

Preparing Winning Résumés

The Purpose of a Résumé

An effective résumé is one that is sent by an applicant and to a potential employer, who then reads it and asks the applicant to come in for an employment interview. The ultimate objective is for the applicant to receive a job offer from the potential employer.

Types of Résumés

Chronological

- Jobs are listed in reverse chronological order, with the most recent job first.
- Emphasizes career and job progression.

Advantages:

- Logical flow, easy to read, most often used.
- Shows continuity of employment and career progression.

Disadvantages:

- Could highlight employment gaps.
- Has more emphasis on recent experience rather than necessarily the most relevant experience.
- Doesn't show accomplishments from early in career.

Functional

- Looks at functions and achievements, not jobs.
- Emphasizes skills and accomplishments, not career and job progression.

Advantages:

- Emphasizes achievements.
- Not chronologically restrained.
- De-emphasizes or camouflages certain undesirable factors such as employment gaps, lack of progression or continuity in jobs, age, recent unemployment, and lack of experience or education.

Disadvantages:

- Leaves many questions unanswered.
- Not used as often.
- No linkage between specific accomplishments and jobs.
- Difficult to compare to other chronological résumés.

Curriculum Vitae or C.V. (Means “course of life” in Latin)

- Academic, scientific, and medical professionals will require a Curriculum Vitae (C.V.) when applying for research, faculty, or clinical positions.
- The C.V. concentrates primarily on the job applicant's extensive academic accomplishments and professional activities.
- The C.V. highlights credentials, affiliations, dissertation titles, medical or academic posts, and publications.
- A strong C.V. is a thorough biographical statement that can consist of anywhere from two to ten pages, depending upon the amount of academic achievements and level of experience.

Résumé Myths

- Résumés should only be one page.
- Really long résumés provide fuller description of qualifications and are better.
- Unique, unusual résumés get more attention.

How Résumés are Read by Employers

First, they are scanned for qualifications and reasons to *not* consider the applicant.

Reasons *not* to consider:

- Job objective incompatible with open positions
- Wrong or insufficient education or experience
- Salary requirements are too high (but if asked to provide them, do)
- Poor résumé
- Employment instability

Next, a more critical read to evaluate degree of fit to the job.

Critical factors:

- Years, type, and level of experience and education
- Record of accomplishments
- How do they compare/rate to other candidates
- How do they compare/rate to the job's duties and requirements

Main Elements of the Résumé for the Applicant to Consider

- **Readability**
- **Content**
- **Accuracy**
- **Spelling and Grammar**

Readability

- Make it clear and concise.
- Format it to be easily read, with at least 12-point type.
- The font should not be unusual or quirky. Times New Roman and Ariel are commonly used fonts because they are easy to read.
- Don't clutter the pages with words -- allow room for white space.
- Use bullets to highlight important points.
- Don't use long paragraphs.
- Avoid technical jargon unless the end recipient of the résumé will understand it.
- Print it on bright white 24-lb. paper.
- Use black ink, not colored.
- Try to keep it to two pages, if possible.

Content

- Work history – include past 10 years, if possible.
- List the current or most recent employer first (for chronological résumé).
- Include military background, experience, and skills.
- If new to the workforce, include relevant experience as a volunteer or other types of activities even if you were not considered an employee. Experience is experience, whether you were paid for it or not. This will also show that you were responsible for something.
- No need to include job title in the description if it's already listed.
- Avoid use of pronoun "I" since they know that you wrote the résumé.
- Use descriptive phrases and clauses if they communicate a complete thought. Complete sentences are not always necessary.
- Start statements with action verbs, followed by noun or adjective.
- Eliminate non-essential information.
- Customize the résumé for the particular job.
- Use quantitative descriptions to convey company size, job scope, and accomplishments, if possible.
- Include degrees, certificates, and special courses you completed.
- If working towards a degree or certificate include the expected completion date.

- Include any other skills and abilities you have that are relevant to the position you are applying for.
- Include a summary of your knowledge, skills, and abilities in bullet format to make it easier for the recipient to read.
- Avoid using clichés. They are old and tired. Use alternatives whenever possible.
- There's no reason to include your hobbies or interests, unless you think it would help you get a particular position. For example, if you are applying for a position at a boating magazine and boating is your hobby, then this would be relevant information.
- Don't include marital status, number of children, health status, or date of birth. In the old days we used to see résumés that included these things. Including these things will indicate that you lack business savvy in this area.

Accuracy

- Make sure all the information is accurate.
- Double-check all dates of employment.
- Don't list an organization as your current employer if you have already left their employment; make sure your résumé is up-to-date.
- If your résumé is "stale" it shows that you didn't care enough to make it "fresh."
- Don't tell lies on your résumé. (Some studies show that about one-third of applicants lie on their résumés. Other studies indicate that it occurs much more often.)
- Employers are careful about the people they hire, so they may conduct a thorough background check on you.

Spelling and Grammar

- According to one supervisor, one-third of the résumés he recently received for a technical position contained spelling and grammatical errors. Consequently, these résumés were not considered "keepers."
- Use correct English, even if it's not your native language. It is very important on a résumé. If there are errors on your résumé, then the recipient knows that you don't have good written communication skills, or you just don't care enough to prepare a good résumé.
- Let your computer check the spelling and grammar, and then proofread your résumé.
- Have someone else proofread it for you also.
- The computer will not find and correct all of your mistakes, so don't depend on it.
- If you have difficulty spelling or selecting the correct word, use a dictionary or ask someone to help you.
- If you have problems with grammar, use a resource that will help you in this area. For example, some people get confused about the correct way to write possessives versus plurals (company's versus companies).
- Dictionary.com is a good free resource for this. It includes an online Dictionary, Thesaurus, and various guides to good grammar and writing skills.

Remember, your résumé is not only an example of your best written communication skills, but it represents you. By increasing your chances that your résumé will be read and kept, you are increasing your chances of getting the job you want.