is appropriate for a potential employer.

→ Objective

Corporations and other for-profit businesses look for an objective at the top of resumes, but they are less common in the public and nonprofit sector. If you decide to include an objective, just make sure that it is not too general:

To use my communication and organizational skills in the nonprofit sector.

Try not to be overly specific, either. Do not restate the job announcement verbatim because it will appear that you are trying too hard to package yourself for that post and not sharing your true objective. It may also cause doubt as to whether you have one at all.

→ Professional Summary

Much of how you structure and order your resume depends upon what phase of your career you are in and what kind of job you are applying for. But generally, at this early point in your career, it does not make sense to have a Summary of Expertise section because you may not yet have fully defined your areas of specialty. You may, however, want to start your resume off with a Professional Summary. You can use this to summarize some of your strongest skills and experience using either a pair of sentences or a few bullets. For example, if you have a lot of direct care experience and are applying for a "front-line" job with a children's education organization, you might say something like:

I am skilled at assessing children's learning needs through interviewing and testing and then directing them to appropriate resources, both within and outside of school.

→ Education Section

Use this until you have been out of college or graduate school for more than two years. Place the Education Section first on your resume or following your Objective and Professional Summary sections if you include them. If you have been out of school for more than two years, make it last in order on the resume. Include your date (or expected) date of graduation, your degree and major, any special training you have received (such as leadership training) and your thesis title if you wrote one and it is applicable to the job you are applying for.

→ Honors and Awards

Depending upon the content of your resume, you may want to group your honors and awards separately, or include them in your Education Section. In either case, briefly list the award or honor you received, from where or whom, and when. It is not necessary to include information on such details as the amount of your scholarship.

Additionally,
if your GPA is over
3.5, you may want
to include it.

➜ Experience

Underneath the Education Section, list your Experience. You can title this section in a number of different ways: Experience, Work Experience, Professional Experience. In this section, it is easiest to organize your list chronologically. That way, readers get a sense of the connections between, and movement from, one position to another.

Separate sections for your professional experience and volunteer experience. You may decide which section you list first depending on which has greater depth. Whichever order you choose, at this stage of your career, you will probably want to describe your volunteer experience with as much detail as your professional experience, including any title you have held, a very specific description of what you did, for whom, and when.

Later in your career, you may want to use a more functional resume. In this case, divide up your experience into main areas of expertise and order your positions chronologically within each function area.

Special notes on Volunteer Experience sections: you may want to frame the kind of volunteer work you are doing for some job applications in order to give your reader a clear sense of your particular area of expertise. Some ideas are: Civic Volunteer Experience, or Educational Volunteer Experience. Additionally, you may consider titling your volunteer section Volunteer & Internship Experience depending upon your background.

➜ Languages

Being fluent in additional languages is always beneficial. Depending on the way that your structure your resume, you may want to have a separate section on languages. Be specific when you describe your level of language proficiency. For example, if you cannot read and write a particular language fluently, then you should specify that you are a conversant speaker only. Or, if you can only read and write very simple phrases, you might

want to reconsider including the information in the first place.

➜ Additional Sections

You can show your commitment to your fields of interest by having an Affiliations section. Use this area to include organizations where you regularly attend meetings if your role is not substantial enough to warrant a mention in your Volunteer Experience section.

Although Interests sections used to be very popular, they are less so today, partially because they often come across as generic. Knowing that you enjoy traveling, reading and jogging does not really tell your prospective employer much. However, expanding on some of your interests in your interview and how they help you stay centered and do the best work that you possibly can makes a really good impression. You should only have a section on interests if there is something really distinctive that you do that relates to the organization's mission or job duties in some way.

If you hold or have held a formal position in this group or organization, list it with your dates of involvement.

Finally, for some jobs, having a Publications or Presentations section can help you further connect the dots between you and your potential employer. Within that section, list by chronological order with the date of your publication or presentation as well as the venue. Do not include too much information because it can be overwhelming for a reader; you can definitely expand on these areas in your cover letter and interview.

