

THE SECRET TO A GREAT RÉSUMÉ

WHAT IS A RÉSUMÉ?

A résumé is your personal marketing tool, whether you are applying for an internship, job, or graduate school. Its purpose is to promote your unique combination of education, experiences, skills, qualifications, and activities; grab the reader's attention; and generate an interview.

Writing a résumé is an art form, not a science. There is no one way to write your résumé, only guidelines and best practices. Your résumé is not so much about you, but more about how you, your talents, and experiences match the organization's needs or requirements. You may want to compose several versions tailored specifically for different opportunities, positions, industries, and organizations.

GETTING STARTED

PERSONAL FILE

Brainstorm and collect information in a personal file that includes:

- projects that demonstrate academic excellence and skill competencies
- awards and honors
- accomplishments
- leadership information
- performance reviews
- clubs and organization memberships and activities
- volunteer work
- other documents and data.

Refer to this file when writing the résumé, as well as when building your portfolio.

DRAFTING THE RÉSUMÉ

Organize your résumé into sections. There are no rules to what sections your resume must have. Create sections that help tell your story to employers, differentiates you, and makes your resume easy to scan. Here are some of the more common sections:

Education, Experience, Activities, Service, Skills

Other popular sections include: Leadership, Relevant Coursework and Projects, International Experience, Other Experience, Multiculturalism, Publications

In your Experience section(s), do not copy your job description; many job titles let the reader know what you did on the job. Instead, emphasize achievements, the impacts you made on the organizations, and transferable skills you developed. Think strategically. Use action verbs, numbers, and other supporting language. Create examples that differentiate you from the competition.

POSITIONING STATEMENTS

Consider adding a positioning section at the top of your résumé, if you have room or if your résumé is not very focused. This can be an Objective, Qualifications, Summary, Value Proposition, or Profile. This section should be a very specific snapshot of who you are and entice the reader to want to know more about you. This is not a statement of what you are looking for, and, most importantly, write this creatively and interestingly; do not bore the reader from the onset. If you make a claim in your positioning statement, you must provide evidence of it elsewhere in your resume.

Not every resume needs a positioning statement; however, if you will not be able to submit a cover letter with the resume, these can be useful tools to create a message of how you fit with what the employer is searching for. Also, if your experience and degree do not completely line up with the position, qualifications statements may help you link your experience with the requirements of the position. Rewrite or reconsider these statements each time you submit your resume.

ORDER OF SECTIONS

In Western civilization, we read left to right, top to bottom. Hence, put your most important information at the top and left side of the page. For most students, Education will be the first section, because it is what differentiates you from your peers without the education you are receiving. If you have a positioning statement, it will go before Education. The rest of the order depends on the importance of each section to the opportunity at hand.

After you have been out of school a few years, your education section will drop to the bottom of your résumé, for it no longer is the great differentiator—your experience is. Your degree now serves as a criterion for most positions. Also, the amount of information you list in the education section will likely shrink to only the university and degree; you may even delete the graduation year to alleviate ageism.

GETTING SUPPORT

After you create a well thought out draft of your résumé, schedule an appointment with a career counselor for an editing session or come to our walk-in hours for a one-on-one review.

DELIVERY OPTIONS AND SAVING YOUR FILE

NAMING YOUR FILE

A recruiter receives hundreds of resumes, and many are named “resume.” Make filing your e-mailed résumé easy on the recipient. Include your name and possibly some information on the opportunity in the document’s file name, e.g., “résumé_MPorter_biochemist.” A common complaint of recruiters is that they receive file names with another organization’s name on it, e.g. “résumé_kpmg” when it was sent to DeLoitte & Touche.

PDFs

Consider converting your document into a PDF for any Internet-based posting or e-mailing. This will protect it from formatting mishaps and tampering. Most newer Word programs and Mac computers offer PDF conversion. If you don’t have PDF capability on your computer, there are several free programs available on-line.

E-MAILING

E-mail your résumé and cover letter as one or two attachments. If you did not convert your documents into PDFs, test your résumé by sending it to several friends to make sure the formatting survives the Internet and different computer and printer settings.

In the body of the e-mail, type a brief note explaining that you have attached a cover letter and résumé. Also include your phone number and e-mail address for the recipient to contact you should there be a problem with the attachments. Do not make this simple e-mail another cover letter.

In the subject line, state some directional information so the recipient will know it is a safe document to open, e.g., “résumé_PRassist_Reardon.”

MAILING OR HAND-DELIVERING

When hand-delivering or mailing your résumé through the postal service, use good quality, cotton paper in white or cream. This can be found at an office supply store, most stationary stores, Walmart, Target, and other stores. Most good quality papers have a watermark; make sure yours is in the correct position with the printed copy of your résumé. Many recruiters look at this to see if you have an eye for detail.

Use the same paper for the résumé, cover letter, reference page, thank you notes, and all interviewing correspondence. Send hard-copy résumés in large 9x12-inch, flat envelopes (white ones work best, especially if your paper is white) with the send to and return addresses typed onto white or clear labels.

GOOD RÉSUMÉ TIPS

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Is your e-mail address sweetcheeks1558@hotmail.com? It is time to create a professional identity. When you are e-mailing your résumé or posting it on a webpage, keep your e-mail address in a hyperlink; however, when you are using a hard-copy résumé, remove the hyperlink.

Also consider what email service you use. Recruiters have biases and make judgments about people based on the service used. For example, Yahoo and Hotmail are often seen as throw-away or junk mail accounts, AOL is viewed by many as for older, non-tech-savvy customers, and using your school account close to graduation, if you don't keep it active post-graduation, could cause you to miss opportunities.

