

AI FOR REAL PEOPLE · A SHORT COURSE FROM PFI

Job Search

A short, honest course on using AI to tighten a resume, draft a cover letter, and prepare for an interview — without sounding like the fifty other AI-drafted applications in the pile.

About 30 minutes

Free

Five short lessons

No videos

No quiz you can fail

You will actually try things in this course — open an AI tool in another tab, paste in a job description, see what happens. The people who try get the most out of it.

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Pacific Forward Initiative is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. PFI is a Hawaii-based nonprofit helping individuals, communities, and small businesses build the future-defining skills needed to thrive in a changing economy. This course is free, and it stays free.

Welcome

The job market has gotten harder in ways that are not your fault.

Hiring has changed on the employer's side, not yours. Roughly half of employers now use AI tools to screen resumes before a human ever sees them, and about one in three hiring managers say they can spot AI-generated writing in under 20 seconds. Strong candidates get filtered out before anyone reads a word they wrote.

Here is the reframe. AI is the tool the recruiter is using to screen you. It is also a tool you can use — the same tool, on your side.

By the end of this course you will know three specific things: how to make an AI screener actually favor your resume; how to draft a cover letter that sounds like you (not like the fifty AI-drafted letters in the pile); and one small habit that catches the AI's mistakes before you submit anything. That is what this course teaches. What it does not teach is how to "future-proof" your career, because that is not a promise anyone can honestly make.

What this course is

A short walkthrough of one thing — using AI to help you tighten a resume, draft a cover letter, and prepare for an interview. Five short lessons. About thirty minutes total. No videos.

What this course is not

- A pitch for any particular AI tool.
- A promise that AI will get you a job.
- A "future-proof your career" course. That is not a promise anyone can honestly make.

How this course works

You read. You try a few things in your own browser, in your own AI tab. You answer a couple of questions to yourself (not graded, not saved). You move to the next lesson when you are ready.

Think of it like an old-school text adventure. You are the person it is happening to. The lesson asks you to do something small, you do it, the next part shows you what to notice.

You can skip any of the questions. You can skip whole lessons. You can do this on the bus, on your lunch break, on the couch.

One thing to know before we start

AI never invents your experience. You do not let it.

Every prompt in this course has one line built in: *"Do not invent experience I do not have. Keep my numbers exactly as I wrote them."* That line is the difference between AI helping you tell your story better and AI helping you tell a story that gets you fired later.

By the end of this course you will know one small, reliable routine for using AI in a job search without losing your voice or your credibility.

A SHORT SELF-CHECK BEFORE WE BEGIN

Three quick scenarios. Ask yourself if any of them sound like you.

Scenario 1. You have not updated your resume in more than a year. Even opening the document feels heavier than it should.

Scenario 2. You saw a job description that fits pretty well. You stared at the "Apply" button for a while and closed the tab.

Scenario 3. You wrote a cover letter last month. Reading it back, it sounded like it could have been about anyone.

If any of those sound familiar, you are exactly who this course is for. Keep going.

A note about the live version

Everything in this course also runs as a free live 30-minute class on Zoom. Alex walks through the same workflow with a real resume and real job description in real time. If you want that — especially the interview-prep part, which is much better with someone role-playing back to you — sign up at lu.ma/pacforward.

If you would rather just read your way through this course, that works too. Keep going.

BEFORE LESSON 2 — SET UP AN AI TOOL

This course is tool-agnostic. It works with any popular AI chat tool. If you do not already use one, take 2 minutes to set up a free account with the AI tool of your choice — the free versions are enough for everything in this course.

One additional note for this course specifically: consider using a *personal* AI account, not a work-issued one. You do not need your current employer's IT department to see search history that says "resume for [competitor]."

Your first career-and-AI conversation

The first move is the safest one: use AI to *understand* a job description before you touch a word of your resume.

What you will do in this lesson

Copy one real job description into an AI chat, ask it to summarize what the employer actually wants, and notice what is in the summary versus what was in the posting.

TRY IT NOW

Open your AI tool in another browser tab. Find one job description you are genuinely curious about. Copy the whole thing — the "About Us" section, the responsibilities, the requirements, all of it. Paste it into the AI chat. Then type this exactly:

COPY AND PASTE

Read this job description. Give me the top 5 things this employer wants from a candidate, in plain English, no jargon. Then tell me one thing about the company or role that stood out to you.

Send it. Read what comes back.

Stop here. Actually do this before reading on.

WHAT YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN

The AI's answer is usually shorter than the original posting — often by 70 or 80 percent. That is the point. Job descriptions are written by committees; the *actual* things an employer wants are often three or four items scattered across a page of corporate language.