→ **Computer Skills**

Depending on your experience and the skills required in a particular job, you might want to add a section that details your computer expertise. Generally, it is not necessary to highlight computer skills for most office jobs because it is assumed that you will have mastery of Word, Excel, and, increasingly, Power Point. However, if you are applying for a job in office administration, then you should include a more extensive list.

Resume Formatting

→ **Font Types & Size**

The rule of thumb for resume formatting is the same as for resume writing: be as simple and clear as possible so that your readers do not get distracted from the content.

That said, if you are applying for a job where design plays a role in the major job responsibilities, you might want to use more sophisticated formatting.

→ **Spacing, Bold, Italics, Underlining, Capitalization, and Bullets**

There are many different ways to utilize spacing, bold, italics, underlining, and capitalization to make certain parts of your resume stand out more than others. The important thing is to be consistent and simple about what you are emphasizing so that you create a clean and clear look that is easy to follow. For example, if you use an 11-point font for one job title, you should use it for all of them. And, generally, you want to highlight what you have done, not when or where you have done it. Align the dates and locations for your work flush against the right margin with your position title bolded and flush against the left margin. Bold and italicize the organization right underneath your job title, also flush left.

Use bullets instead of full sentences throughout your resume. Bullets make it easier for your reader to see what you have done and they allow you to direct the reader to the skills and experience you want to stress. Additionally, it is a good idea to have margins of about one inch (minimum .5 inches) on all sides of your resume. Be mindful of leaving enough space between each line and not trying to cram in every last detail; don't crowd out that which is most important to you.

Things to watch

→ **Showing Impact without Underplaying or Exaggerating Your Work**

Try as much as possible to think about what you have to offer in the same way you would think about a colleague's skills. Be as matter-of-fact as possible so that your work speaks for itself.

Note from Author:

Use easy-to-read fonts like Times or Palatino in a size no smaller than 10 or 11 or 12 point for the bulk of your content. Make job titles even slightly larger and section heads slightly larger still.

Below is an example of a bullet from an *Experience* section in three stages. The example illustrates a transition from underplaying to exaggerating to on-target!

Delivered a presentation on prisoner rights organizing at the National Prisoner Rights Fund Annual Conference. With this statement, the author is missing an opportunity to fully engage and educate her reader.

At the same time, if she says:
Delivered an incredibly dynamic presentation on prisoner rights organizing at the National Prisoner Rights Fund Annual Conference, she is not giving her reader many details about what she actually did at the same time as she is using subjective language (incredibly dynamic). The exaggerating language is of no utility.

Instead, let us say she is applying for a job as a Project Assistant with a local chapter of the National Prisoner Rights Fund, taking the same line, she might say:

Delivered a highly interactive presentation, 'Human Rights Abuses of U.S. Prisoners in the New Millennium" at the National Prisoner Rights Fund Annual Conference to an audience of more than 200 activists. With this statement, she has provided an example of her skill in public speaking, shown commitment to a topic that is sure to be of interest to her potential employer, and indicated that she potentially impacted a large number of people.

Indeed, showing impact is important, but unless you are absolutely certain of your quantitative impact it is best not to include specific numbers.

For example, some applicants say things such as:

Increased productivity by 50% by developing innovative filing systems. Instead, give your reader a snapshot of the kind of systems (or processes, programs, and ideas) you have helped to develop, perhaps even briefly showing how you did so. For example, you might say:

Developed organization's first "paperless" client filing system in Filemaker Pro, allowing front-line staff to more closely track trends in client need and providing documentation utilized in fundraising for new daycare program.

→ Verb Selection
As you think about the impact you have had in each of your positions, it is important to be very selective about the verbs you use. They set the rest of the sentence and your readers' thoughts in motion.

Coordinate, manage, oversee, spearhead, initiate, develop, lead, assist, collaborate, supervise, create, craft, direct, conceptualize, and train.
No verb is the right verb if it is not accurate. Above all, select words that closely describe what you did, without minimizing or inflating anything. For example, if you assisted in developing a program and did not assume a leadership role during the process, it is crucial to make that distinction.

