

# Bewerbungen im englischsprachigen Raum

Vorlagen und die häufigsten Fehler

For a good online overview of writing resumes (CVs) and letters, please consult the homepage of the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development:

<http://www.deed.state.mn.us/cjs/cjsbook/index.htm>

## Most Common Mistakes on Resumes

Below are some of the most common mistakes German students make when writing resumes and cover letters in English. If you would like further information about any of these points or any other practice in English grammar, then just let me know.

### General:

- The most important part of the résumé is the layout. Someone should be able to look at your resume and see everything clearly, since most resumes are only examined for approximately 30 seconds. Therefore, make it look interesting, but not confusing; bullet points can help here.
- You should have a pattern and stick to it.
- Dates should also be clearly visible in one column
- No abbreviations (short forms) of words are allowed! Thus, DO NOT use “GB” for “Great Britain; from the cover letter: DO NOT use contractions (ex: “I’d” instead of “I would”)
- Most importantly: everything on the resume should be parallel. This means that the layout should be in some way uniform (indentation should be the same, only use one type of bullet), but also the text should be parallel. For instance, if you know the address of one company for which you worked, but only the city of the others, then only list the city for all companies.
- Depending on your purposes, it is usually better to put the most recent achievements first.

### Address (and any other personal information):

- I did not mention this before, but it is a good idea to list both a current and a permanent address, in case you have two or are planning to move soon.
- The word “cell”, although normal in spoken English, should not be used in formal documents. Use “mobile phone”.
- If you use your country in the address, then use the country code in the telephone number; if writing to a company/university abroad, then always use your country in the address and country code in the phone number.

### Education:

- If you are still a student, this section should come directly below your “Objective” or “Summary”
- Always name your university, the city and your major
- Universität Dortmund: either you leave it like that or: University of Dortmund, Dortmund University; NOT University Dortmund
- It is a good idea to put your GPA here [either cumulative (*Gesamtnote*) or for a partial area (ex: only the major subjects)], but specify if it is cumulative or partial)
- GPA: always differentiate between grading scales (German scale, American scale, etc.); a 1.0 in another country could be horrible even though it is the top grade here.

### Work Experience:

- Under work experience: always put the company, the city (or address) of the company and your position there.
- It is even better if you can provide a few key words about what you did there.
- Internships: In Germany listed under education; in America: often under work experience.

### Language Skills:

- Do not forget your mother tongue; this is not always obvious.
- Always put the level (basic, intermediate, advanced, fluent)

### Leadership Positions (or “Interests” or “Achievements”):

- Always name the organization or club (for example, the soccer club if you play sports), the city (or address) and what you do there (member, president, class representative, etc.). If you were a class representative, then name the school and city.

### Travel/Countries Visited:

- unless this directly has something to do with the job/internship that you want, do not put it under “Education”.
- This would also be a good thing to use in the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph of the cover letter (ex: I have visited over 15 countries and have gathered through these experiences the necessary skills to deal effectively with other cultures.) or under “Interests”, then “Travel (# countries visited)”

## General Grammar/Language Mistakes

**NOTE:** Anyone interested in learning more about any of these rules should either talk to me during my office hours or consult the following books (available in the *Universitätsbibliothek*), which are very thorough and easy to understand:

- o *Advanced Grammar in Use*, Martin Hewings, Cambridge Press (upper-intermediate to advanced)
- o *English Grammar in Use*, Raymond Murphy, Cambridge Press (beginner to intermediate)

### BE v AmE:

If writing for someone in Great Britain, then try to use British English (BE); if for someone in America, then American English (AmE). No matter who your audience is, make sure that you do not use BE AND AmE in one text. (Tip: change your spell check in your word processor to BE or AmE)

- o “organise” – BE; “organize” – AmE
- o “colour” – BE; “color” – AmE

### Capitalize:

- o the first word of a sentence (always—even the first word in the first sentence of a letter),
- o countries,
- o countries used as adjectives (“an American business”, “a European trade regulation”)
- o titles of books, etc. (except the prepositions and words like “and/or/the”: “The Taming of the Shrew”),
- o titles of people (Chancellor Merkel; but “The chancellor said...”),
- o subjects (but not fields; ex: “I study Industrial Engineering.” “I work in engineering.”),
- o months and days,
- o University of Dortmund (but not just the word “university”; ex: I have learned a lot from my time at the university.”)

### Words with hyphens and quantities become singular although the meaning is plural:

- o four-week internship                      NOT: four weeks internship
- o three-year study program                NOT: three years study program

### Quotation Marks/ Inverted Commas:

Please make sure that your quotation marks are not in the German style: so ““ and NOT „““

### Do not end sentences with a preposition in formal writing:

- o That is the person with whom I studied.                      NOT: That is the person I studied with.  
(NOTE: “who” changes to “whom” when it is the object, in this case the object of a preposition)
- o That was the company for which I worked.                      NOT: That was the company I worked for.

