

Episode Two: Recent and Relevant – How to perfectly tailor your résumé, CV, and cover letter (Intro Music)

This is the Institute for Music Leadership

Stephen: Welcome to episode 2 of “Create. Inspire. Lead.” – a podcast from Eastman School of Music’s IML Office. I’m Stephen Biegner. And today, we’re going to talk about something we all know that we should have, but universally seem to hate doing, or maybe we don’t know how to do it, or, only do it once every few years. I’m talking about your résumé, and maybe worse, your cover letter. Why do these documents seem to be the bane of everyone’s existence? I mean, I don’t think I’m alone here. I’ve never had a friend say, “Oh, great! I get to update my résumé” or “Man, I can’t wait to work on this cover letter.” I’m sure there are people out there – and listen, as someone who comes from a family of list-makers, there is something so appealing about writing everything out, adding bullets, having that historical record, but I can’t help but feel this overwhelming urge to do – anything else. I put the “Pro” in procrastination; I feel like the Michael Jordan of doing anything else and putting it off until the last minute. And while I’m sure that reference probably ages me, I am *not* sure why there seems to be this universal dread about putting these two very important documents together. Oh – and of course, there are CVs. I don’t think I need one, but I do think I would consider changing careers if someone ever asked for one.

Or at least, I used to.

So, why is there this overall reticence to work on and share these documents. I mean – if someone asked to see my materials right now, I know I would turn beet red, and make some excuse about how I have to find where I put them on Google Drive or something...

Blaire: But nonetheless, like I make them do an activity where they switch. And then like talk about things. Right? And you can just see, like, the blood draining from them. And I’m just like, point. Right? If you’re embarrassed to send it to the person next to you, why the heck would you actually apply with this?

Stephen: That is another good point from our friend Dr. Blaire Koerner, the Eastman Career Advisor. She’s talking about an exercise she does with participants in the Eastman Leadership Academy where she makes participants send her their résumés in advance; they think they’re safe. And then, she makes them switch with their colleagues, sometimes complete strangers! It’s cruel, I know. But, it is effective.

Blaire is back to talk with me about all things résumé, cover letter, CV – what’s the difference, how many do you need, what makes a good one, what makes a bad one? Now, Blaire and I had planned to talk for about 25 minutes and we ended up talking for almost an hour and a half. Now – don’t worry – you won’t have to listen to 90 minutes of scintillating résumé talk. I know that would be too hot to handle. But, that’s just to say, once you start to scratch the surface, you realize, there’s a lot more underneath. And it’s definitely one of those times where the more you know about this topic, the easier it can actually make your life.

As I chatted with Blaire, the deeper we got into it, the more it reminded me of slow practice – that is, if there’s a complicated passage to play or sing, you’re not going to nail it the first time, nor will you if you charge through it at breakneck speed 40,000 more times. But, if you break it down, just tap the rhythm, solfege it, play it slowly, then play it slowly with all the notes even, then with all the notes a little inegal, and on and on, suddenly you’ve got it. If you can play it slow, you can play it fast.

So, let’s start off real slow. The first thing I asked Blaire was, who needs a résumé, and how many do you need anyway?

Blaire: So, everyone needs a resume. Let's be honest. We're all going to apply to a job, a competition, an audition - in particular in the music field, obviously. They're used for a lot of different reasons. Even school applications. So, we always need one.

Now, how many? Well, that depends on your variety of skill sets. So, if you as a musician are going to be performing, you're going to performance résumé to do the auditions and the competitions and the festivals. If you're also looking for an on-campus job, you're going to be looking at an administrative potentially résumé that may talk about how you worked as a lifeguard or you've gone ushering or you were a secretary at a local law firm, et cetera. So that combines a variety of different skills that are a little bit more office work, or non-music based in the sense of playing an instrument. It could also be research, et cetera. So if you are someone who is looking for a variety jobs, if you're also interested in teaching, you’re gonna have different resumes for each of these types of areas. And then of course, with every job that you apply, you have to tweak said résumé to match that job as best as you possibly can, so you have the best shot of getting said job.