→ Length
Generally, if you are still in college or out of school for only a couple of years, your resume should not be over one page in length. As you accumu-

late more experience, your resume will naturally grow; indeed, mid-late career professionals might sometimes have a two or, occasionally, even three page resume. At this stage of the game, however, sticking to one page is a good goal that will help keep you focused and succinct.

→ Under or Over Customizing

As you probably know, it is crucial to customize your resume for the job you are applying for. That is, you should make sure that it describes most of the kinds of skills, experience and qualifications asked for in the job announcement. However, do not customize your resume to the extent that you use a lot of the same language that an employer has used in its announcement. If you do, it can appear that you are pushing to fit yourself into a position. Instead, you may want to alter a few words and phrases in your Template Resume (the resume that incorporates all of your skills and experience before you customize for a specific job) and re-order your bullets to highlight different aspects of your experience. In this way, no matter how you customize your resume, you will not change the heart of how you present yourself.

→ Including Unnecessary Information

There is no need to include statements that references or writing samples are available upon request because that is already assumed. Further, you do not want to use up any of your precious space unnecessarily.

→ Typos, Spelling, and Grammatical Errors

Typos are a huge faux pas and yet, incredibly, they are common in applications. Use spell check AND proof your resume at least three times yourself. Further, have two other people look at it, preferably folks who are great editors.

To accommodate these steps, add proofing time to your application completion timeline. Indeed, leaving an extra couple of days for proofing whenever possible is well worth it.

→ Get Feedback on Your Resume

Once you have done everything listed above, it is a great idea to send your resume around to a few trusted sources such as a good friend or mentor to ask for their immediate impressions. It is best not to say too much about what kind of job you are looking for because you really want to hear what sense people get from your resume without additional information.
- → You may want to ask them a few specific questions, such as:
- → What kinds of jobs do you think my resume, as written, makes me qualified for?
- → Does the flow and organization work?
- → Is there anything distracting, out of place, or confusing?
- → What do you like best and least about it?

Be selective about including only the most important aspects of what you have done and what you want to emphasize for different positions.

Try not to take any feedback you are given personally. Moreover, before making drastic changes, check with yourself and see what feedback feels like it is really on-target.

Ultimately, what is most important is that you are comfortable with what you have written and feel that it accurately and clearly represents your skills, experience, and knowledge.

Writing Cover Letters

Communicating Your Authentic Self

The cover letter, even more so than the resume, is a tool to build a relationship with potential employers and convey information not appropriate in your resume. Indeed, while your resume should provide potential employers with a sense of your work history, the organizations that you have worked for, and an overview of your skills, the cover letter is your opportunity to really connect in a much deeper way. Some of the keys to really connecting involve:

➜ Painting a vivid picture of your skills and experience and how you can put them to use for your prospective organization

➜ Clearly explaining your passion for the position and the organization
➜ Doing all of the above with authenticity

Key Steps in Writing Your Cover Letter

➜ Imagine Your Cover Letter as a Conversation

Oftentimes, individuals are more confused and nervous about how to write their cover letter than about any other part of their search. Part of the reason for this is that many people think that they need to sell themselves even more in their cover letter than in their resume.

The truth is that if you feel passionate about a position and organization and you clearly convey the connection between your skills and the organization's needs, your cover letter will naturally stand out; there is no one else out there who has the same exact interests, experience, and skills that you have!

Take a few deep breaths and then imagine that you have just sat down to have a conversation with a friend about why you want to work for this particular organization and what skills, experience, and knowledge you bring to it. Of course, you can also enlist your friend for a live conversation, but generating both "sides" of the conversation may actually give you more material for your cover letter than you can handle. Note your friend's reactions to what you are saying and any questions he or she had about what you said. Then, ask them if they think you conveyed what you have to offer the position and organization as authentically and clearly as possible. Lastly, quickly jot down 3-5 bullet points summarizing the most important information you got from your conversation.

➜ Rate Your Interest in Applying for the Position

Job applications take a lot of time and effort so it is key to assess whether each job of interest is worth the effort of actually applying. If you find yourself really struggling to explain why you want the job in your imaginary conversation, you may want to reconsider applying. Moreover, it is helpful to formally rate your level of interest in the job, the organization, and its fit with your skills and experience.

