



## 1.1 Ten Tips to Land a Startup Job

- ① **Start within arm's reach.**  
Products and services that you already use, know, and love are great places to begin your application process. The ability to have a knowledgeable conversation about a company's offerings is a sure-fire attention-grabber.
- ② **Skip the blind dates.**  
Really, really do your homework on each company before meeting or applying for a job with them. Scour their websites, blogs, social media presences, and articles written about them (or by their team members). This is much more important at startups than at large companies.
- ③ **Don't forget to tip.**  
Now that you're well-versed on both the company and its offerings, come up with one great suggestion for how they can improve, or one new feature you would add. Startups love this.
- ④ **Link outside the box.**  
Building your digital presence through Twitter, blogging, Instagram, Quora, and industry-specific centers like GitHub (in addition to LinkedIn and Facebook) is mandatory at this point. Blogging offers an outlet for your interests, thoughts, and writing; Quora exhibits your knowledge by allowing you to answer others' questions (or ask your own); and GitHub connects developers for open source projects. Start now—even a little can yield a big return.
- ⑤ **Talk to strangers.**  
Involve yourself in local, professional communities through Meetups for entrepreneurs, startup enthusiasts, coders, designers, and others in your field of interest. Reach out to companies and professionals directly for coffee meetings and informational interviews. In no time, you'll have a budding network in the startup space.
- ⑥ **Take one a day.**  
Make it a goal and personal challenge to reach out to at least one new person or company each day. Through friends, professional connections, and referrals, your network will grow exponentially, opening doors to new professional opportunities.
- ⑦ **Stack the deck.**  
You don't need a job to have business cards. [Click here](#) to learn how to stand out amid the currency exchange of networking known as "card swapping."
- ⑧ **Do it yourself.**  
Bulk up your résumé, skills, network, and confidence beyond internships and the classroom. Freelance work, passion projects, volunteering, competitions, and classes are all great ways.
- ⑨ **Bookmark these pages!**  
The search continues for the holy grail of an updated and highly curated startup job board for all fields. In the meantime, we recommend exploring the following:
  - \* Developers/Tech - [Careers 2.0](#), [GitHub](#), [Dice](#), [Hacker News](#)
  - \* Design - [Behance](#), [Coroflot](#), [Dribbble](#), [AIGA](#)
  - \* General - [Mashable](#), [VentureLoop](#), [Startuply](#), and—of course—[Wakefield](#).... and don't forget companies' own websites, job boards, LinkedIn pages, Twitter profiles, and Facebook pages.



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**Ditch the tie; perfect your ping pong serve.**

The clichés of startup life are clichés for a reason. Scrap the corporate culture and dress code, and understand there's a new sheriff in these here parts: one who wears jeans, T-shirts, and rolls into the office some time between 9 AM and noon (offset by hours that can run late into the evening, of course).



## 1.2 The Startup Interrogation Room

Startups are not for everyone. Really, they're not. Here are some questions to ask yourself—without the bright light, one-way mirror, and good cop/bad cop routine—to figure out if they're right for you.

- 1 The Fish:Pond Equation**  
Do I prefer working on a large team where everyone has a specialized, more focused role, or a smaller team where projects require the agility of a bullfighter, flexibility of an Olympic gymnast, and high tolerance for (potential) chaos?
- 2 The Atlas Workout**  
Does the idea that my work at a smaller company will account for a larger part of its livelihood excite or intimidate me?
- 3 Living the Dream**  
Am I truly, genuinely, 100% passionate about the companies to which I'm applying and the products or services they offer?
- 4 Check Mates**  
If necessary, would I take a smaller salary to work at a startup that seems like a perfect fit than I could potentially make for a similar role at a larger company?
- 5 Interior Design**  
Am I more productive with the privacy of cubicles and corner offices with floor-to-ceiling windows, or do I prefer a bustling open office with no walls?
- 6 Clock Work**  
Is "9-to-5" a personal requirement, suggested schedule, or cruel joke? (*Startups are notoriously unpredictable and flexible with daily schedules.*)
- 7 Clothes Call**  
Does "business attire" mean tailored suits, blouses, and button-downs, or simply whatever is clean? (*Startups seldom require formal garb, but dressing to impress can be an important factor for some jobseekers.*)
- 8 Where the Wild Things Are**  
Are you comfortable with (or allergic to) animals? (*Startups are more likely to have the occasional roaming pet, sometimes affectionately referred to as an intern, security, or the VP of Sales.*)
- 9 Your New Best Friends**  
Do I like the people with whom I'd be working? I mean, do I *really* like them? (*At a startup, you tend to bond more closely with your coworkers, and even if your role changes, chances are that you will still be working with the same folks. At a larger company, however, changing roles or departments could mean less or even no further communication with certain colleagues.*)
- 10 Security Guard**  
Is job security a deciding factor, or are you open to a company that is high-risk/high-reward? (*Most startups don't make it, and the end often comes quickly. On the other hand, success can*