Stephen: Now, I do still perform a little bit here and there. It’s usually small-scale things – or some bigger things, I guess – but it’s typically with people I know, or groups I’ve worked with before. Most of what I do now is administrative, so I really only have one type of résumé. I do update any artistic endeavors as they happen because often when I’ve applied to arts organizations, it’s been helpful for them to see both my admin skills and my artistic skills.

But, so many musicians nowadays are so multifaceted – I mean, think about what you maybe do – you might play in an orchestra, you have a chamber group, you have solo work, you might teach, you make your own reeds or mallets and sell them online, you might conduct, you might do all the contract negotiation or the website design for yourself or group – and some of that can be combined into one thing, but those are at least a couple different types of résumés. So, do you really have to tailor each one, or can you have a catch-all résumé you send out?

Blaire: My analogy is it's, it's like - it's going on a first date. OK. So when the job market is open and they say, OK, we are looking for somebody. Here is somebody that we're interested in and they describe their responsibilities and duties and all these things, that this is what the person I

am interested in. And they put themselves out there kind of like putting themselves in some sort of dating app. You see this and go, you know what? I like this organization. I like this job. I think I'm a good fit. And now I need to prove it. So, whenever you are applying for a position, the final step is reviewing what that job in particular is looking for and then tailoring and highlighting things that are most relevant.

Stephen: This is where Blaire and I go into having a résumé draft – something I'd never thought of. Each time I edited my résumé in the past was usually when I was applying for a new job, and so I'd be making all of my updates at once. But, in reality, you want to have a draft that you're updating as things are happening, that has everything on it. Now, I said I came from a family of list makers – and, I love a good list. For example, I used to play in a band with my cousin when I was younger, and we actually put all of our songs into an Excel spreadsheet so that when we had to make a set-list, we could just make a new list from the master Excel sheet. Super rock and roll – I know, but this runs deep. So, you can imagine how I felt when Blaire said this:

Blaire: I 100 percent think that you should have a running list. Now, I call it, you know, the running list because I call it the research. Right. So whenever you apply for a job, you have to research the job and you have to research yourself, you know, remembering, oh, what masterclass did I attend a few months ago, or what was the repertoire I played on my last recital? And sometimes it just bolts - your mind draws a blank. So especially as things go flying by in the school years and do so many different things, have a running list. It doesn't have to be in absolute detail. It could just be a place where you jot things down. And then later, when you have more time, you can start dishing things out and a little bit more descriptions; and, then you drag and drop the appropriate things, because that makes a lot of sense, because that is still who you are. Nothing about you has changed. It's just what you are prioritizing and what you find the most relevant for the position that you're applying for.

Stephen: A prime example Blaire gave was of a performance résumé. Let's say you're auditioning for an orchestra position – yes, you would need a résumé first – so, you should always lead off with your education. After that – of course – list your orchestral experience. It seems obvious, right? But so many people forget to do this, or they list chamber rep or solo experience first. The flip side is when those people apply for a military band or a chamber gig, and they use their orchestra-first résumé. Instead, for each different position, you want to make sure you're highlighting the relevant experience.

Blaire: So even from a performance résumé, you're going to want to tailor it a little bit more to the job. Outside of performance résumés, when you have a teaching, a regular résumé, an administrative, whatever it may be, you will end up having descriptions and bullets describing your responsibility. And those, those descriptions, those skills, those responsibilities of the outcomes are all things that the duties of the potential job will be highlighting. And you want to make sure you parallel as much language as possible. So, you show that not only have you read their description, but you know exactly what they're looking for, and you have exactly what they are requiring.

Stephen: Paralleling is important, and there are two ways you can do this. One way is to literally copy some of the language you might see in a job posting. So, like, if a job was looking for a motivated, self-starter excited to learn new skills, you might put that you're "a motivated, self-starter, excited to learn new skills." Or if the job wants someone proficient in Excel, don't just put "Knows Excel" or "familiar with Excel" – actually put "Proficient in Excel." As long as it's true – and we'll get to that later. But the other way you can parallel is just by giving yourself the benefit of the doubt.

