

# CPA (Public Practice) Recruit Application Tip Sheet

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## This Tip Sheet will cover:

1. Overall tips for both cover letter and resume
2. Resume tips
3. Cover Letter tips

## Firm's Perspective

We strongly recommend that you look at your whole application with a critical eye and consider it from the perspective of the firms, who are assessing thousands of CPA applications during fall recruit. Based on feedback from employers, these are some of the questions they may be asking themselves as they read through your application:

- Has the student demonstrated that they are hungry for this position and our firm?
- What has this student done in the past? How have they cultivated the transferrable skills that will enable them to succeed in this position?
- What accomplishments has this person contributed at previous jobs or at university/college? How have they differentiated themselves from their peers?
- Will they fit into our team?
- Are they willing to work hard?
- Are they flexible – can they balance time demands?
- Does this student present him/herself well?
- Does this student demonstrate he/she is client-facing?
- Does this student stand out and make me want to interview them?

## Questions to ask yourself:

Before you submit your application, take another look at it and ask yourself the following questions:

- Have I conveyed my knowledge and understanding of both the firm and position?
- Have I highlighted my strong “selling points”?
- Is it easy to read?
- Do my accomplishments and achievements stand out?
- Have I checked for spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors?
- Have I done a good job at identifying and communicating what makes me unique?

## Get a head start on your application now!

The fall semester is busy and hundreds of students will be scrambling to get their applications together. Make an appointment to have your application form reviewed by your career centre as early as possible to beat the fall rush.

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## The Goal:

To write a targeted, specific and unique cover letter for each company you are applying to that explains:

1. Why you want to be a CPA
2. Why you want to work for that firm
3. What makes you a good fit
4. What are the skills and experience you have that would allow you to excel

Make sure you read the job description again carefully before writing your cover letter. This is your opportunity to expand and make the connection between your resume and the job description, so do not copy and paste text from your resume.

Most importantly, don't panic –most students worry about what to write for their cover letter. Firms want you to write a letter that reflects you and your own style, and highlights what is important to YOU. **Every student's cover letter should be different. Writing a good cover letter is not about following some secret formula—there is no such thing as a perfect cover letter. Your job is to write a letter that best represents you.**

## The Format:

### Concise, Clear, Easy to Read, Simple, To The Point

- Follow the basic format of a professional letter by including your information in the header, followed by company name, address, date, etc.
- Use short paragraphs. Double space between paragraphs or sections, or use headings with bullets underneath.
- Don't go overboard with fancy formatting (bolding every 2<sup>nd</sup> sentence, italics, etc.). Keep your format and font style consistent with your resume. Is it easy to read?
- If you mention the firm's name make sure it is the correct name for the firm you are applying to (i.e. don't mention KPMG in a cover letter submitted to Deloitte). Trust us, it happens (and is a big no-no)!
- Avoid overuse of the word "I" and using weak words such as "although", "just", "but", and "however".
- A scanned signature at the bottom of your letter is not needed.
- One page maximum, font size no smaller than 10 point.

## The Tone:

### Professional, Unique, Genuine, Engaged

- Your cover letter should come across as genuine and allow a recruiter to get a sense of your personality and character - they are reading through hundreds of these, so think about making your letter stand out in a unique way.
- Don't rely on humour to set yourself apart from other applicants – there is a fine line.
- "Sell" your qualifications but be sincere.
- Do not include personal information such as marital status, age, religious denominations, etc.
- Avoid over use of superlatives: "I am so excited", "I am the perfect candidate", etc. Focus on your experience and the value you bring by being specific.

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## The Content:

### Why you want to be a CPA ➡ Honest, Unique, Interesting

- Describe why you would be a strong candidate for the advertised position by elaborating on short and long term goals, personal qualities that you possess, and your decision making process for why you choose CPA as your career path and the factors that contributed to that decision
- Explain what makes you unique and how this relates to being a CPA. Make sure you highlight off campus experience.

### Why you want to work for that firm ➡ Demonstrates Research, How you Fit

- Customize your form for EACH firm. Spell their name correctly! Adapt your form to emphasize areas that are important to each firm respectively (ie: their values, mission statement, etc.).
- Read the job description carefully; analyze and interpret what that firm is looking for
- Target the firm specifically – mention what it is about their firm that attracts you. The more specific, the better.
- Demonstrate how you would be a good fit through your knowledge of the firm and who they are (research their website and attend events through the summer and the National Firms Day and Midsize Firms/Industry Day to actually meet the firm representatives).
- Connect your reasons for being a good fit back to the skills & experiences on your resume.
- Only mention the names of reps from the firm, how you met them, and how they may have influenced your decision to become a CPA or apply for that company if you have established a relationship with the rep and you are confident they will know who you are (don't simply name-drop – make it sincere).

### How you know you can do the job ➡ Your skills, results and accomplishments

- Address requirements of the position, both stated and implied - research clients, trends, etc. and connect to long term goals.
- Emphasize not just “what” you did in your examples, but what results you had and how you accomplished them. Recruiters like to see how you demonstrated key skills like leadership, teamwork, customer service, analysis, written and oral communication, decision making, initiative, accountability, problem solving and time management, to name a few.
- If you wish to address potentially detrimental facts on your application (ie: low GPA), do so only if:
  - you have made significant improvement and can demonstrate what you have learned
  - there were extenuating circumstances that may provide context
  - you can keep it positive and focused on your strengths

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## The Goal:

The resume is not a list of your lifelong work history or educational background. It is a document that highlights the most relevant experiences and skills that you would want a firm representative to know about you when applying to a specific job.