*be on an unimaginable scale: Yahoo! just bought Tumblr for \$1.1 billion, and even powerhouses like Microsoft and Google were once startups.)*



### **How Do You Take Your Coffers?**

Do you prefer a company that is well-funded, has received some funding, or is bootstrapped? And do you understand how this affects employees' salaries and equity in the short- and long-term?



### **Game Changers**

Is the startup you have your eye on doing something to disrupt the space in which it's operating or to change the world at large?



If startup life doesn't feel quite right for you, fear not; there are, of course, plenty of other options at larger, more traditional companies. But if you find yourself longing for the best of both worlds, it might surprise you to learn that many larger companies have divisions that operate very similarly to startups. For examples, check out [@WalmartLabs](#), [Microsoft's Bing Fund](#), and [Google Ventures](#).



## 2.1 Secrets to Great Startup Résumés

### Welcome

The tech space is an exciting sector of the economy, and one where job opportunities are numerous. But working here requires particular skill sets and a careful approach to applying.

[Wakefield Media](#) was created for those who are interested in the unique experiences of emerging, young companies. We uncover their jobs, products, and personalities through daily editorial and the largest tech startup hiring series in the country, known as [Uncubed](#): a spectacle that is one part job fair, three rings circus.

We've surveyed our friends at some of the most well-known startups and tech companies out there—including [Tumblr](#), [Spotify](#), [Stack Exchange](#), [Behance](#), [Meetup](#), and [Microsoft](#)—to dial in on the advice you'll need to join one of their teams.

This document is part of an ongoing series. In this section, we'll take a look at how to put your best foot forward with your résumé. So sit back, relax, and enjoy the beginning of the rest of your career.

### Your Résumé

Sure, companies have interviewed and hired candidates without résumés, relying instead upon examples of their work to assess skill sets and abilities. This could mean GitHub, Stack Overflow, or Careers 2.0 profiles for developers; Behance, Dribbble, or Coroflot portfolios for designers; or a diverse portfolio of writing samples for copywriters, content producers, and editors. That said, recruiters and hiring managers treat these instances as major exceptions to the rule.

**They still want to see your résumé.**

***“Having a résumé not only demonstrates that a candidate takes his or her career seriously, but it also shows respect to the employer.”***  
- Sean McDermott, Dir. of Recruiting at Tumblr

**Recruiters spend an average of 10 seconds reviewing each résumé, so you'll want yours to be...**

- 1) Concise (*You only have 10 seconds.*)
- 2) Structured (*You only have 10 seconds.*)
- 3) Specific (*You guessed it... 10 seconds.*)



From top to bottom, startups want your résumé to demonstrate that you can not only provide the experience they're seeking, but that you are passionate about what they do, share their vision, and will provide the cultural yin to their yang.

Here's how you can accomplish this within each section of your résumé ([click here for a template to start or revise yours](#)):

I. Contact Information

We'll assume that you covered the basics here, so what's left? Come out swinging with a link to your digital portfolio, code repository, or some other showcase of your work. If you're on Twitter (and you should be!), include your handle... so long as your content is safe for employer viewing. In the event you have an affinity for four-letter words or trashy gossip, consider setting up a more professionally minded Twitter account as well.