Blaire: So, for instance, a lot of people - a prime example, if someone says that they worked at like a front desk or something, they usually say like, file papers, answer phones. You know, something like that. And whenever you see a job description, they're most likely not going to say your job is to answer phones, but your job would be to provide customer service. So, when you instead of say, I answer phones, you provided customer service over the phone, via email, and in person to answer ticket questions, donors, et cetera, et cetera. And you go on. But providing that customer service is a real skill. It's the being friendly and listening and providing whatever that customer's wanting - information, a service, a result and then moving forward with that. So that is a prime example I see all the time. I answer phones. No, you provide customer service. Think of it in that light.

Stephen: Now, it's important to remember that you should only parallel to a point. I think there's sort of a joke about applying certain buzzwords or phrases to punch up your résumé to a point where it actually changes what you're doing. Like, the example I gave Blaire was, say you worked stocking shelves in a grocery store. It might sound nice to punch up your résumé to say you were a "Food display architect." However:

Blaire: First and foremost is always be truthful. Right. So, if they keep highlighting a skill set and you don't have it, then you should be questioning if you should be applying in the first place. Right? And if you don't have it, then maybe you should look elsewhere to try to get that skill set. Whether that's training yourself, online materials, volunteering, etc. to then get that skill set to be able put that on there. And then the other thing is I often find that - I don't see too many people that go overboard with the descriptions as your food architecture, for instance, I'm sure I can get a few creative people out there. I actually see people on the opposite end where they actually belittle or downplay their role or their job. And often I have a conversation and I pull out the most amazing things that I learn from what they do.

So, one of the things I often ask students to do is - and alumni, as well - is think of it from all angles. So sometimes people just list the responsibilities. That's fine. But also think about how long were you there? So, when you list your time frames. OK. Sure. You might be in there for summer, but I don't know if you were there full time. I don't know if you're there three hours a week. So that can be a big change. Like being a full-time intern and doing something full time over the summer is a really awesome opportunity, so definitely detail that out.

Stephen: You can also mention things like whether you were part of team or working independently; how frequently did you meet with supervisors; did you prepare or give any presentations; did you receive criticism and then grow and improve from that feedback?

Blaire: Am I able to be organized, or am I a project person, or am I more of a research person? Or am I more of a task person? Or you just give me the duties and I do them, but I don't want anything creative out of the box. You know, there's a lot of different skills that these jobs will ask for. And until you self-assess, you won't always necessarily see the direct connections. So, take that time.

Stephen: All of this self-assessment is a great thing to do probably regardless, but one of the hardest things about putting together a perfectly-tailored résumé is knowing what exactly you should put on it. And we talked a little bit about making sure to, say, put your orchestral experience toward top of a résumé for an orchestral job, for example, but which experiences do you list? How many? What if you did 20 different jobs and felt like you basically ran the last company you worked at? What makes the cut?

Blaire: Yes. Deciding what goes on, it is one of the hardest but also most important thing that you will need to learn. So, rule of thumb, there are different perspectives on this. I will say that especially as a student, whatever you have on your résumé, whatever experience, projects, volunteer work, etc. Once you are starting to complete or finish a undergraduate degree, you should no longer have anything from your high school. That's basically three and half four years. And then once you get into your graduate and finish your graduate, you don't want to have anything less than maybe your senior year of undergraduate. After that, things get a little bit more flexible. But the reason for that is having a student job or having an internship or having a project in an undergraduate degree program versus potentially graduate versus potentially a professional are at very different levels. So, yes, it is important to find the things that are relevant.

My two things are: Is it recent and is it relevant? if it hits both? It's absolutely on there. If it hits one, then you start thinking about it. OK. Cool. Does it belong in this category? Great. It doesn't hit either. Then off it goes.

Stephen: This is a really tricky thing. Like, what if you had this amazing opportunity, but it's like 7 or 8 years old? Or, maybe you've decided to go back to grad school, so there's this hiccup in your work experience. Or, for me – I have this weird trajectory on my résumé – I had been the assistant director of admissions at the Manhattan School of Music but I left to work part-time in the music department at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine because my wife and I had decided that I would be the stay-at-home parent for our son when he was born. So, sometimes you may need to have these gaps, or pull from an experience you had that was several years ago. But I found it really helpful to have Blaire's rule of thumb:

Blaire: Is it recent and is it relevant?

