

Guide to Resume Writing

What Is A Resume?

A resume is a one or two page summary of your skills, accomplishments, experiences, and education designed to capture a prospective employer's interest. ***The purpose of a resume is to secure an interview.*** It is the primary tool of your job search and may take several drafts to prepare effectively. This article is designed to assist you by offering suggestions and guidelines for you to use as you construct, write and print your resume.

Building An Effective Resume

I. Self-Assessment

Before you can write an effective resume, you must first be able to identify your skills and abilities as well as your special needs relating to the work environment, salary, geographic location, and people environment. This step will help you to develop a career objective. The following exercises will help you identify some things about yourself which you may want to express in your resume.

Self-Assessment Exercise

A. List at least 10 skills which you have developed in each of the following areas: Education/Work/Internships or Volunteer/Extracurricular. Use action words to develop one-liner summaries.

B. Circle each of the skills noted in part A that you would like to use in your employment. Are there other talents you possess that you would like to use on the job? If so, add them to the list of circled skills. Now rank these skills in order of those you most want to use.

C. Make a list of what you consider to be 5 great accomplishments in your life. What personal qualities helped you reach each goal?

II. Career Exploration

Collecting information regarding the required **skills and qualifications** of occupations which interest you is an extremely important step. This information will help you decide if and how these requirements relate to your own skills and needs. Using the books available at your institution's career center or making an appointment with a counselor can be helpful in identifying and exploring careers and can also help you in developing a career objective.

III. Writing The Resume

As you organize your resume, keep in mind the needs of the employer who will be reading it. Consider what s/he is looking for in a candidate and make it easy for the reader to pick out those skills by selecting appropriate categories, using underlining, boldfacing or capitalizing and presenting relevant experience and skill areas higher on the page. Competencies Sought by Employers illustrates common transferable skills and qualities.

Keep in mind the following suggestions as you begin developing your resume:

1. **Sell yourself.** Create a good first impression by highlighting skills and abilities appropriate to the position.
2. **Use active language.** Check out our on-line list of action words to spice up your resume. Articulate marketable skills acquired through your positions.
Example: Salesperson, Smith Shoe Store, Portland, Maine. Assisted clients with selection of shoes, developed and promoted special marketing events, trained new employees, monitored cash. Store increased in sales by 7 percent in 6 month period.
3. **Be consistent.** Choose a pattern of spacing, an order of information presentation or a format of highlighting and be consistent throughout.
4. **Present information in reverse chronological order** within categories. List education and work experiences starting with the most recent first.
5. **Check for grammar.** Misspellings and poorly constructed sentences communicate negative impressions about a candidate.
6. **Ensure that your resume is neat and visually appealing.** Choose high quality

paper in white, off-white or other conservative colors. Have the final version professionally reproduced.

Make Your Resume Unique

Feel free to develop your own categories to highlight your special relevant experiences and skills. It is frequently useful to separate your related or professional experiences from your other work experience by creating separate categories for these content areas. In this way, you can call more attention to your relevant skills by putting them in categories closer to the top of the resume so they are read first.

Here Are Some Examples:

- Student Teaching Experience
- Related Experience
- Experience With Children
- Related Courses
- Community Volunteer Work
- Workshops & Conferences Attended
- Technical Skills
- Special Skills
- Computer Skills
- Certificates
- Travel
- Leadership
- Accomplishments
- Professional Memberships
- Military Experience
- Language Proficiencies
- Additional Information

In place of **Related Experience** you might wish to indicate your field of experience in the

category heading.

Examples: Business Experience, Engineering Experience, Human Services Experience, Sales Experience, etc.

Resume Content Areas

The following categories can be used as guideline to assist you in organizing a resume. In constructing a rough draft, do not be concerned with length. Remember, categories may be omitted or added in later revisions. There is no absolute correct way to organize your resume. Creativity is encouraged. The following are descriptions of the basic categories of the standard resume:

Name, Address and Telephone:

Present yourself with the name you use in your personal and business life (nicknames should be avoided). If you have a campus address that does not apply during vacations or after graduation, you should present both a college and permanent address. Use your parents' home address, a post office box, or someone who will know where to contact you at all times. Also, always include phone numbers **with area codes**. If you have an e-mail address, you might want to include that as well.

Objective or Profile:

The objective is one of the most important parts of a resume and should not be overlooked. It informs potential employers that you are moving in a certain direction, relates your work preference(s), and serves as a focal point from which to review and analyze your resume. It should be brief, clearly stated, and consistent with the accomplishments and demonstrated skills as documented on your resume. If you are considering more than one professional goal, you should consider developing more than one resume, each presenting a different objective.