II. Objective Statement

If you're going to include one, use it to connect with the company. You could seek "to obtain a challenging, full-time position in business development" at a hot, new startup... but that won't help you stand out. Or, you could bowl over an employer with the desire "to bring [Company X] closer to world domination by expanding their partnerships and product usage."

Remember, your résumé will be read by a human. Connect with this decision-maker-responsible-for-your-future-at-the-company by infusing some personality into your résumé—especially when applying to startups, where cultural fit is a significant factor.

With larger companies, of course, the risk may outweigh the reward. The payoff for demonstrating that you know the brand well may not be apparent, since it's most likely assumed that you'll already know them and what they stand for.

III. Education

Let's not tell your parents about this one...

In the world of startups, and also at certain larger tech organizations like Microsoft, your GPA is a second-class citizen to your talent and experience.

***"I prefer students who challenge themselves rather than go for an 'easy A.' GPA is a good factor for a year or two after college, but we want students who are well-rounded beyond that."***  
- Andy Gottlieb, Staffing Consultant at Microsoft

Particularly for startups, you'll also want to use this opportunity to start making the case that your experience is relevant to their brand and culture. How?

- Include your major and any minors or concentrations. If you're passionate about a job in software development but only received a Computer Science minor



alongside your Finance degree, consider leading with your minor and associated coursework. Speaking of which...

- Include any relevant coursework. If you're applying for a Social Media Marketing role, citing your Marketing degree or concentration isn't enough. Pull the relevant threads out of your courses: did you complete any Facebook or Twitter marketing projects? Any social media marketing case studies?

#### IV. Experience

This is where the real magic happens. Regardless of where you've worked and what you did there, now is your opportunity to demonstrate—in limited words—that your experience is relevant and you're the right fit for the job. Tailor, tailor, tailor.

Beyond the usual bullets (jobs and internships), be sure to include...

##### A. Side Projects & Hobbies

- Do you code for fun? Freelance as a writer or programmer? Design logos and websites? Maybe you worked with a professor on a research project or built a robot over the summer? Or tweet for a non-profit on a part-time basis?
- Does your blog or Twitter account have a sizeable following? This carries weight with startups and larger tech companies alike.

##### B. Professional Associations, Student Organizations, & Meetup Groups

- Do they relate to the field you want to work in? Did you hold a leadership role?
  - The Society of Women Engineers (SWE), American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA), on-campus marketing or advertising clubs, and local tech or social media Meetup groups are all great examples.

PRO TIP



Being active in one of these groups provides you an instant upgrade in the eyes of recruiters, not to mention a set of relevant experiences and contacts.

##### C. Volunteer Work

- Do you volunteer at learning centers or tutor elementary or high school students? If it's related to the position you're applying to, like tutoring students in math or computer science, volunteering your web development skills to an organization in need, or contributing your social media savvy to promote a charitable cause, play this up.
- In addition to reinforcing your own knowledge of a subject, volunteering can sometimes substitute for a lack of internship experience.
- It also generally improves your candidacy from a character perspective. Almost every large tech company has charities or non-profits they support, and startups are increasingly weaving their own programs for giving back into the cultural fabric of their companies. Adding people to their teams who actively pursue initiatives like these is an attractive option.



### D. Competitions

- Whether through school or on your own, participating in competitions like design contests and hackathons shows employers that you're already producing great work in the field. Don't be modest: if you won any of these competitions, let employers know. And if you've won using the company's platform or software, DEFINITELY let them know!
- Examples of great competitions to enter include the Core77 Design Awards, those hosted through Behance, the Association for Computing Machinery International Collegiate Programming Contest, and TopCoder contests.

### E. Conferences

- These further reflect your passion for a certain field, desire to know the latest in that industry, and openness to networking with peers and thought-leaders. Have you attended the Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing, AIGA Design Conference, SXSW Interactive, or the 99U Conference? Let employers know!