Stephen: But there are also things you may not think to put on your résumé because they don't seem like traditional work experience.

Blaire: And the other thing too is, I want to highlight that being paid for something is obviously what we all want to do and experience. But being paid for something does not always get priority. So if you have an experience that's super relevant, but you did it as a freelancer, that you kind of just ran your own business or, you know, started your own chamber ensemble or, you know, you published your own book or etude or something along those lines. But it's your own baby. It's your own project. That can go on your résumé. And if that's super relevant, the position that you're applying for rate, put it on there.

Stephen: Ok. So, there's a lot to consider when trying to figure out what goes on your résumé, and we haven't even gotten into certain aspects of performance résumés – like, what are some must-haves? Now, Blaire is a bassoonist, so she had given some bassoon examples:

Blaire: if you got into this orchestra, if you were principal or not, or if you played a particular solo that is very popular for your instrument. I'm a bassoonist, so if I played *Marriage of Figaro*, that's definitely going to be on there. If I play *Scheherazade*, that's also gonna be on there.

Stephen: We'll get into a little more of that later, but I'm sure you can think of some examples for your own instrument. But, throughout our conversation, Blaire kept mentioning some other musts for résumés. Like, she kept mentioning skills.

Blaire: I keep mentioning skills.

Stephen: I told you. So, she mentioned soft skills which are things you'll weave into other areas of your résumé, like whether you're communicative, organized, have any leadership skills or managerial skills. But, there's a separate section where you can list your hard skills.

Blaire: So, in this case, it could be languages specifically if you're going to be doing anything with translations or anything along those lines. If you have any type of computer skills and this could be something as simple as are you a Mac or PC person; can you do Google suite; Microsoft Office? You'd be surprised how many people cannot use Microsoft Office. I want to highlight that. So, if you can use it at all. Put it down. Have you done Canva design? Have we done InDesign? Have you done PowerPoint or Photoshop? Have you done a final cut pro?

Stephen: Even if you think it's super basic, put it down. One thing I've started sneaking into my résumé if I can, is when I mention Microsoft Excel, I mention pivot tables. Now – disclaimer – everything I know about Excel has come from Googling it or watching YouTube videos on how to do something. Like, I'll be working on something and think "Is there a faster way to do this?" And usually there is. So – a pivot table basically takes a whole bunch of raw data and lets you quickly sort it and highlight important aspects. And to do it, you literally just highlight all the data, click a button, and then click a couple check-boxes saying where you want that data to go. It's so easy, but when people hear you can do a pivot table, they go nuts. Like, they look at you

like you told them you were the founder of Google. And it's so easy to do, and seems so easy to leave it off your résumé because, who cares – but people do care. And that thing that you're good at might make you that missing puzzle-piece in an organization's skillset.

So, once you've figured out how to tailor a specific résumé and made decisions about what soft and hard skills you're going to list, there's the question of how it should look. And if you open up Word, or Google Docs, or even do a quick search online, you can find a whole bunch of résumé templates at your disposal.

Blaire: OK. So, referencing on Google's Suite, on Microsoft, on Pages even - there are now templates out there for résumés. Don't get seduced by the prettiness of them. My first and - the first thing is content. Content. Content. Content. Right? So as much as it would be fun to make it pretty, pretty doesn't necess- that won't get you the job - just flat out, it won't.

So first, take a step back. It may be frustrating, but write everything down and format it yourself. OK. And this may take some time, and may not be the most fun thing in the world, but take some time to really think about the ordering, the categories, what you want to highlight, etc. Even play around with some fonts – that's perfectly fine – as long as it's legible and it's not smaller than eleven point - because you still want to feel like actually not used by magnifying glass, and you want it to be easy to follow.

Stephen: Ok. Content is king. So, how should you format it?

Blaire: That format should be consistent. It could be a different font. It could be bolder. It could be all capitals. There could be a line under. There is still flexibility there. But then that has to be different than the title of the organization. And the title of the organization needs probably to be different looking than what your title was.