An effective resume demonstrates your ability to meet an employer's needs; moreover, it stimulates their desire to meet you. Compose your resume using information that you generate through the following:

1. **Analysis of each job you have held** (think about what you accomplished, what skills you developed, and what kind of tasks you enjoyed most or were particularly good at)
2. **Research you've conducted** to identify what skills are required for the job you are targeting.
3. Incorporating the **key competencies** recruiters are looking for in each particular posting (ex: initiative, adaptability, team player, analytical ability, leadership, relationship management, time management and communication skills).

## Let's Break It Down...

### Section 1: Header

The header contains your name and your contact information. Think of your header as a form of personal branding, so feel free to be a little creative here. However, refrain from using logos, monograms, pictures, etc., unless you have the skills and an eye for design.

Things to keep in mind:

- Include only one phone number and one email address
- You can use your school email address or a non-school professional email address
- Your header should be repeated again on the 2<sup>nd</sup> page of your resume, include page numbers
- Optional: you may wish to include your LinkedIn URL, or website if appropriate

### Section 2: Profile or Highlights

The firms would like to see a "Profile" or "Highlights of Qualifications" section where you highlight your best and unique skills and strengths. A four to five sentence profile, or three to six bullets in a highlights section, allows the reader to get an overall sense of who you are. You can imagine with firms receiving thousands of applications, they tend to get the same skills listed by students. Think outside of the box – be sure to include skills that reflect what the firm is looking for in their core values from their position and website, but really explain why & how they are relevant in your own words.

Things you may include in the Profile or Highlights of Qualifications:

- Snapshot of your education/concentration
- Relevant work experience (including years)
- Relevant skills, traits and accomplishments that are included in the body of your resume
- Languages and computer skills (make sure you are honest - those skills may be tested)

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## Section 3: Education

This section is where you list your relevant education in reverse chronological order. Include designations or training that you are currently enrolled in. If you transferred from another post-secondary institution, or went on an exchange semester, you should include this as well.

<b>Bachelor of Business Administration (Accounting Honours)</b> Beedie School of Business, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC	Start date - Completion: December 2013
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include scholarships received, Dean's Honour Roll achievements, Golden Key Society</li> </ul>	
<b>Diploma in Commerce and Business Administration</b> Faculty of Commerce and Business Administration, Douglas College, New Westminster, BC	Start Date - Completion: June 2009

## Section 4: Professional Work Experience

List your **paid** professional experience using accomplishment statements. Include bulleted “accomplishment statements” outlining achievements so that:

- Firms understand what you have accomplished in the past and what the skills are that you can use to benefit their organization in the future
- The scope of your experience and/or results are quantified when possible
- Firms understand your level of involvement
- Firms have concrete evidence proving that you can do what it is you say you can do

<b>Position Title</b> (include part-time or full-time, and average hours per week) Company Name, City, Prov.	Month/Year – Month/Year
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accomplishment bullet</li> <li>• Accomplishment bullet</li> </ul>	

*\*Note: you should include average hours per week, as well as specific months*

### Accomplishment Bullets

When creating accomplishment bullets, keep in mind that firms love seeing results, so as much as possible, start your bullet with one:

**RESULT** + “by” or “through” + **HOW**

- *Increased awareness of brand by 30% through conducting several focus groups and tailoring the promotional message to target audience*

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Tip: If you cannot identify a quantitative result you had, think about what the positive impact or benefit to the organization or project for the specific work that you did was. For example:

- *Built and maintained positive relationships with customers by identifying their unique needs and providing individualized information about products*

## Section 5: Volunteer Experience / Extracurricular Activities

Current activities that you are involved in that demonstrate key competencies such as initiative, team work, time management, and leadership should go under this heading. Some items you may want to include are volunteer activities, involvement in student clubs, board of directors, and professional associations, and participation in team sports. Things to keep in mind:

- Don't underestimate the importance of this section just because these are unpaid experiences - firms like to see community minded individuals
- Treat the accomplishment bullets as if this was a "Professional Work Experience" section (ie: think about results)
- Include average hours per week

## Optional Sections: Awards and Achievements, Interests

These are additional sections that you may want to include in your resume. Firms are looking for well-rounded students with diverse experience.

### Awards and Achievements

- Case competitions
- Awards and scholarships (if not included under "Education")
- Charity and community recognition
- Particular course achievement at your school
- Musical achievements
- High school achievements, if noteworthy

### Interests

Instead of having a laundry list of multiple interests, provide a few interests and elaborate a little on each one.

## Last Tidbits

- Should be one or two full pages
- Margins no less than 0.75 inches
- Font no smaller than 10 point
- Font choice should be easy to read
- "References Available Upon Request" is not needed
- **Remember not to exaggerate or inflate your experience**
- You may use colour in your resume, as long as it looks professional
- Always have someone review your resume and give you feedback