### A Few Things to Consider:

- If you're a developer, be specific about the languages you've used for previous work. If you're a designer, the same applies to software. Did you use the product or service of the company to which you're applying for your work? Even better.
- If your past experience is in an unrelated field, draw parallels wherever possible to the company to which you're applying. Do you have knowledge of a vertical market or sales landscape the company might be trying to break into? Explain how your unconventional background will add value.

Someone who interned at a multinational bank might decide that the field or environment isn't right for her. Under "Experience," she could describe how she worked closely with a fairly autonomous, ten-person team at the bank to launch a new service and how this project was similar to a startup experience. She could also point to the scale of the audience the bank's service was reaching, which might be on par with the audience of the startup she's applying to.

- Tech companies of all sizes, and especially startups, recognize that a large portion of candidates' experiences occur beyond the classroom. Don't be afraid to turn over all stones here. If you haven't spent the past three summers interning at top tech companies, this is your opportunity to connect the dots and qualify yourself as a candidate. Challenge yourself to link seemingly unrelated work and experience you have with the goals of the company. They'll appreciate that you've thought about their mission and how you can contribute to it.

PRO TIP



If, after reading through this section, you discover that your experience is still a bit too "svelte" for the position to which you're applying, consider the activities, honors, and organizations above as ways to bulk up.



### V. Skills

These are great to include, but always assume that you will be called upon to prove them during an interview. If you were only briefly exposed to an application, programming language, or technique in class, err on the side of caution and either leave it off or specify the level of your familiarity.

Should you feel so inclined to get creative with the format of your résumé, go for it. Recruiters at startups are relatively lax about the format they want to see—as long as the essential information is presented in a clean, digestible way. Larger companies, on the other hand, often have résumé submission forms or processes that may limit the potential for creativity (and it's probably less advisable to stray from the norm here anyway).

So designers, tinker with your layout; developers, cast your websites. The possibilities are truly endless: Tumblr fanatics have harnessed the platform as their way of applying to the company through customized pages, and Spotify has seen résumés via playlist. Applicants to [Amazon](#) and [Shopify](#) have even set up online stores for recruiters at those companies to “purchase” interviews with them!

These alternatives aren't necessary to secure an interview with a company, and they certainly don't guarantee a job. But knowing that your résumé will be read by a human, and one with only 10 seconds to spare, don't be afraid to make them look twice at you among a sea of one-inch margins and Times New Roman.

[Your Name]  
[Street Address]  
[City, ST ZIP Code]  
[Phone and Email]  
[Website/Code Repository/Twitter Handle/Digital Portfolio]

This template suggests the information that companies like Tumblr, Spotify, Behance, Microsoft, Stack Exchange, and Meetup recommend including in your résumé. Click the comment bubbles to the right (🗨️) for further information where noted.

**OBJECTIVE:**

[Example: Bring [Company X] closer to world domination by expanding partnerships and product usage.]

**EDUCATION:**

**[School Name]** [Grad Year, Expected or Actual]  
• [Degree obtained or current major and minor]  
• [Academic awards]  
• [Relevant coursework]

**EXPERIENCE:**

**[Internship]** [Year] – [Year]  
[Company Name, City, ST]  
• Project(s) you owned & skills it required  
• Deliverables  
• Results

**[Conferences/Hackathons/Competitions Attended]** [Year] – [Year]  
[Conference/Hackathon/Competition Name, City, ST]  
• TechCrunch Disrupt  
• Future Insights Live  
• Core77 Design Awards  
• TopCoder  
• Startup Weekend

**[Club/Organization Involvement]** [Year] – [Year]  
[Organization Name, City, ST]  
• Student organization & role  
• Meetup group  
• Examples: Society of Women Engineers, American Institute of Graphic Arts

**[Side Project, Volunteer Work, or Hobby]** [Year] – [Year]  
[Organization Name, City, ST]  
• Freelance work  
• Summer project  
• Social media successes  
• Volunteer work

**SKILLS:**

Coding languages mastered, proficiency in design tools like the Adobe Creative Suite, deep knowledge of Google AdWords or SEOmoz, etc.