1. First, rate your level of interest and passion for the position on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being most passionate. Then, make a note about why you gave it the rating that you did. If you rate a job as less than a 7, then it might not be the right position for you.
2. Next, rate your level of interest and passion for the organization itself on a scale of 1-10. Again, if your rating is less than a 7, even if the position itself looks really great, if you do not see a fit between yourself and the organization's mission and culture, it may not be the right fit for you. It can be helpful to review all the clarifying work that you did in the 'Ideal Job Description' worksheet for this rating.
3. Then go through the job announcement and note whether you meet the job requirements. If you meet at least 80% of the requirements, then it is probably a good fit (assuming the last 20% is not a major component of the position).
4. Lastly, go back through all of your ratings and take a 'big picture view' in making your final assessment. For example, you might have rated the position a 7, but the organization as 8, and your skill match at 85%. Taken together, this is a pretty strong fit and probably worth the effort of applying.

If you are sending out more than a few applications a week, you may not be targeting your search enough or customizing your applications adequately. It is not easy to find dozens of jobs and organizations that you would rate with a 7 or higher in interest level! It is a MUCH better investment of your time and energy to send a handful of applications out a month that are a great match with your skills, experience, knowledge and passions than to engage in a conveyer belt application process where you send applications out constantly.

➔ Carefully Review Your Resume & Professional Profile

Once you decide to move forward with an application, it is time to review your resume and professional profile in greater depth. It is important to have the full array of your professional background at your fingertips before you begin writing your cover letter. While it is not a good idea to repeat parts of your resume in your cover letter, you can definitely rely heavily on your professional profile in shaping your cover letter.

➔ Methodically Review the Job Announcement

Before you begin writing your cover letter, go through the duties, responsibilities, and qualifications in the job announcement in much more detail than you did to assess whether the position warranted an application. This time, next to each one, write a short example detailing how you meet the qualification. For example, rather than just saying that you have excellent communication skills, provide a specific example that illustrates your excellent communication skills. The first time you do this activity for a job, it might take you a few hours, but it will end up saving you time after that. Many jobs you will be applying for will undoubtedly be looking for similar skills and experience so you will be able to use what you came up with in many future cover letters.

Do not worry if you do not have everything that is being asked for – remember - as long as you have about 80%, you will be in good shape.

➔ Thoroughly Research Your Potential Employer

It is crucial to make sure that you learn as much as you can about the organization to which you will be applying: study their website and other materials and see if anyone in your network knows of them (see the Little Black Book on Informational Interviewing for more information on what kinds of questions to ask people about potential employers.) This research will allow you to more fully assess if they seem like a good fit with your skills, working style and organizational culture preferences. Furthermore, it will allow you to customize your cover letter and show that you have a good understanding of what the organization does and what it values.

Cover Letter Structure

Just as with resumes, there is no one best structure for a cover letter. The one below is one of many that you may find fits your style, but it is a solid guide from which to begin refining your own unique approach.

➔ Contact Information, Address, & Date

You may want to include your contact information right at the top of your cover letter in the same formatting that you have on your resume, however,

doing so takes up 3 precious lines of space, so you may decide not to include it. For example,

Lisa Bell
333 Oak Drive
Brooklyn, NY 11215

The date, address of recipient, and greeting are generally self-explanatory.
For example,

March 15, 2006

Cathy Wasserman
Consultant
300 Dream Job Alley
New York, New York 10023

Dear Ms. Wasserman,

If you do not have a specific name for the recipient, you can address
your letter:

To Whom It May Concern,

Or, if you have the name of the department to which you are sending your
application, you might say something like:

Dear Human Resources Staff,

→ **First Paragraph: Introduction & Overview of Passion & Skill
(about 4-6 sentences)**

At its core, the cover letter is an opportunity for you to paint a visual pic-
ture of your skills and background and how you can put them to use for an
organization.

Probably the biggest mistake made by candidates in cover letters is that
they use general and subjective statements. These read as words on a page
and do not come to life and to create the images intended by the author.
After writing a sentence or two, pause, read them back to yourself, and see
if you get a clear image of what you are describing yourself doing. If you
do not, it is time to try to infuse more detail so that you can connect with
your reader. Examples are provided throughout this section.