Example:

- Position teaching science and/or math at the secondary school level.
- Position within a financial institution requiring strong analytical and organizational skills.

Education:

This category is particularly important if you have not had a great deal of work experience. Remember, your most recent educational experience should be listed first.

Include your degree (A.S., B.S., B.A., etc.), major, institution(s) attended, date of graduation, minors or concentrations, and any special workshops, seminars, related coursework or senior projects. A G.P.A. of higher than a 3.0 (either overall G.P.A. or G.P.A. in major) should also be noted here.

Work Experience:

Many students have limited paid work experience, but have been involved in volunteer, internship, practicum or student teaching work experiences. The important point to the employer is what your skills are and what you can do on the job. Be sure to include all significant work experience in **reverse chronological order**. Note to teacher candidates: be sure to include your student teaching experience on your resume.

- You should include: (1) the title of your position, (2) name of organization, (3) location of work (town, state), and (4) dates (ex. Summer 1994; 1994-95 academic year)
- You should describe your work responsibilities with an emphasis on achievements using action words to communicate your skills. List the most important and related responsibilities first.
- Identify the most relevant work experiences and describe them fully. Be brief with the irrelevant experiences or omit them. It is sometimes useful to divide your work experience into two categories: **Relevant Experience** and **Other Experience**.
- You may want to add that work was performed to earn a certain percent of college expenses. Example: Earned 75% of college expenses through the following part-time jobs.

Additional Information

This category is useful for displaying information that doesn't fit in any other category.

Although **Interests**, **Computer Knowledge**, and **Activities** can be separate categories, especially if they are very strong, they can be listed here as well. Languages spoken, or any extra, relevant bit of information can be placed here as well.

- **Interests**: This is sometimes used to evaluate your suitability to a geographic area or to understand your "personality type". Include this section if you have available space. Include social or civic activities, health and fitness or sports activities, or hobbies which indicate how you spend your leisure time.
- **Computer Knowledge**: If using computers is a necessary skill for the job you are seeking, be sure to highlight your knowledge in this section. Example:
 - Software: Lotus, dBASE III, WordPerfect 5.1, Microsoft Word, Excel, SAS, Real World Accounting
 - Hardware: IBM 3090 Mainframe, AT&T 386, IBM PC, Macintosh
- **Activities, Honors, and Leadership** are also important categories to include. If the activities involved work responsibility, note it in some detail. The employer is interested in the skills you have developed whether through volunteer or paid experiences. If you were elected to offices or committees, mention it. Recognition and demonstration of leadership roles are valuable.

References:

Be sure to ask individuals if they would be willing to be a reference for you prior to mentioning their names to prospective employers. Names of individuals are not usually listed on the resume (unless there is space available at the end), but you should prepare a typed list of three references to provide at the interview. This list should include name, title, employer, address, business and home telephone number. You may also state at the bottom of your resume "References furnished upon request."

Cover Letters :

Years ago, it seemed there was no question about cover letters accompanying resumes. Now, you'll sometimes find classified ads that state explicitly "resumes only" or that tell you to fax a resume but don't stipulate the inclusion of a cover letter. What do you do?

Send a cover letter, unless an advertisement the applicant NOT include one.

It should be tailored to the specific job the person is looking for.

Job seekers should be specific in their cover letters by relating experiences or results in their past to the qualities the hiring company is looking for."

Demonstrate your writing skills

Finally, don't underestimate the importance of the cover letter. In a recent survey of 150 executives from the nation's 1,000 largest companies, 60 percent of the respondents said that when they screen applications, the cover letter is either as important as or more critical than the resume. Your cover letter really does matter.

RESUME CHECK LIST

Resume Lead-in (Objective or Profile)

- Does it use business language that is action oriented?
- You need to have a specific job title that you are seeking (resumes must be tailored to each recipient, particularly if you are sending a resume for a specific position)
- Show your most prominent strengths.
- Indicate the type of responsibility that you can hold.
- Show how your contributions will specifically benefit the employer.

Professional Qualifications

- Does this section highlight each of your major strengths?
- Are all of the qualifications/achievements related to the career objective?
- Is there appropriate usage of key action words that connote your sense of urgency?
- Have you described each in such a way that the reader clearly understands the benefits of your achievements?