**Comment [(W)1]:** If you're on Twitter (and you should be!), include your handle... so long as your content is safe for employer viewing. In the event you have an affinity for four-letter words or trashy gossip, consider setting up a more professionally minded Twitter account as well.

**Comment [(W)2]:** This is an optional section. If you're going to include an objective, use it to connect with the company. Small organizations will appreciate seeing your personality come through in this section to assess whether you fit with their culture and know their brand. Larger companies may be less interested in this section and the risk of including it could outweigh the reward.

**Comment [(W)3]:** Include your GPA if it is competitive (usually, 3.0 or higher). If it isn't, don't sweat it; just use the rest of your résumé to show off your skills and talent.

**Comment [(W)4]:** If the position to which you're applying seems incongruous with your major, be sure to list any relevant coursework. For example, if you didn't major in Computer Science but have taken CS courses, explain this when applying for an engineering role.

**Comment [(W)5]:** These indicate your passion for a specific field, desire to know the latest in that industry, and openness to networking with peers and thought-leaders.

**Comment [(W)6]:** Don't be modest: if you won any competitions, let employers know. And if you won using their software, DEFINITELY let them know!

**Comment [(W)7]:** Being active in one of these provides you an instant upgrade in the eyes of recruiters—not to mention a set of relevant experiences and contacts.

**Comment [(W)8]:** Does your blog or Twitter account have a sizeable following? This carries weight with startups and larger tech companies alike.

**Comment [(W)9]:** In addition to reinforcing your own knowledge of a subject, volunteering can sometimes substitute for a lack of internship experience.

**Comment [(W)10]:** These are great to include, but always assume that you will be called upon to prove them during an interview. When in question about listing a skill, err on the side of caution and either leave it off or specify the level of your familiarity.



## 2.3 Insider Guide to Startup Cover Letters

### Welcome

The tech space is an exciting sector of the economy, and one where job opportunities are numerous. But working here requires particular skill sets and a careful approach to applying.

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We've surveyed our friends at some of the most well-known startups and tech companies out there—including [Tumblr](#), [Spotify](#), [Stack Exchange](#), [Behance](#), [Meetup](#), and [Microsoft](#)—to dial in on the advice you'll need to join one of their teams.

This document is part of an ongoing series. In this section, we'll take a look at how to put your best foot forward with your cover letter. So sit back, relax, and enjoy the beginning of the rest of your career.

### Introduction

Laid-back tech companies are thought to spend more hours each week in office ping-pong tournaments than board meetings. We'll plead the fifth here. But it's this same desire to challenge "business as usual" that may leave you wondering if these organizations follow the standard rules of the job application.

Is there room among the ergonomic chairs, T-shirt-clad employees, and occasional pet roaming the office for the résumé and cover letter of yesteryear?

In short: yes, you'll almost always still need both. This surprises many.

With the tips that follow, distilled from our survey of startups and larger tech companies, you can maximize your shot at a job with one of these fine institutions.

## Your Cover Letter

Like Batman and Robin or fish and chips, the latter half of the résumé-cover letter duo has long been the less heralded. But for startups in particular, it has proven to be a surprisingly effective tool.

Many job applicants are tempted to dismiss it entirely, especially when applying to tech companies with lax environments, thinking, "What good will a formal cover letter do in getting me a job at the next Facebook?"

As it turns out, a strong cover letter offers you a greater opportunity to flag down a recruiter's attention than you might expect. Tumblr's Director of Recruiting, Sean McDermott, says that he'll "look twice" at any candidate who submits a cover letter, noting that it can sometimes be the contents of this one item that qualify a candidate for the position or company. Meetup's Team Development Lead, Erin Dertouzos, echoes the sentiment:

***"You might not quite have the experience we're looking for, but a really phenomenal cover letter will get you a phone call... Not submitting a cover letter is doing yourself a huge disservice."***

At a large tech company like Microsoft, however, their online application process won't let you submit a cover letter. This makes sense given the volume of applicants the company receives and how established their brand is. "Recruiters [here] know what they're looking for," adds Andy Gottlieb, a Staffing Consultant at Microsoft.