→ First, briefly state where you saw the announcement for the position or
how you heard about it; be sure to include the position title. Including
this information may seem unimportant, but it is a crucial part of
establishing a first tie with your potential employer; similar to telling
people whom you just met your name and where you are from. For
example, you might say:

*I am writing in response to your ad on Idealist.org for Assistant Youth
Political Program Director to apply for the position.*

→ Briefly explain what excites you about the organization, the particular
program that is connected to the open position, and/or about the posi-
tion itself. You may be able to get some of this material from your
imaginary or real conversation with your friend about why you are pas-

sionate about applying for the position, from any comments you wrote down when you rated the position, and from your research on the organization. Your goal here is to let the potential employer know that you feel strongly about the position and organization and to show that you understand clearly what they do and what they value. For example:

I know first-hand the powerful impact of the YWCA's youth programming: I participated in your "Teens Talk Back" program for two years and during that time, my self-esteem, political savvy, and leadership skills grew enormously.

➔ It is a good idea to close your first paragraph with a short and clear sentence that summarizes how you believe you can most benefit the organization. For example:

I am so excited about the possibility of putting my youth program development skills to use for a community that has given me so much!

➔ Be sure your statement relates directly to the responsibilities and qualifications that were outlined in the job announcement. Also, be careful not to come across as presumptuous or as an "organizational savior!" For example, do not write things like:

With my outstanding organizational skills, I know that I am the right person for the job.

Or, *I think my x, y, and z skills make me an excellent fit with the position.* These statements are too subjective and general and do not paint a picture of how you can benefit the organization.

➔ **Second Paragraph: Details of Skills, Experience, & Knowledge (about 5-7 sentences)**
  ➔ Before you dive into your skills, use the second paragraph to clear up any confusion you think a reader might have when reviewing your application. For example, if at some point in your future you make a big career shift, you want to briefly explain your new career trajectory and how your skills in the old career path translate. You do not want to go into a lot of detail, but if you do not give some explanations, your reader is likely to draw lots of conclusions on their own. **The bottom line is that you want to control how your reader sees you, not let them jump to their own conclusions.**

For example:

After ten years of service to Democracy NOW, wearing many different hats and playing a large role in the agency's growth, I am eager to seek a new opportunity with an organization whose mission, like the YWCA, is close to my heart and where I can contribute my program development and management expertise to help make a significant community impact.

  ➔ Whether you have some confusion to clear up or not, you want to begin your second paragraph with an opening sentence that illustrates how your skills and background can serve the organization. Then, get more specific: briefly explain how you can put 2-3 of your skills and/or areas of expertise to work for the organization by providing specific

examples of what you have done. That is, draw direct connections between what you have to offer and what the organization is looking for in the job announcement. Again, if you find yourself having to really stretch your connection, it might not be the right position for you.

Depending on how much experience you have and the nature of the position, you may need about 1-3 paragraphs to effectively link your expertise with the needs of the position. If you do use additional paragraphs, strike a balance between them. First, include your strongest skills, then your facility with the requirements at the core of the position. Lastly, make a logical break between each paragraph. For example:

Indeed, I have assisted in the development of youth programming for the past three years through both my professional and volunteer work. In my current role as Democracy NOW Leader at Iowa State, I have collaborated on developing programming with other campus youth leaders to encourage students to volunteer for the Democratic National Party. Last semester, we designed a 12-week course for which students can now receive partial credit called, "12 Steps to Citizenship." Through the course, students are educated on how they can participate politically both locally and nationally and then coached on developing a detailed action plan. I also spearheaded the formation of the Democracy Now Youth Committee so that students considering becoming involved with our work would have the opportunity to attend monthly open houses where we detail the history of the party on such issues as the environment and women's rights.