And then you have the bullets which are indented, by the way, don't have them left facing. So that way it reads much more fluidly. I can go from category to category without any question. I can go from job to job without any question. And I know exactly how to follow it.

Stephen: In my old position in admissions, we did ask people to submit a résumé as part of their application. There were some that were just a wall of text. Everything was the same font, same size, all along the left-hand side of the page – they were impossible to read. But, I'd also see résumés that had fancy icons, and little swooshes instead of bullet points, crazy little blocks of short text, or keywords – and while these maybe looked aesthetically pleasing, they were sometimes just as impossible to read. So, make sure your categories, jobs, titles, and bullet points are clear, clean, and consistent. One place you can get creative though that won't affect the content is in your header.

Blaire: So that's a part of your brand. So, if that's where you want to put a different font in, or even a slightly different color - and I'm not saying line green - I'm saying maybe like a dark color. Or even better yet, I've seen people put like a color block at the top and then their name on top

of the blocks so they have like a baby blue light. You know, maybe opaque with their name and contact information there. And then it's just a straight outline from there on forward.

Stephen: So, once you've figured out what your branding looks like, what else goes at the top?

Blaire: The basics is your name, phone number and email. Depending on what you're applying for, if you're a performer and you want to demonstrate some stuff, you might want to put down a Web site. If you're a teacher and maybe you have a book that you have for sale, an etude thing or some sort of, you know, cool philosophy or webinar or something like that, you also want to put like a YouTube link or something up there as long as a shorter version of the YouTube series, if you want to highlight. That's fine too.

I would avoid social media unless it's something that you are using *only* for professional reasons. But yes. Avoid addresses.

Stephen: Depending on the type of résumé you're putting together, the formatting may vary – for example, a performance résumé probably doesn't need bullet points for each performance that you list – but the general principles of simplicity and clarity apply across the board. Make sure that whoever is reading your résumé can quickly get the gist and find what they need. In some cases, a cluttered, wordy résumé could mean that a hiring manager just decides to skip yours.

Blaire and I also got in weeds about a whole bunch of specific topics about specific types of résumés. Honestly, it can all get so specific that if you have questions about your instrument or career goal, the best thing you could do is make an appointment with Blaire to go over your specific concerns. Her email and a link to create an appointment through Handshake will be in the show notes.

I will share one last thing Blaire mentioned specifically about performance résumés because I've heard people ask about this a lot myself, and I think it's important to know.

Blaire: You can also put down when you were in the semifinals or finalist for an audition as well, because that shows that you've actually moved your way up the ranks and you got past the first few rounds. That's amazing. If you didn't win it, that's fine. But you at least give yourself credit for going as far as you did.

Stephen: So, yes. You can list those times you made it to a final. Like Blaire said – Give yourself credit. And ultimately, putting together a résumé – sure there are some finer points, and strategies, and tailoring you can and should do – but it's sort of all about giving yourself credit for what you've done. To go back to Blaire's dating analogy – you wouldn't go on a first date and downplay yourself, or hide your best features or traits, or you probably wouldn't get a second date.

So, at this point, I felt like I had a better handle on what makes a good résumé and I thought Blaire offered some great advice for making the whole process of assembling and tailoring each type of résumé I'd need easier and less time-consuming than if I only ever tried to update it once every five years or whatever I'd been doing. But, I still wondered about the difference between a résumé and a CV. Did I need one? Was it wildly different from a résumé?

Blaire: Great. Great question. I love this. OK. So. A CV, basically there's two main things that differ in a CV from a resume. So, first, well, CV is called a curriculum vitae. The first thing that's different in a resume is length. It is much longer. I usually push for or suggest around eight pages. Now I have seen it as –

Stephen: As a minimum or...?

Blaire: As a good place to be.

Stephen: A good place to be...

Blaire: Yes, exactly. I've seen it as small as five and I seen it as large as twenty.

Stephen: So, honestly, for me, that was shorter than I'd expected. I know I sound shocked at 8 pages, but, it's shocked in the opposite direction. Curriculum vitae translates to "course of life" and so for some reason, I had it in my head that a CV was this big, massive document that contained everything about you. It would be everything you'd done, believed in, written, researched. I pictured a book – something bound. I dunno. But, Blaire set me straight.