Realizing that the cover letter is a potentially powerful offering on your part, let's dive into the dos and don'ts of an effective one for startups:

### Do:

- I. Deeply connect with the startup's brand.
  - Large companies often take it for granted that you know whom they are and what they do. Startups, on the other hand, don't have this luxury. With limited positions, payrolls, and time, they need to be certain that applicants are the right cultural fit and familiar with their brand and its mission. So if you're applying to Tumblr or Spotify, for example, tell them how you use their service and the role it plays in your life.
  - Jeanine Wade, Spotify's U.S. Business Recruiting Team Lead, elaborates that even if your past experience doesn't portray a direct connection to the company, there are ways to accomplish this by switching from professional to personal. If you are, in fact, applying to Spotify, but your background is in finance, you could note the last three or five concerts you attended to demonstrate your passion for music.

II. Show the company you *really* know them.

- Tumblr's McDermott explains that they want people who are truly focused on Tumblr and not applying to every job out there. Prove to the recruiter that you are genuinely passionate about working for *their* company by noting any product features you would add or change and demonstrating how your skill set fits directly into the company's future.
- Dertouzos recommends exploring Meetup's website to get a thorough understanding of the company. Not only will you avoid a mistake that many make (referring to Meetup as a dating website), but you'll learn that a cover letter featuring business jargon and a focus on profits will prove to be a cultural mismatch.

III. Connect your previous experiences to the company's culture and structure.

- If your only recent work experience was at an international publishing company, you'll want to explain what makes this experience relevant to why you're applying to a fifty-person startup. Did you work on a small team that might have felt like a startup environment, or did you learn more about the type of company that you want to work at moving forward?

IV. Highlight your side projects if you lack full-time experience in the field.

- These can include writing code, designing websites, producing mock marketing campaigns, or participating in hackathons. Anything that demonstrates the relevant skills you possess is fair game.

V. Tell your story.

- Alex Krug, Vice President at Behance, stresses the importance of telling a story with your cover letter:

***"I see where you went to school; I see the experience you've had; but tell me a story about how these dots [on your résumé] all come together."***

If you've had diverse work, internship, or extracurricular experiences, why is that? Is there a common theme they all share? Demonstrate how these have prepared you for the role you're applying to or for the multidisciplinary tasks common of work at startups.

- When telling your story, Krug recommends that you showcase what you're passionate about and how you've pursued it:

***“We’ve always hired based on past initiative as an indicator for future success [...] Whatever you were passionate about, if you involved yourself in a leadership role, we think that translates to how people acclimate themselves at companies.”***

So whether your story has followed a linear path or taken some detours along the way, explain your motivations and accomplishments at each step to demonstrate your character and aptitude.

#### **Don't:**

- Use a cut-and-paste cover letter that blandly says you're smart, accomplished, and want a job at the company. This won't help you stand out and casts you in a negative light.
- Address your résumé “Dear Sir/Madam” or “To Whom It May Concern.” If, after endless searching, you're still unsure to whom your cover letter should be addressed, go with “To the [startup X] recruiting team” and then make the rest of your cover letter highly personalized according to the “Dos” above.
- Be *too* casual. Yes, startups do know their way around a ping-pong table, but it's a turnoff for recruiters when applicants stray from being professional.
- Forget to spell-check. As is the case with any company, you're toast if you make a spelling error.

Finally, a caveat: the weight placed upon a cover letter DOES vary by skill set. Software developers and designers, as well as the recruiters who evaluate them, are increasingly using GitHub, Stack Overflow, and online portfolios like Behance as complements to the résumé. So while a well-written cover letter is an excellent opportunity for you to connect with the startup you're applying to, it's slightly less critical for candidates in these fields. For everyone else, though, “it's a must,” says Alison Sperling at Stack Exchange.