PROPER VS. COMMON

Capitalize proper nouns, initials, acronyms, headings, titles of publications, and a sentence (not a fragment or list) after a colon. If you do not remember the rules of proper nouns, review some style books. Here are two samples to consider for correct usage of capitalization:

Job Titles: If the title is part of the person's name, it is capitalized.

- Prepared PowerPoint presentations for the president of the company
- Wrote biographical pieces on President Obama and President Rouseff for the trade summit

Courses: If speaking about the formal name of a course it is capitalized.

- Learned about juvenile delinquent behavior in a criminal justice course
- Honed skills in critical writing and analysis in Criminal Procedure

ZERO TO 60

If the number is nine or less, spell it out; for 10 and up, you may use numerals. It is perfectly okay to spell out all numbers. This, of course, does not apply to GPA, street numbers, and such.

NUMBERS MAKE EXAMPLES REAL

Whenever it is possible verify skills, experiences, and achievements with numbers. Numbers provide tangibility to your claims and link the theoretical to the practical.

If you are sloppy on your résumé, the reader has the right to assume your work for the organization will be the same. Use Spell Check and ask friends, professors, family members, and others to read the documents again and again. However, be wary of Spell Check; this resource is not always correct and does not catch correct spellings of the incorrect word. Consider the possible errors with "there, they're, and their." Additionally when making edits, always recheck the document. Formatting errors and misspellings can occur easily when you change a section.

PERIOD OR NOT TO PERIOD; THAT IS THE QUESTION

Either format bullets with no punctuation or with periods; either choice is acceptable in résumés. The problem is that most people aren't consistent throughout the document, and this causes non-parallel construction.

GETTING LOST IN THE SPECIFICS

Describe job, leadership, and other experiences with specific details; tell stories; let the reader get a sense of whom you are and what they can expect from you; don't write job descriptions full of duties. Instead write of accomplishments, innovations, results, innovations, and impacts.

THE VERNACULAR

Use the language of the industry. This makes your résumé easy to scan for keywords and lets the reader know you understand the industry.

WOULD YOU HIRE THE LAZY ONE?

E-mailing, text messaging, and writing on e-walls have trained us all to become lazy, informal writers. The résumé is a formal, marketing document; avoid lazy writing. Beware of the following:

- Ampersands: The “&” symbol is an ampersand. Use it in the proper name of a group or other proper title; do not use it in lieu of “and.” “Sanford & Sons” is correct. “Crawfish, shrimp, & crab” is not.
- Abbreviations, Acronyms, and Initials: Use these with great caution; not only is it lazy writing, but you are assuming your reader will know what they mean.
- And/or: Often when this is used, we mean one or the other. Use more powerful language and clearer sentences.

ACTIVE OR PASSIVE

Use active voice and action verbs. Ensure verb tenses are correct to the timeframe that you are documenting.

THESE PEOPLE JUST DON'T BELONG

A list of references nor a statement “References Available” does not belong on your résumé. Instead create a reference sheet with full contact information. Bring this document to the interview; only send this sheet with your résumé if it is requested in the application. The career counselors in the Career Services office can help you with this.

DO THEY CARE? DID YOU SAY IT RIGHT?

Ensure the style of your résumé fits the industry and organization you are targeting.

NO PRONOUNS ALLOWED

Résumés are written with an understood “I.” Avoid pronouns.

PARALLEL UNIVERSE

Carefully review your verb tenses, style choices, spacing, tabs, and other formatting for consistency.

HYPERBOLES, NOT HYPERACTIVE

Do not use overly effusive language or make claims you cannot prove. Never lie or exaggerate on your résumé.

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR ME LATELY?

Do not list high school information, even if you graduated from a school that has cachet or a powerful alumni network. There are other ways to optimize these relationships. There are a few exceptions, but typically only if you accomplished something extraordinary in high school, such as “winner of National Debate Tournament” or you received experience in your select field. Discuss these honestly with your career counselor, because very few students truly qualify for this exception.

The other exception is freshmen building their first résumé; however, the freshman year should be spent building experiences that start to fill a professional résumé. Once a student has begun the sophomore year, no high school is used.

IT’S NOT PERSONAL

Do not list anything that could put the employer in any sort of Equal Employment Opportunity trouble. This includes age, marital status, sexual orientation, family information, health, ethnicity, and religious affiliation. Never list your social security number, bank information, or other private information. Social security numbers typically are not put on résumés; however, some government résumés require them. See your career counselor for more information.

ONE PAGE, TWO PAGE, THREE PAGE, MORE?

Most students’ résumés will be one page; however, if you make a compelling case to read more than one page and you’ve used your white space well, the reader will read more than one. The truth, however, is that rarely does a student need a résumé that will exceed one page. Also, rarely does a seasoned professional need more than two pages.

THE REAL ESTATE BUBBLE

Use your white space well; the résumé should be attractive and easy to scan. Be very mindful not to extend your margins too far or use too small a font (recommend a 10 to 12-point font for the body of the résumé). Also avoid style elements that make the page lopsided or the résumé look like one big column down the middle.

GILDING THE LILY? LIPSTICK ON THE PIG?

Do not hide weak content with too much design. Also some formatting may be lost in scanning software, fax machines, and with older versions of Word. Color is not appropriate on your résumé, unless you are applying to graphic design or other highly creative firms.

WHILE IN ROME

Résumé guidelines and protocols vary by country. Learn résumé rules for different cultures. Your career counselor can help you.