### Relative Clauses:

You join two sentences by putting *who/which/that* in place of *he/she/it/they*.

(*who* is used for people; *which/that* are used for things.)

- o I have a friend. He has been working for your company for five years.  
I have a friend who has been working for your company for five years.  
(*defining clause, thus, no comma*)
- o I study Industrial Engineering at the University of Dortmund. It is one of the most renowned universities for technical subjects.  
I study Industrial Engineering at the University of Dortmund, which is one of the most renowned universities for technical subjects.  
(*non-defining clause, thus, comma*)

DO NOT separate a *that*-clause with a comma (the same is true for *why* and *if*-clauses):

- o Ich bin mir sicher, dass ich der Richtige für den Job bin.  
I am sure that I am the perfect person for the job.
- o Sie fragte sich, warum sie den Job nicht bekommen hat.  
She wondered why she did not get the job.
- o Ich werde ihn fragen, ob er mitkommen möchte.  
I will ask him if he would like to come along.

British Style Letter

Your name  
Street Address  
City, State Zip Code  
Phone Number

Individual's Name  
Job Title  
Name of Organisation  
Street Address  
City, State Zip Code

Date

**Dear Mr/Ms** \_\_\_\_\_

Paragraph 1

Paragraph 2

Paragraph 3

**Yours sincerely**

*(Signature in blue or black ink)*  
Your typed name

**Enclosure**

## American Style Letter

Your name  
Street Address  
City, State Zip Code  
Phone Number

Date

Individual's Name  
Job Title  
Name of Organisation  
Street Address  
City, State Zip Code

**Dear Mr./Ms. \_\_\_\_\_: / ,**

Paragraph 1

Paragraph 2

Paragraph 3

**Sincerely,**

*(Signature in blue or black ink)*

Your typed name

**Enclosure**

## Cover Letter Example\*

Johnny Network  
Klosterstr. 3  
45221 Dortmund  
(+49) 231-5555555  
Germany

October 31, 2006

Mr. Phillip Morework  
Production Manager  
XYZ Corporation  
21 Industry Lane  
Anytown, MN 55555  
USA

Dear Mr. Morework,

Please consider my qualifications for the Lead Production Assistant opportunity, which was listed in the *Daily Planet* on October 20, 2006. With a proven high-tech background in Fortune 100 companies, I am well qualified and eager to represent your company in this capacity.

I thrive in a fast-paced environment where production deadlines are a priority, and handling multiple jobs simultaneously is the norm. In relation to leadership, I have been responsible for up to 35 staff members, and have built a reputation for making quality administrative decisions in a fair and consistent manner. Constant negotiations with all levels of management and staff have strengthened my interpersonal skills.

Enclosed is my resume and I am looking forward to discussing my qualifications with you. I will call you to confirm receipt of this information, and discuss possible next steps. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Max Mustermann  
Enclosure

**Kommentar [LEH1]:** Don't forget the country, if international

**Kommentar [LEH2]:** You should always write to a specific person

**Kommentar [LEH3]:** Specific reason for writing, the position desired

**Kommentar [LEH4]:** Where you saw the ad

**Kommentar [LEH5]:** DO NOT repeat information from your resume/CV (like "Production Manager for XY"), but DO mention unique skills learned there that make you the perfect candidate

**Kommentar [LEH6]:** Mention what is enclosed in the letter

**Kommentar [LEH7]:** Indicate desire to talk with the employer; Some people may even suggest a time to meet, especially in an international case ("I will be in the United States from November 15 until November 22 and would be grateful to get a chance to meet if those dates are convenient for you")

**Kommentar [LEH8]:** Show initiative: communicate your plans to follow up

**Kommentar [LEH9]:** You may want to include day and evening contact information

**Kommentar [LEH10]:** Thank the employer for his/her time

**Kommentar [LEH11]:** Make sure that you stick to either the British or American style (also British or American spelling!)

\* Example taken from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

The following words are too informal for writing:

- **used to**  
*Ich habe schon \_\_\_ gemacht*  
→ In the past I did \_\_\_\_ . NOT: I used to do \_\_\_\_.  
*Ich bin es gewöhnt, \_\_ zu machen.*  
→ I am acquainted/comfortable with doing \_\_\_\_ . NOT: I am used to doing \_\_\_\_.
- **a lot of** → use “several”, “many” or “a plethora of”, etc.  
*Ich habe viele verschiedene Erfahrungen gesammelt.*  
I have gained many experiences. NOT: I have gained a lot of experience.
- **got** → use received or earned  
*Ich bekam eine Auszeichnung.*  
→ I received an award. NOT: I got an award.
- **cell** → use “mobile” or “mobile phone”