➜ **Third Paragraph: More Details of Skills, Experience, & Knowledge (5-7 sentences)**
This paragraph should be set up in the same way as the second paragraph, but to highlight additional skills, experience, and knowledge which are directly related to the position. For example:

In addition to developing programs, I am also skilled at program delivery. Indeed, whether I am speaking to government officials, community groups, or young people, I think carefully about the goals and concerns of my audience and how I can most effectively reach and assist them. For example, while working as an organizer with Youth Vote last summer, I developed and delivered a thirty-minute talk on the role that college professors can play in encouraging young people to vote. I knew that many of the professors had previously expressed frustration with a decrease in student voting so I began the presentation by having two young people talk for a few minutes about the positive impact of hearing professors reinforce the role that voting plays in shaping our society. At the end of the presentation, two professors signed up for our Professor Outreach Committee, which was very exciting!

➜ **Fourth Paragraph: Details of Skills, Experience, & Knowledge (about 5-7 sentences)**
➜ And, if necessary, close with a few more examples of your strongest skills that relate directly to the position. For example:

Additionally, I am adept at encouraging young people to participate in the political process through writing; I have written the column, "The Democratic Wave" for NYU's student newspaper for the past two years. I am attaching two student letters to give you a sense of the effect that the

column has had on the NYU community. For the past year, I also have been assisting a Political Science Professor in gathering data on the factors that influence young people's voting practices. Our preliminary analysis shows that youth who feel that they have agency to positively change their personal lives vote almost twice as often as young people who do not feel this way. I would love to have the opportunity to apply my learning from this project to more fully engaging the young people in the YWCA's programs.

→ **Fifth Paragraph: Closing & Last Injection of Passion! (about 2-3 sentences)**

   → First, state one more reason that you would be excited to contribute to the organization. For example:
   In closing, I am incredibly interested in the Assistant Youth Political Program Director position and the possibility of developing after school programming that inspires young people to vote for their own best future.

   → Close with a gentle invitation for more contact. For example:
   I would welcome the opportunity to learn more about the position and how I could be of service to your organization.

   → Provide your contact information including phone and email for easy access, unless you have already listed it as a header at the top of your cover letter:
   I may be reached at 555.555.555 or Lisa@hotmail.com.

→ **Signature**

   → No need to get fancy, for example:
   Sincerely or Best,

   Lisa Bell

Things to watch:

→ **Gently Direct Your Reader**
   You don't want to come across like you are actively directing your reader to do certain things. Do not, for example, say that you would like to come in for an interview. These things are generally assumed and you never want to come across as pushy.

→ **Know Your Angle**
   There are lots of different ways to frame your expertise and experience so it is crucial to know which is going to help your reader understand how you can serve them. For example, you might be someone who has lots of great experience in managing volunteers, developing new programs, and budgeting. While you may convey all of this expertise in a cover letter, you want to be clear which you are going to emphasize more in the new position. Are you a program developer who excels at managing volunteers or are you really more of a volunteer manager who develops programs for volunteers?

   Most people have multiple skills and it is crucial to know which ones you really want to exercise in your next job. In this case, frame your background appropriately and thread your major skills with it.

→ **Length**
   Generally your cover letter should be no more than about _ of a page- 1 page long, especially when you are starting out in your career. If you find yourself going way under, then you want to go back to the job announce-

ment and make sure you meet at least 80% of the qualifications required. On the other hand, if you find yourself going way over, check in to make sure you are getting to the point quickly enough. Trim anything that is not absolutely essential to helping your future employer understand how you can best serve them.

➔ **Apply the Suggestions made in the THINGS TO WATCH section of the resume:** Everything you were encouraged to watch for in your resume also applies to your cover letter. In particular, be sure to edit and proof your cover letter adequately. Since a cover letter feels so much more like a conversation to most readers, it is more distracting to discover upon typos, spelling and grammatical errors! Just as importantly, get feedback on your cover letter from a few people before sending it out. Unlike the resume, give this feedback "committee" more information about what you are looking for, it is best to give this group of people the job announcement.