Notice what the AI *lifted* to the top of the list. Those are the items your resume and cover letter need to speak to directly. Everything else on the posting is context.

Why start here

Because job applications fail more often on *mismatch* than on *quality*. A perfectly written resume that speaks to a job the employer is not actually hiring for gets ignored. A plainer resume that speaks to the top three things the employer actually wants gets a callback.

Starting with "what does this employer actually want" is starting with the right question.

A QUICK QUESTION FOR YOURSELF · not graded, not saved — just for you

Which of the top-5 items the AI pulled out did you already know were in the posting — and which surprised you? The surprises are usually where AI is most useful: it caught something you skimmed past.

TRY TO REMEMBER · TWO QUESTIONS, UNGRADED

Try answering each one yourself before reading ours. Your answers aren't saved.

1. What is the very first move when you are thinking about applying to a job?

Our answer: Paste the job description into the AI and ask it to pull out the top 5 things the employer actually wants — before you touch your resume.

2. Why is "mismatch" a bigger problem than "quality" for most job applications?

Our answer: A perfectly written resume that speaks to the wrong job gets ignored. A plainer one that speaks to the right things gets a callback. Match your writing to what the employer actually asked for.

The live class walks through this with a real posting an attendee brings — lu.ma/pacforward.

Tightening your resume to one job

Most resumes fail because they are generic. Yours probably is not the exception — most people's aren't.

The move in this lesson is to take your generic resume and *tighten* three or four bullet points so they speak directly to one specific job description. Not the whole resume. Three or four bullets. That is enough to move you from "generic pile" to "worth a second look."

The three-move workflow

Move 1. Paste both.

Open your resume in one window. Copy it. Open your AI tool. Paste it in. Then paste the job description underneath it (or attach it if your AI supports attachments).

Move 2. Ask for the constrained rewrite. Type this exactly:

COPY AND PASTE

Here is my resume [pasted above]. Here is a job description [pasted above]. Rewrite my 3-5 most relevant bullet points to speak more directly to this specific job. Two rules: (1) Do not invent experience I do not have. If I did not say I did something in my original resume, do not add it. (2) Keep my original numbers exactly as I wrote them — no rounding, no adjustments. If the original said "12 people," the rewrite says "12 people."

Stop here. Actually try this on your own resume before reading on.

WHAT YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN

The AI probably rewrote 3-5 of your bullets. The rewritten versions should:

- Use language from the job description (not word-for-word, but conceptually)
- Lead with the strongest number in each bullet
- Be one line shorter than yours were, usually

Read each rewrite next to the original. For each one, ask:

- Did the AI add a fact I did not include? (If yes, cut that fact.)
- Did the AI change any of my numbers? (If yes, put them back.)
- Does the rewrite still sound like something I would say? (If it sounds too polished — like a LinkedIn press release — soften it.)

Move 3. Do the human edit.

Copy the AI's rewrites into your resume, replacing the originals. Then read your whole resume out loud. Anywhere the AI's rewrites sound smoother than your other bullets, adjust the surrounding bullets slightly so the whole thing sounds like one person wrote it.

This last step is the difference between a resume that gets past the screener and one that gets rejected as "AI-written" at the human review. Which brings us to the next thing.

How to tell if AI over-polished your resume

Hiring managers who read a lot of AI-drafted resumes have learned the tells. If any of these appear in your rewrite, take them out:

- The words *delve*, *tapestry*, *streamline*, *leverage*, *synergy*
- Every bullet starting with a strong-sounding verb ("*Spearheaded*," "*Orchestrated*," "*Championed*") — real resumes have variety
- Numbers that end in round zeros ("*reduced costs by 30 percent*" when you actually had 27%) — use your real numbers

- Bullets that all follow the exact same structure — real people write with rhythm variation
- Claims of skills you would not want to be quizzed on

One good check: ask yourself if you would be comfortable being asked, in an interview, to give a five-minute story about any bullet on your resume. If not, cut or soften that bullet. The AI does not know what you are prepared to defend; you do.

A NOTE FOR HAWAII-SPECIFIC APPLICANTS

If you are applying to a Hawaii-based role, adding one line that reflects local context — a Hawaii community you have worked with, a Hawaii-specific challenge you understand — often does more than any AI-polish. AI does not know your community. You do. That is one of the strongest cards you have in a smaller job market.

TRY TO REMEMBER · THREE QUESTIONS, UNGRADED

Try answering each one yourself before reading ours.

1. What is the two-rule guardrail you put in every resume-rewrite prompt?

Our answer: (1) Do not invent experience I do not have. (2) Keep my original numbers exactly as written.