Experience

- For each job listed, have you listed the Job title, Function and Employer's name?
- Have you updated the language of your resume to include updated jargon that is widely used in your targeted industry?
- Will the reader understand the level of responsibility that you had from reading the information?
- Does this section talk about accomplishments and not about responsibility? Do you try to quantify your accomplishments?
- Don't be timid about listing non-paid accomplishments that you may have achieved for an organization.

Education

- Does the section begin with the highest academic achievement and work downwards?
- Did you include other training (even if it is non-academic) that might be relevant?
- Have you listed credits that might be irrelevant?

Professional Organizations and Community Activities

- List only those items that have specific relevance to your career objective
- Does it list any organizations that don't present a professional image?
- Does it highlight organizations that will give you prospective employer an advantage with your contacts and business relationships?
- Does it refrain from personal information

Overall

- Does the resume look great? Have you highlighted or boldfaced titles, subtitles and other important information?
- Is there enough white space - does the text flow for 'easy reading' ?
- Has the resume been checked by you and at least two others for spelling, punctuation, syntax and grammar? Have you checked it at least 10 times?
- Does the body of the resume complement the career objective?
- Does the resume focus on what the employer wants to see?
- Does the resume use the word "I" - it shouldn't.
- Don't include references on the resume.
- Would you consider this resume to be an excellent sales tool for your performance and past accomplishments?

When you are ready

Print it as needed on a laser printer if you have one. Avoid paper colors other than white or ivory. Modify the resume for a position that you are keenly interested to personalize your specific advantages.

Tips & Techniques

- *It's All She Wrote: A resume should never be longer than two pages. It's your job to get noticed not the interviewers to find out what matters on your resume.*
- *Industrial Strength: If you have worked for Blue Ribbon companies use a resume format that highlights employers. If you had interesting assignments, then highlight experiences with resume format*
- *Power Statement: Replace job objectives with a power statement that describes your area of expertise (e.g. "Organizational Design Specialist" not "Human Resources Generalist"), demonstrates what you do (e.g. "align HR systems with organization strategy "not" design and develop . . .") and how you do it (e.g. "value - added consultative style")*

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SOME RESUME WRITING TIPS

1. Use Simple Sentences.

- Emphasize nouns instead of verbs.
- Instead of describing what your responsibilities were describe exactly what you did.
- Mention the names of any tools, software, or equipment you used, and any specialized knowledge you acquired.
- Remember that ADA can mean a computer language, the American Dental Association, or the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Even within the Department of Defense, the same acronym or abbreviation can have many different meanings.
- Avoid using jargon, abbreviations, and acronyms, unless they are common to a job field.
- Spell out, at least once, the meaning of any abbreviations and acronyms you use.

2. Focus.

- Include only work experience and skills that are relevant to your career goals.
- For instance, if your career goals are in the budget area, don't include old experience as a clerk-typist.
- Starting with your most recent experience.....
 - Show where you worked: beginning and ending dates; the name and phone number of your supervisor.

3. Don't Repeat Skills.

- There is no extra credit for repeating skills.
- Once a skill such as "management" or "budget" is pointed out, you need only use the skill again if you are describing a different position.

4. How Should You Write Your Resume?

- Unlike the Standard Form 171 (SF-171) in which you described your work experience in detail, your resume should be skills-based.
 - We want to know what you did on the job.
 - The best way to convey that is to use simple sentences and concrete words.
- Instead of describing what your responsibilities were, describe your accomplishments.

5. Preparing Your Resume.

- Proofread for errors and pay particular attention to spelling.

PRESENTING YOUR RESUME – MAKING THAT FIRST IMPRESSION COUNT!

- Impressions are formed the first time we see or meet someone (based on physical appearance, attitude, intellect, etc.).
- First impressions can be lasting.
- When you apply for a job, your resume is often the means by which a first impression is formed.
- Your resume is a reflection of you....so dress it up to look your best.
- Stimulate the reviewer to want to know more about you:
 - Use proper grammar and spelling.
 - Be forthright. Don't ramble or use double talk.
 - Be assertive. Toot your own horn but be prepared to back it up.
 - Tailor the narrative of your experience to demonstrate possession of relevant skills and knowledge.
 - Be truthful in stating your qualifications.
 - List relevant education and training.
 - Account for gaps in employment dates, e.g., "unemployed from _____ to _____."
 - List relevant awards, community activities, special projects/teams with which involved.
- Never take for granted that the selecting official/panel knows you and what you can do.
- A poorly-prepared resume may prevent you from being selected, even if, in actuality, you are the best qualified individual for the position.
- The content of your resume should be a reflection of the knowledges, skills, and abilities that you would bring to the position for which you are applying.
- **Make that first impression count!**