Blaire: OK. So yes, teaching philosophy, different document altogether. Diversity statement and different docketing altogether. Sample syllabus, different document all together. So, all that stuff is as a separate thing, you would have to submit potentially for a job application, but not within your CV.

Stephen: So, a CV is essentially a more detailed résumé. So, what should it look like, and who needs one?

Blaire: I am a believer that I would still bulletize even in the CV, because let's be honest, I can skim through bullets a lot faster than I can skim through a paragraph. You can lead with really strong verbs that really intrigue me to want to reach further. Putting them into paragraph form makes it feel like it's being weighed down.

And then paragraph for me, it just it gets so hard to read like half a page paragraphs, and that way it's also harder to edit. So, if you're going to tweak something and re-shift it around, then you have to find the end of the sentence and you might accidentally copy the wrong sentence.

And I'm just like, no, no. So, this way if you're bulletizing, you can bulletize and preference the things that they've mentioned in their job description by shifting those most important things up.

Stephen: Again, Blaire is emphasizing clarity and simplicity, and even paralleling which we talked about earlier. So, similar principles apply.

Blaire: A CV is essentially only used for two types of positions, specifically in the music industry. One is a faculty position at a college, or a higher education institution. So, if you're applying for a position at higher ed, sometimes even adjunct. By the way, that requires a CV. I'll get into the reasons behind that in a little while. But yes, CV for absolutely for a higher education faculty position. The second, and I alluded to this earlier, is the higher-level administrative position. This is the dean of a school. A chair of a department. An artistic director of an orchestra. A music director of a very large church organization. A, you know, director of a choir. A CEO or an executive director of a nonprofit organization, etc. OK. The reasoning behind this is the reason that so long is because they're really looking for usually a breadth and depth. So, they want you to have a boatload more skills and be more specialized. Right. Contradictory. Right?

Stephen: This does seem contradictory, but it also makes sense. If you're at a higher level, you may need to have certain artistic chops and administrative chops. Like, the example Blaire gave in our conversation was for a faculty position. If you're looking to teach in, say, the musicology department – you'll need to show you are an expert in that field, show you've done research, presented at conferences, and that you're continuing to pursue professional development opportunities. But also, you may be asked to mentor or advise students, keep track of the musicology department budget, run meetings, be on committees, go to recruitment fairs. You need to show those skills as well. So, it's both broad and narrow. And you probably need more space to get into these things than on a résumé. And that's because:

Blaire: So, the longest you will ever have for a résumé is two pages. Now it's a front to back type of situation. You can print it off on one sheet. One back and front and then you're good to go.

Stephen: I definitely broke this rule. And while I obviously still got hired to this job, it's a good rule of thumb to aim for two pages. Or in some cases – if you're younger and have less experience – one page is recommended. And for other things – performance résumés for example – it should *only* be one page.

So – a CV can also get really specific, and I really just wanted to touch on the primary differences. The more you know, right? But one thing we all have to do, whether it's with a résumé or a CV, is submit a cover letter. And these also get very specific, but in a different way. Essentially, each cover letter should have a similar formula, sort of across the board. The specificity comes with which job you're submitting it to. There's no such thing as a blanket cover letter. Each one is crafted specifically for each different job you're applying to. So, while

you may have a résumé that can fit for a couple of different similar positions, your cover letter for each of these will be different.

So, let's dig in. First, what is a cover letter?

Blaire: So, cover letters are actual letters and people often use the same exact cover letter for jobs and that's even more problematic than the same résumé. Because these are, you know, very supposed to be very directly related to the organization or industry that you're interested in. You're supposed to make absolute connections. My, my analogy with the dating is if you have that first date and all you want is me, me, me, I, I, I, me, me, I, I - do you think that that person would invite you for a second date? Most likely not. But if you go, oh, I saw that you're interested in this. I like that, too. Or tell you know, I you know, I'm really interested in how you are, you know, experienced in that area. And I would like to learn more about it or I like to collaborate about that. And then it's more of a conversation.