➔ **Key questions to ask them include:**
  ➔ Do you think that I have painted a clear picture of how I meet the job qualifications and how I could excel in carrying out the duties and responsibilities?
  ➔ Have I made it clear why I am passionate about the job and the organization?
  ➔ Does the cover letter flow well?
  ➔ Is my tone direct without being too directive?
  ➔ Do my presentation, my content, and my tone represent who you know me to be?
  ➔ What do you like best about my cover letter?
  ➔ What do you like least?
    Again, you want to consider each piece of feedback carefully and make your own decisions about what you change.
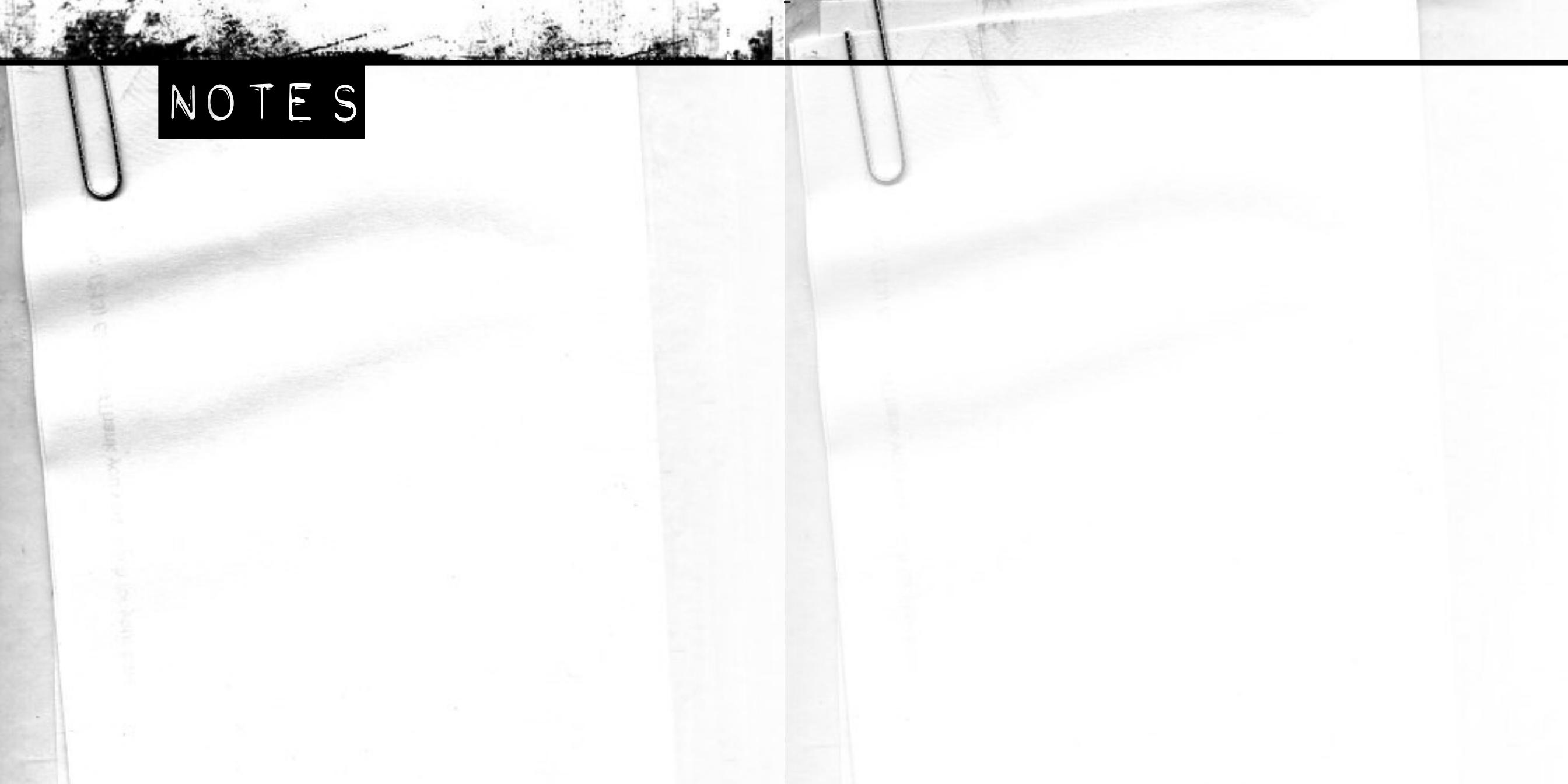
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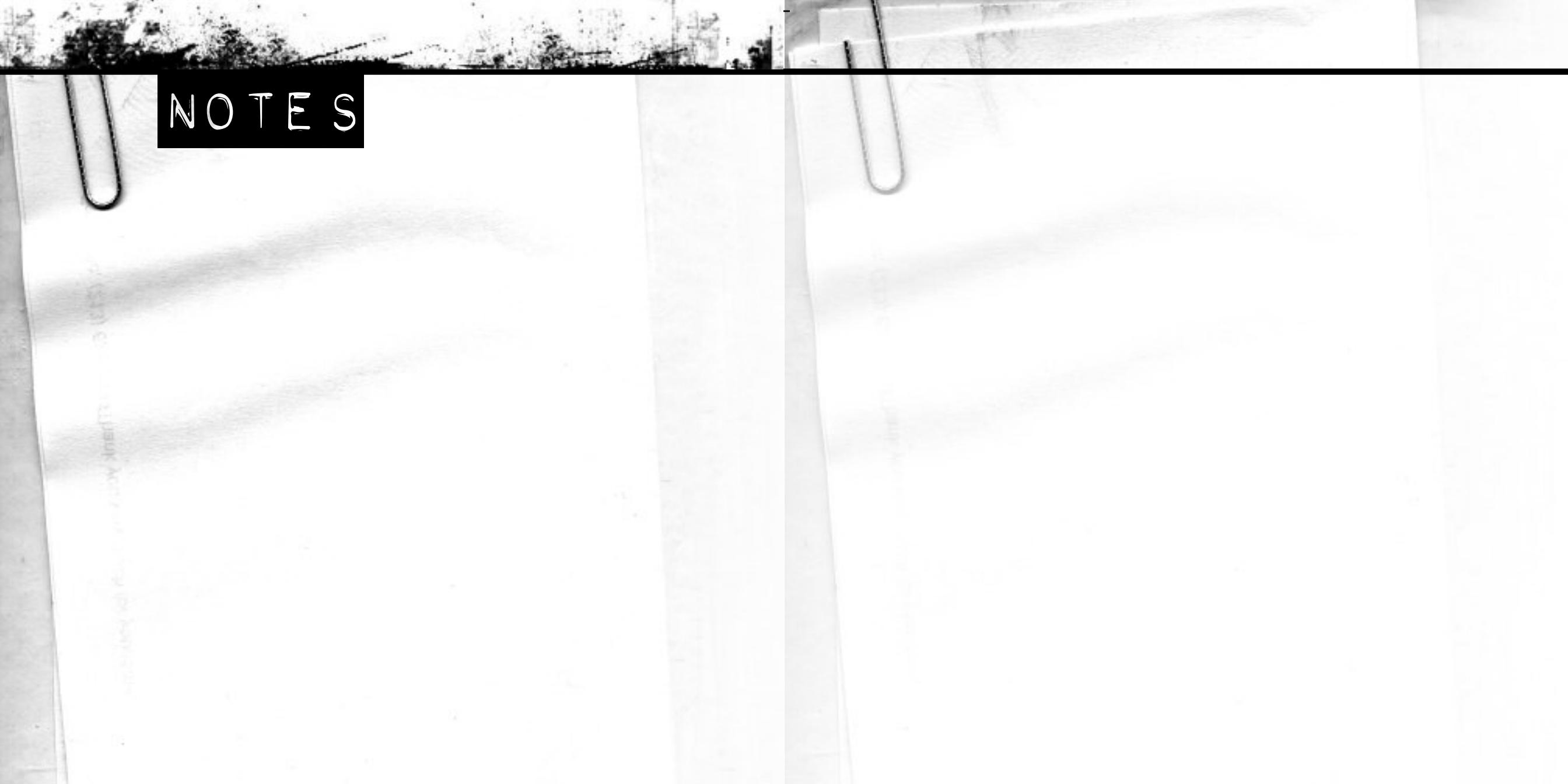
LITTLE BLACK BOOK

is a YOUNG PEOPLE FOR initiative

YOUNG PEOPLE FOR is a program of