

The Ultimate Resume Building Guide

Understanding how to use your FSD experience to your benefit during your job search and the inevitable interview process is often unclear. This guide has been created to help you maximize and articulate your FSD experience so that potential employers, who may not fully comprehend the value of an international internship, can understand how this experience sets you apart from your contemporaries.

Some resources that you may want to have at hand as you begin to use this handbook are:

- Your Blog or Journal
- Pictures of your time in country
- Your grant proposal (if applicable)
- Your FSD Confirmation Letter

DEFINING YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The first step to being able to use your FSD experience on your resume is to understand and define what you have gained from your internship and time abroad. This process of reflection can be difficult for some, so we have given you an easy method to begin to understand and digest some of the changes and accomplishments that you have achieved in the past months.

Begin by reading over your journal, Blog, or even just emails that you have written to friends and family during your internship. This process is meant to refresh you on some of the project work that you did in country and some of your experiences. As you read through these materials and others try to:

- Make a list of what you would consider your accomplishments during your internship. It sometimes helps to not limit yourself to the tangible, like results of your project for the organization; allow for intangible experiences like challenges that you encountered in the field and how you dealt with them. This may not seem like a huge accomplishment, but the ability to overcome problems you face is something that employers look for and something of which you should definitely be proud. Try and narrow them down to what you consider the three which you are most proud.
- Make a list of what you consider some changes in perspective, understanding of international events, values, your future plans, or even (if you have been back for sometime) changes in your life.
- Look over the attached list of Interpersonal Skills that are common outcomes of international experiences and highly desirable to employers. Which of these did you develop or enhance through your internship? Jot down any that apply to you, and then pick several that you think will be of greatest interest to employers. Be ready to tie them into a story which will demonstrate how you used them during your internship.

Once you have a list of the your accomplishments and you have selected three, draw a table like the one below, this will help you fully understand what each of these accomplishments entails and how you will be able to use them both on your resume and in an interview.

In column 1 list the three accomplishments that you have selected, being sure to note the inherent challenge that you overcame.

In column 2 you will be listing the skills you developed or applied to achieve this accomplishment. These will be tangible skills that aided you or that you picked up by dealing with your project or challenge. For example, if you created a database then the skills you used or picked up may have been knowledge of a certain software or information gathering techniques.

In column 3 you will be listing some personal qualities that you demonstrated (this is where it is often helpful to consider some of the changes that you have gone through or the list of interpersonal skills).

To better understand exactly what is meant by this we have provided an example in the first row of the model.

ACCOMPLISHMENT	SKILLS	QUALITIES
Created a program to address the issue of rampant diabetes in Villa Elisa.	Completed a needs assessment to assess how best to implement project, developed sustainable and economic materials for distribution, gained increased comfort in presenting information in a foreign language, learned grant writing skills which I used to fund my project	Organization of materials and events, clear written and oral communication skills, creativity, persistence in applying for funding, ability to work in multicultural groups, improved Spanish skills and confidence in language,

One last tool that might help you in synthesizing your experiences is the website [What's Up With Culture](#), which provides a short module on re-entry, outcome assessment, and communicating your skills to employers.

The Application Process

Once you have completed the chart, it is time to consider how you will work these accomplishments, skills and qualities into your resume and cover letters when applying for jobs. Depending on the style of both your cover letter and resume, how and where you choose to discuss these accomplishments will vary.

A good rule of thumb is to read over the job listing and consider what skills the employer is looking for, then adapt your cover letter and resume so that it speaks directly to these skills and how your experience reflects them. Additionally, consider how you are going to explain these accomplishments and skills to employers. It's helpful to always have a short story ready about what you accomplished and how it will be relevant to the job for which you are applying. (For more information on updating your resume or writing a cover letter, go to the [Resume Building Techniques](#) section under the AlumniConnect [Job Resources Center](#)¹.)

Once you have finally synthesized your experiences into job applicable skills, thought of pertinent stories that demonstrate that you possess these skills, and crafted a professional resume, it's time to start the inevitable job search. In the [Finding a Job](#) section of our website we have a plethora of information on how to begin your job search and some links to useful articles that might interest you. We also have a multitude of links to different job posting sites and relevant national or international opportunities which we have divided into 10 different categories under [Job Postings](#). Lastly, we highly recommend that you check out the [Networking](#) section of AlumniConnect as it provides some poignant information on how to utilize the networks (including the [LinkedIn Group](#) of FSD Alumni) to which you already belong.

When you are finally ready to apply to a position, don't forget to attach your **confirmation letter** (and if you don't have one you can request one by emailing: alumni@fsdinternational.org). This letter not only offers a succinct description of what FSD does, it also provides the employer with a synopsis of your time in the field, setting you apart from other candidates. This letter is not, however, a letter of recommendation. The next section will discuss how to get appropriate letters of recommendation.

¹ <http://www.fsdinternational.org/alumni/jobs>

Letters of Recommendation

Some jobs listings (and practically all universities you apply to) will request letters of recommendation from a previous teacher, employer, or someone who knows you well in the academic or work environment. Obtaining these letters can be a difficult process, but we have tried to simplify it so that you have a better way of demarcating a good candidate for a reference.