Stephen: I always found that when I started a cover letter, the first draft almost always was just my résumé, but now written out. And then I'd send it off to friends for edits, and, well, I'd get back this massacre of red ink and horrified comments, and I'd basically start again from scratch.

Blaire: You're not alone. A lot of people have the same first draft of a cover letter. So, a cover letter does not rehash your résumé. A cover letter takes a magnifying glass to your résumé.

So, a cover letter highlights the most important and relevant things from your résumé that you think fit that position. And then you get to tell more of a story around it so you can only squeeze so much in with bullets. Right? So, the cover letter gives you a chance to actually tell the full story in less of a factual way and in more of a personal way. And you can make a real strong connection.

Stephen: So, this is the part where you get to explain why you're passionate about a certain type of work, or why this internship was so special, or even clarify why you had a gap in your work experience, or a blip in your GPA or something. But just like in a résumé, you still have to pick what you're going to put on and what you're going to leave off.

Blaire: When people in a paragraph literally list all of the orchestras or all of the country that they've ever performed in. In a list, after about three, people stop reading and they start skimming. And if it's a list, is it really that important? Probably not. Instead, could you highlight your top three experiences and explain why those were your top picks? Right? So that is where it's really important not just to regurgitate things from your resume, but really telling that story around a particular experience or skillset that you have learned.

Most people start with cover letters because they take more time and people know it and they can tell if a good cover letter is there then that applicant has probably spent enough time that they're, they're seriously interested in its position and that you should probably continue looking at their materials.

Stephen: The final thing that's important about your cover letter is how looks.

Blaire: You still have your materials, so you still have your name and your contact information. It should be the same header as you would in your résumé because you want to have the same branding. Then off to the side. You're going to actually put the address of the institutions. You might have to do a little research. You also want to try to address it to a specific person. So that maybe in person that maybe the chair of the committee. If you don't know, then you might want to look and see who's the head honcho of that department and address it to them and the committee. But try to find a person. You're going to date it and you're going to say, Dear Mr. Smith and Search Committee comma continuing on. And then at the end, thank them very much. Sign off "sincerely," and then a signature.

Now, the other thing and this may seem really obvious, but the other thing and the last thing I'll say before we move on is in the first paragraph after the dear Mr. Smith and blah, blah, blah, blah - write what you're applying for. I'm applying for the assistant director of this opera guild for twenty-twenty-one, twenty, twenty-one season and then moving on. Who are you? Etc. I can't tell you how many times people don't actually reference the job that they're applying for. And that can be problematic, especially if you're looking at internships and they've got 40 interns for the summer. And you just send something and they're like, but what do you want to do?

Stephen: And finally, once you have formatted it, addressed it, made it specific, chosen what parts of your résumé you're going to highlight and expand on – print it out. Your résumé too. You might notice a formatting issue when it prints – and a lot of companies still print these materials out to review. But, you also read things differently on a screen than when it's printed out in front of you. And of course, share it. Have a friend, a career advisor, a mentor – someone, read it over. They'll come at it from a different perspective and catch certain things that you might miss.

And then, when you're finally, finally ready, you send it off. And wait. And wait. And wait.

Blaire: You know, I can't give you a percentage, but the majority. You will not hear back from. And it's super unfortunate.

Stephen: This could be for many reasons – maybe they've already hired someone, or have someone in mind for the position already. Maybe they did read through your materials, but they just didn't take the time to send you a note. This part can be really frustrating. So, what's the etiquette for reaching out?

Blaire: First and foremost, what's their deadline in the sense of what's the deadline of application?

Stephen: If you submit your application on May 1st, but the deadline for applying is June 1st, don't email somebody on May 15th asking when you'll hear. If a job says "open until position filled" or something like that, then they're reviewing materials on a rolling basis, but otherwise, most places won't start reviewing your materials until the deadline has passed. However, if the deadline does pass and it's been a couple of weeks:

Blaire: Send somebody a message. Usually, again, at the bottom of the description they may say, oh, if you have any questions, please contact that person - contact that person and say, hi. I've applied for this position. I'm really, really looking forward to getting to learn more about it. I was wondering if you could give me a little more information on your timeline. You know something along those lines, not when will I hear back, anything like that. Timeline's a great way of just saying like, hey, what's your process, what can I expect, and be flexible. We don't hear anything back. You can follow up in another week if you want to. But at that point is when you might want to start backing off afterwards.