### “False Friends”

The following words and phrases from the German language can be tricky when you translate them into English:

- *Ich habe ein Praktikum gemacht.*  
→ is not “I made an internship.”, better is “I (have) completed an internship.”  
*Ich habe meinen Führerschein gemacht.*  
→ is not “I made my (driver’s) license.”, better is “I received/earned my (driver’s) license.”
- *Personal* in German  
→ is not “personal” in English; it is “personnel”
- the words *wachsen* and *steigen* when talking about business or statistics  
→ are not “grow business” or “raise business”; use “increase” (↑) or “decrease” (↓)
- *Ich habe geholfen, Verkaufszahlen um 20% zu erhöhen.*  
→ “I helped increase sales by 20%.” NOT “I helped to increase sales by 20%.”
- *Ich bin Mitglied einer Mannschaft.*  
→ can be “I am the member of a team”, but better is “I am a team member”

### Commas:

- **with transitional words like *therefore, thus, overall, in addition*:**  
Commas always set these words apart from the rest of the sentence. This means that one of these words at the beginning of the sentence is always followed by a comma.  
*Therefore, sales dropped last year.*  
If the word is placed in the middle of a sentence, then commas are placed on both sides.  
*Our campaign failed last year, thus, causing sales to drop.*
- **With conjunctions like *and, or, but*:**  
A comma is used to set apart 2 independent clauses (this means, two clauses that could stand alone as one sentence)  
*He worked for the company for ten years and liked it there.* (“Liked it there” could not be a real sentence)  
*He worked for the company for ten years, and he liked it there.*
- **in a series:**  
a comma between the last two items can be used but is not necessary (especially in scholarly work or a journalistic text: no comma between the last two).  
*My activities show that I am motivated, skilled and interested in new things.*  
or  
*My activities show that I am motivated, skilled, and interested in new things.*

### Confusing words:

- **sale (noun) v. sell (verb)**

A shop has a sale when everything is available at a cheaper price; the bread store sells bread every day.

On my door-to-door runs today I made six sales. I sell window cleaners to housewives. and *Verkäufer* is *salesman*; NOT *saleman*.

- **adopt v. adapt**

Pay attention to the subtle difference in spelling, which makes for a huge difference in meaning.

The early Americans adapted the techniques of others to create completely new methods.

But they had to adopt a new mentality to survive.

- **many v. much**

Use *many* when it is possible to count the object; use *much* when you cannot count it.

She received much money. She received many dollar bills.

The theme park is a place of much happiness. The comedian got many laughs during his show.

- **good (adjective) v. well (adverb)**

He does his job well. Last week he created a good diagram that was used in the meeting.

- **actual vs. aktuell**

“aktuell” actually means “current”, not “actual”

ex: My current job does not provide me with enough challenges.

NOT: My actual job does not provide me with enough challenges.



## Tips for (cover) letter writing

### Body of the Letter

#### Paragraph 1:

State the reason for writing. Name the specific position or type of work for which you are applying. Mention how you learned of the opening.

#### Paragraph 2:

Explain why you are interested in working for this employer and specify how you're perfect for the position. Don't repeat the information on your resume. Include something special or unique about yourself that will benefit the employer. Remember, the reader will consider this an example of your writing skills.

#### Paragraph 3:

Mention that your resume is enclosed and indicate your desire to meet with the employer. You may want to suggest alternate dates and times, or simply advise them of your flexibility to the time and place. Include day and evening contact information (phone number and time). Include a statement or question that will encourage the reader to respond. Be sure to communicate your plan to follow-up. You might state that you'll be in the area on a certain date and would like to set up a meeting, or you'll call on a certain date to set up a meeting. Finally, thank the employer for his/her time.

Tips for the body: Avoid starting sentences with the same word every time (e.g. "I"); keep the sentences short; stick to 3-5 paragraphs; use the same type of paper for cover letter and resume.

### American v. British:

A: sender on left-hand side

B: sender on right-hand side

### Salutation:

*(when you don't know the name of the recipient; but always address it to someone, even if it means politely calling beforehand to ask the name of the person in charge of hiring):*

A: Ladies and Gentlemen,

B: Dear Sir or Madam

*(when you know the name of the recipient):*

A: Dear Mr./Ms./Mrs./Miss \_\_\_\_\_, (period/full stop at end)

B: Dear Mr/Ms/Mrs/Miss \_\_\_\_\_ (no period/full stop at end)

### Closing:

*(when you don't know the name of the recipient):*

A: Sincerely yours,

B: Yours faithfully

*(when you know the name of the recipient):*

A: Sincerely,

B: Yours sincerely

### Common abbreviations at the end of a letter:

Re. Regarding

pp. (on behalf of) when you sign the letter for another person

encs. documents are enclosed with the letter

cc copies, the names of the people who receive a copy are included in the letter