Just as when you applied to the FSD program you probably began by thinking about who knows you best. A great first step is to make a list of the people who you would be comfortable asking for a recommendation and the context from which you know them. Great people from your time in the field would be your supervisor at your organization, someone from the site team whom you have built a personal relationship with, perhaps even an advisor who helped you through the process. Having compiled a list it is helpful to go through and consider which of these potential recommenders knows you and your capabilities the best, it should be personal.

Once you have selected two to three recommenders a few good ideas to ensure they are able to write a personal letter are:

- Include your resume and potentially the job listing you are applying for
- Include a small description on your professional goals and goal of the letter
- A bulleted summary of any work or highlights of activities that the recommender may want to focus on (this is a helpful refresher for them)
- Give them the attached How to Write a Reference Letter document, many people find it helpful, especially when writing one for the first time
- Give the recommender at least two weeks to complete the letter

Don't be shy in telling them about your goal for the letter and what would be helpful that they focus on. A reference letter is a sales letter that is intended to sell you. Now is the time to point out your accomplishments!

ATTACHMENT 1

List of Interpersonal Skills²

The following list delineates more precisely what the general term “interpersonal skills” means by giving you more specific characteristics. Additionally, the following list of qualities are common outcomes of international experiences and highly desirable to employers.

Read through the list and jot down any that apply to you, then pick several that you think will be of greatest interest to employers. Be ready with a story that demonstrates how you used them during your international internship.

- Perseverance
- Flexibility
- Independence
- Self-reliance
- Motivation
- Sense of curiosity
- Ability to "fit in" to new groups
- Ability to work in a multicultural group
- Second (or more) language ability
- Ability to work in a multilingual environment
- Ability to solve problems
- Demonstrated initiative
- Tolerance for stress
- Adaptability without judgment
- Negotiation skills
- Enhanced listening skills
- Sensitivity to cultural context
- Able to establish rapport quickly
- Time management skills
- Ability to cope with difficulty and rejection
- Accept responsibility for actions
- Clear written and oral communication skills
- Can communicate across barriers
- Possess an understanding of culture's complexity
- Respect for difference and diversity
- Demonstrate self-confidence/self knowledge

² Adapted from the “What’s Up With Culture” website

ATTACHMENT 2

How to write a Reference Letter³

Below you will find some general guidelines (in no specific order) to assist you in writing a letter of recommendation. You can also access help through links in FSD's [Job Resources Center](#) under the Alumni section of their website:

Questions to Consider:

- Explain how you know the applicant and how long you have known him/her.
- In what respect is this person exceptional to others you have known with a similar background? List the applicant's exceptional qualities and skills, especially those that are related to the applicant's field of interest or job search. Give specific examples to back up what you have written.
- Refer to the requester's competency in a specific field and/or prior experience, organizational and communication skills, academic or other achievements, interaction with others, sound judgment, reliability, analytical ability, etc.
- Omit weaknesses unless you can show how they have become a positive change. If you can't write a positive letter of reference, you should diplomatically decline when you are first approached.
- State your own qualifications. Why should the reader be impressed with your reference letter?
- Emphasize key points that you want the reader to take note of on the resume or application. Be sure to elaborate meaningfully; don't simply restate what he/she has already written.
- Unless it is absolutely relevant, do not refer (either in a direct or implied reference) to the applicant's race, religion, national origin, age, disability, gender, or marital status.
- Don't be too brief, but be succinct and make every word count. Generally speaking, a letter of reference for employment should be one page; a letter of reference for school admission should be one to two pages.
- List your own contact information if you are willing to receive follow-up correspondence or answer questions.
- Make the ending strong without overdoing it. Undo praise can be viewed as biased or insincere.
- Proofread! The letter of reference represents both you and the applicant.

³ Adapted from "Write Express" website (<http://www.writeexpress.com/reference-letter.html>)

Here are some additional things to keep in mind:

- **Appearance.** Type your reference letter. Your reference letter casts a reflection on both you and the candidate. Appearance may even determine if it will be read or not. Print the letter on good quality ink-jet paper.
- **Specifics.** Concentrate on several different aspects of the person. Be specific when you refer to his/her skills, attitude, personal attributes, contributions, performance, growth, etc. during the time period you have known the candidate.
- **Word usage.**
 - Be careful with "power words"! Some words that seem harmless in every day conversation can carry both positive and negative connotations when written and presented to a prospective employer. Here are a few positive adjectives: *honest, articulate, effective, sophisticated, intelligent, observant, significant, expressive, creative, efficient, cooperative, imaginative, dependable, reliable, mature, and innovative.*
 - Avoid adjectives and adverbs that carry a mediocre connotation such as: *nice, good, fair, fairly, adequate, reasonable, decent, and satisfactory.*
- **Attributes.** The National Association of Colleges and Employers compiled the following list of attributes. They can be exceptional topics to address as you describe the candidate:
 - ability to communicate
 - intelligence
 - self-confidence
 - willingness to accept responsibility
 - initiative
 - leadership
 - energy level
 - imagination
 - flexibility
 - interpersonal skills
 - self-knowledge
 - ability to handle conflict
 - goal achievement
 - competitiveness
 - appropriate vocational skills
 - direction
- **Intangible qualities.** The ASCUS Annual listed the following intangible qualities as important when evaluating teaching candidates--a good list to consider for other vocations as well:
 - empathy
 - native intelligence
 - a divergent, abstract thinking style
 - a high level of commitment
 - the ability to be a "self-starter"
 - a high energy level
 - the recognition that excellence is a journey, not a destination
 - the potential ability to lead