Stephen: And sometimes, even when you think all is lost, you'll hear from someone months later asking you to interview. That actually happened to me – I'd been working at Eastman for 2 months when I got an email saying "We've reviewed your application and were hoping you'd come in for an interview."

Blaire: Sometimes that means that they went through the first round of applicants and they decide they like any of them and now they're going through it another time. That happens. And that's a legitimate thing that can be sometimes very surprising when you thought you were checked off the list and then you're back in.

Stephen: Putting all of these materials together can be exhausting, and sometimes, in addition to doing all this work on your résumé and your cover letter, you have to fill out an application that basically has you input your résumé, line by line, field by field, for each job. It's frustrating, and feels redundant, but that's sometimes how it goes. But if you know what you're trying to do, and you have a good foundation, a good base of resources to cull from, it becomes an easier, more routine thing to do rather than waiting for two, three, five, 10 years to re-do your résumé, CV, or cover letter.

Blaire: The only thing that I would add is finding a job is like a full-time job.

Stephen: True.

Blaire: It takes a lot of time searching different job boards. Please do not use just one. There are so many out there. There is also music specific ones which we have on our web site that you definitely want to check out because a lot of times music is not found on the normal ones like Glassdoor, or Indeed, or Monster.

Stephen: So, to close, here are Blaire's top 4 tips:

Blaire: So, first and foremost, acknowledge that there's lots of places to look and you need to use a diverse amount to really understand what's out there.

Second, you have to stay on top of it. What you looked at last week may have changed this week. I mean, jobs are posting all the time. Sometimes jobs get reposted as well and that can be just as confusing.

So, my third thing is, keep track of the things that you're interested in, and also keep track of the things that you were thinking about, but then decided not to apply because if you stumble upon it again, you remember why you decided not to apply. And this can be in any format. I use Excel spreadsheets. Some people like Post-it notes. Whatever works for you. But you do want to keep track of which one because it can get very complicated.

And the last thing is, give yourself enough time to do a good job. If again, you're sending out the same résumé any to all the different types of positions and barely changing the cover letter and blasting it, if they find a mistake or if they find it generic in any way, you're out the window. So, you're basically spending less time – accurate – but in guaranteeing that you're not going to get invited. So, wouldn't you want to spend a little more time and increase your percentages? So, spend the time to do it right. Have people review it. Not necessarily every single app - every single résumé and cover letter. But, you know, until you start feeling comfortable with it and you can start replicating the same concepts, have people look at it and then commit some time, a little bit every day, a little bit every other day, whatever it is that you're planning on doing.

But don't just sit down for one day and then do everything and then say you're done for the next two weeks. Nope. Things will change by 2 days from now. So, keep at it. It seems frustrating, but if you really want that position, especially now with everything that's going on, you just need to keep trying.

(Outro Music – “Storm of the Century” by Matthew Larsen and the Documents)

Stephen: Special thanks, once again, to Dr. Blaire Koerner, for spending so much time answering questions. We probably could have talked for even longer because there's so much to cover and Blaire is so passionate about her work. I realize there are a lot of things we didn't talk about, and there may be things that you, fine listener, want to ask yourself. Well, you're in luck. Current students can set up a virtual appointment with Blaire by visiting Handshake and signing in with your current net ID and password. Alumni, staff, faculty – Blaire is here for you too – just send her an email at bkoerner@ur.rochester.edu.

If you have questions or comments about this episode, or if there are topics you want us to cover on future episodes, you can send me an email – I'll put my contact in the show notes. In fact, if you're listening, please let us know what you think, or share with a colleague or fellow student who you think would benefit. It would really help us to get the word out and to know that you're really out there.

Finally, we have a bunch of upcoming guests for future episodes, so please stay tuned and keep your eyes peeled. We'll let you know when those are happening as soon as possible.

Thank you so much for listening. Go out. Make art. Do good work. From the IML, I'm Stephen Biegner. Until next time.