2. Name one "AI tell" that will get your resume flagged as AI-written by a human reviewer.

Our answer: Any of: delve, tapestry, leverage, synergy; every bullet starting with a spearheaded/orchestrated verb; round-number percentages; identical bullet structure; skill claims you couldn't be quizzed on.

3. What is the last-step read-out-loud check for?

Our answer: To make sure the whole resume sounds like one person wrote it — not like some bullets were AI-tightened and others weren't. Voice consistency across the page is what makes it feel real.

This is the class where a live session helps most — watching Alex work through a real resume live gives you the pattern faster than any writeup can. lu.ma/pacforward

Cover letter, the 70/30 way

Cover letters are where AI hurts the most applications. About 80 percent of hiring managers say they can spot AI-drafted cover letters, and many of them do not like it. A short handwritten cover letter beats a polished AI-drafted one, every time.

But cover letters are also where AI can help the most — if you use it for the 70 percent that is scaffolding, not the 30 percent that is you.

THE 70/30 RULE

70 percent AI-drafted scaffolding. The opening greeting, the connective sentences, the transition from "here's why I'm applying" to "here's what I bring." This is the boring part. AI is fine at it.

30 percent hand-written yours. One specific story from your work that shows you can do what the job needs. One sentence that shows you actually know this company. One closing line in your own voice.

If you do both parts, your cover letter reads as *personal but polished*. If you skip the 30 percent, your cover letter reads as AI-drafted — because it is.

TRY IT NOW — THE DRAFT PROMPT

Open your AI tool. Paste in your resume and the job description if you have not already. Then type:

COPY AND PASTE

Draft a 200-word cover letter for the job below, in a warm, direct voice — not overly formal. Leave two blank spots in square brackets: [MY STORY] where I will add a specific example from my own experience that shows I can do the top thing this employer wants, and [MY COMPANY NOTE] where I will add a sentence showing I actually know something specific about this company. Do not invent experience I do not have.

Send it. Read what comes back.

Stop here. Actually try this before reading on.

WHAT YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN

The AI produced a short cover letter with two visible [MY STORY] and [MY COMPANY NOTE] gaps. That is what you asked for. Now you write the 30 percent.

[MY STORY] — Pick one thing from your actual work life where you did something like what the job is asking for. Not the most impressive thing you have ever done. The most *specific* one. "When our team lost two people mid-project last year, I took over their tasks for six weeks and we still shipped on time" beats "I am a strong problem-solver" every time. Two or three sentences. Include one specific number if you have one.

[MY COMPANY NOTE] — Spend two minutes on the company's website. Find one specific thing (a product line, a recent announcement, a value they emphasize) that you can name and connect to why you want to work there. One sentence. Not a paragraph. Not "I love your commitment to innovation." Something specific.

The check before you send

Read the whole letter out loud. Ask yourself:

- Does the [MY STORY] section sound like *me*? Or like AI trying to sound like me?
- Would I be embarrassed if the hiring manager asked me about any sentence in this letter?
- Does the company note sound like I actually looked at the company, or like I could have written it about any company in the industry?

If any of those answers is a wince, edit that section again — in your own words. Then send.

The best cover letters are still short, specific, and personal. AI helps with the first draft. But if you cannot personalize the AI's draft with a real story and a real company detail, you are statistically better off submitting a shorter, plainer, human-written note than a polished-but-generic AI letter. The polish is not what recruiters are looking for. The specificity is.

If the 30 percent feels like too much work for a particular job — that is useful data. It probably means you are not that interested in the role. That is fine. Save your 30-percent effort for the jobs you actually want.

TRY TO REMEMBER · THREE QUESTIONS, UNGRADED

Try answering each one yourself before reading ours.

1. What is the 70/30 rule for AI-assisted cover letters?

Our answer: AI drafts the 70 percent that is scaffolding (greeting, transitions, structure). You write the 30 percent that is one specific story from your work + one specific detail about the company + your closing voice.

2. Why does asking the AI to leave visible [MY STORY] and [MY COMPANY NOTE] blanks work better than just editing an AI draft?

Our answer: It forces you to add the specificity that makes a cover letter personal. Editing after the fact, most people don't; the AI's generic version gets sent.

3. When is it better to send a shorter, plainer, hand-written cover letter than a polished AI-drafted one?

Our answer: Any time you cannot personalize the AI's draft with a real story and a real company-specific detail. Specificity beats polish; polish without specificity is a red flag.

The live class walks through building a cover letter with a real person's story, from scratch. If you want that: lu.ma/pacforward.

What you did, what's next

You came in unsure whether AI could actually help with a job search — or whether it would hurt more than help. You leave with a small, honest routine that uses AI where it helps and keeps you in charge where it matters.

Your checklist — what you can do now

Tick each one you have actually done.

- ☐ I have signed in to an AI tool at least once.
- ☐ I know how to ask an AI to pull the top 5 things a job description is really asking for.
- ☐ I know the two-rule guardrail for every resume-rewrite prompt: no invented experience, no changed numbers.
- ☐ I know at least three "AI tells" that get resumes flagged (delve, tapestry, spearheaded-verbs, round-number percentages).
- ☐ I know the 70/30 rule for cover letters — and why the 30 percent has to be handwritten.

What to do this week

Pick one job you would actually apply to. Just one. Run the three-move workflow from Lesson 3 on your resume. Draft a 70/30 cover letter using the pattern in Lesson 4. Read both out loud before you submit anything.

The first application takes about an hour to do it well. After three, it takes about 20 minutes.

A QUESTION, IF YOU WANT TO ANSWER IT · optional, not saved

What was one moment in this course where something surprised you, or something clicked, or you thought "wait, this changes what I was planning to send"?

If you want to tell us, email hello@pacforward.org — Alex reads every reply.

Two things that go further than this course

The Field Guide to AI — a free downloadable PDF that covers everything in this course plus chapters on paperwork, family conversations, and the honest limits of AI. pacforward.org/repository.

The free live class — 30 minutes on Zoom with Alex, and specifically useful for the interview-prep piece we did not cover here. Alex can play a hiring manager and role-play a real behavioral question with you in the moment. If you have an interview coming up, this is the highest-leverage thing PFI offers. lu.ma/pacforward.

KEEP THIS PAGE

The prompts, in one place

Five prompts from the course you can copy when you need them — plus three more to grow into. Open this page when you sit down to apply for a job. Replace the bracketed parts with your actual situation.

1 • Understand what an employer actually wants — from Lesson 2

Read this job description. Give me the top 5 things this employer wants from a candidate, in plain English, no jargon. Then tell me one thing about the company or role that stood out to you.

2 • Tighten resume bullets to a specific job — from Lesson 3

Here is my resume [paste]. Here is a job description [paste]. Rewrite my 3-5 most relevant bullet points to speak more directly to this specific job. Two rules: (1) Do not invent experience I do not have. (2) Keep my original numbers exactly as written.

3 • Draft a 70/30 cover letter — from Lesson 4

Draft a 200-word cover letter for the job below, in a warm, direct voice — not overly formal. Leave two blank spots in square brackets: [MY STORY] where I will add a specific example from my experience, and [MY COMPANY NOTE] where I will add a sentence showing I know this company specifically. Do not invent experience I do not have.

4 • Check for AI tells — from Lesson 3

Read this resume. Point out any phrases that sound AI-written to a hiring manager — words like delve, tapestry, leverage; every bullet starting with a strong verb like spearheaded; round-number percentages; identical bullet structure. Do not rewrite — just flag.

5 • Check before you send — from Lesson 4

Read this cover letter. Tell me: 1) Does the [MY STORY] section sound specific and personal, or generic? 2) Does the company note sound like I actually researched this company, or could it be about any company? 3) Anything in the letter that would embarrass me if the hiring manager asked me to expand on it in an interview?

THREE MORE TO TRY — THESE BUILD ON THE FIVE ABOVE

6 • Prep for a behavioral interview question

Act as a hiring manager for [role]. Ask me one behavioral interview question ("tell me about a time..."). After I answer, tell me what worked in my answer and what to sharpen. Use the STAR format (Situation, Task, Action, Result) as your check.

7 • Turn a rejection into a follow-up worth sending

I got rejected from [role]. Here is the rejection email [paste]. Help me draft a two-sentence response that thanks them, keeps the door open, and asks one specific thing that could help me for next time. Do not sound bitter.

8 • Prepare a thank-you note after an interview

I just interviewed for [role] with [interviewer name]. Here are three things we talked about [list]. Help me draft a short thank-you email — under 100 words — that mentions one specific thing from our conversation. Do not sound like a template.

One habit to keep: use prompt 4 (the AI-tells check) after any AI-assisted resume rewrite, before you send. It is the habit that catches the mistake you are most likely to make.

‘A‘ohe pau ka ‘ike i ka hālau ho‘okahi

"All knowledge is not learned in one school."

Pacific Forward Initiative is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Our courses are free for everyone — if this one gave you time back, you can help keep it that way at pacforward.org/donate.

FORWARD TOGETHER