

RESUME WRITING GUIDE

In most fields, preparing a good resume is the first and possibly most important step in the employment process. A resume is a sales tool which is used to help you get a job interview. A resume lists your pertinent biographical facts, educational background, special talents, and work experience. By highlighting your strengths and qualifications, a resume can help convince employers that you are a person they would like to meet.

A resume should allow a prospective employer to evaluate your skills and talents quickly and accurately. Since it is often reviewed before the applicant makes personal contact with the interviewer, the importance of an attractive, complete, and accurate resume cannot be overstated. Most employers will scan a resume for only 20-30 seconds before deciding whether time and money you spend preparing your resume are good investments.

CONTENT OF THE RESUME

A resume should contain blocks of information arranged with lots of white space in between for ease in reading. Blocks usually include **Heading, Career Interest(s), Education, Academic Honors,** and **Experience.** (You may wish to highlight the titles of the blocks by using boldface, underlining, and/or all capital letters.)

The **Heading** consists of personal information: your name (usually in all capital letters): your address (students may wish to include both a current address and a permanent one); and your telephone number including area code (again, students may list both current and permanent numbers). Generally, all of this information should appear in boldface and be centered at the top of the page. (If you are including two addresses, list only your name at the top center. Space down two to four lines. List your current address at the left margin and your permanent address slightly to the right of center.) Do not abbreviate words in your heading.

The **Career Interest(s)** block contains a concise statement of your employment goals or objectives. Alternative titles for this block are Job Objectives and Career Objective. See the attached sheet for suggestions of ways to verbalize your goals.

The **Education** block describes your academic and technical training. This block will include the name of the school(s) your graduation(s) (usually month and year). In most instances, you should list your major and minor for each degree. If you performed well academically, you may wish to include your overall grade point average, your GPA in your major field, or your class standing (i.e., With Honors, Magna Cum Laude, etc.).

You may also list specific courses related to the job you are seeking, but do not list courses you would have been expected to take. (Example: If you are a music major applying for a marketing job, you may want to list courses you have taken in economics, marketing, or finance. Do not include courses such as piano, music appreciation, or musical composition.)

The **Academic Honors** block lists honors, awards, and scholarships you have received.

The **Experience** block gives pertinent details about jobs you have held and the responsibilities each entailed. If your jobs have been paid positions, use the title **Work Experience** for this section. Use the title **Career-Related Experience** for non-paid experiences (i.e., volunteer work, tutoring, internships, etc.) which required the same or similar skills as the job for which you are now applying.

When describing your work history, be sure to list the following information: your job title, the firm for which you worked, the dates during which you worked, and the company's address. If you have worked for a local company recently, you may also wish to include the company's telephone number and the name of your immediate supervisor.

Do not cut corners in this section by using general, vague, or catch-all terms. The more specifically you explain the tasks you know how to perform, the more likely you will be to attract a potential employer's attention. See the attached sheets for a list of suggested terms that might help you describe your experience.

In addition to these five standard blocks, several other **OPTIONAL** blocks can be used in a resume. Whether or not you should include these sections will depend on your personal background and the type of position you are seeking. Some job seekers may wish to use a **Military Service** block, in which they outline their service and their current military status. Others may include a **Special Skills** section to indicate their knowledge of foreign languages, computer languages, computer software, or specialized equipment. Still others may use an **Activities, Hobbies, or Personal or Community Interests** block to describe their involvement in college events and/or show themselves as well-rounded people. Include such information **ONLY** if it will help demonstrate your suitability for the job you seek.

RESUME PITFALLS

When completing your resume, you should generally **AVOID** doing any of the following:

1. Including photographs of yourself.
2. Listing your high school diploma, activities, or achievements.
3. Overstating/understating your past employment responsibilities.
4. Mentioning courses or programs you did not complete (i.e., "Began a master's degree at Northeastern State University")
5. Focusing on your long-term goals. (Instead, emphasize how your training and skills will benefit the employer.)

RESUME FORMAT

No single resume design is perfect for everyone. Although your resume should begin with the **Heading** and **Career Interest(s)** blocks, the order of your remaining material will depend on the type of job you are seeking, the qualifications the position requires, and your own background. Always arrange your information so that your greatest strengths are listed first. If you are an experienced member of the work force, however, you should begin with your employment data.

Since you want the resume to attract a prospective employer's attention and stimulate his interest in interviewing you personally, make sure your format presents your information in the best possible way.

Generally, a resume should consist of only one page. Experiment with margins and the spacing of your information until you create a one-page format which is visually pleasing and easy to read. Use a second page only if you have a large amount of information which would appear cluttered and unattractive if squeezed onto one page.

CRITIQUING THE RESUME

Once you have created a draft of your resume, five friends and relatives copies, and ask them if the format is neat and easy to follow. Also ask your critics to evaluate your resume's content. Have them read your resume closely and tell you what message they get about you as a potential employee. As with any business communication, have someone with good English skills check your letter for spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors. After listening to the critics' comments, reevaluate the resume yourself and make adjustments as needed.

Bear in mind that a resume should highlight your background by showing how your training and experience meet an employer's needs. As a result, you need not include all of your background information. For example, if you are applying for a corporate position, you may want to exclude information about various odd jobs you have done over the years. If you are applying for a job which requires a great deal of versatility, you may wish to include such information to demonstrate that you have a wide range of skills and can adapt to a variety of situations. Likewise, if you are trying to enter a field such as health and recreation, you may want to list your height, weight, age, and health status. (**Note:** Information about you physical appearance, health status, etc., can be volunteered, but federal law prohibits employers from requesting such data from applicants.)

REMEMBER: DO NOT FLAUNT INFORMATION WHICH IS NOT RELEVANT TO THE POSITION YOU ARE SEEKING. INCLUDE ONLY INFORMATION WHICH SPEAKS TO AN EMPLOYER'S NEEDS.

Type your resume on white or off-white bond paper (8 1/2" x 11"). Do not use neon- or dark-colored paper for your resume. Make sure that your final copy is neat and error-free. For reproductions of your resume, offset copies are preferable and may be obtained from most copy centers at a relatively low price. You may use a copy machine to reproduce the resume as long as the copies are clean and legible. (**Note:** Unless you have excellent typing skills, hire a professional typist or use a word processor.)

Prepare only as many resumes as you will need in a reasonable period of time. Six months may bring changes in your experience or training that will make your resume obsolete. Similarly, a new address or telephone number will make the original resume useless. Once a resume no longer represents you accurately, it must be updated.

HOW TO USE YOUR RESUME

As stated earlier, the function of a resume is to help you land an interview. If you want to apply for a position that has been advertised, for example, mail your resume, along with a cover letter tailored to the job as described in the ad, to the address indicated. Since the best jobs often are not advertised, you might use a mass mailing approach by sending your resume and cover letter describing your career goals to several prospective employers or their personnel departments. Always carry copies of your resume with you when you are job hunting, visiting personnel departments, having lunch with potential employers, or attending college career days. Sometimes a copy of your resume placed with a friend can eventually find its way into the hands of a hiring person (an example of **networking**).

REFERENCES

Compile a list of the names, titles/positions, addresses, and telephone numbers of three persons who know you well to serve as references. References usually include former professors, employers, or supervisors. You should contact these people in advance for permission to use them as references. If you are applying for a specific position and can list information about your references on your application, simply state "References available upon request" at the bottom of your resume. If there is no section on the application for references, or if you are mass mailing your resume, list your references on a separate sheet of paper and include it with your resume.

A FINAL WORD

Although writing a resume may seem to be a terrible chore, it is a mandatory task for the serious job seeker. To make the job easier--and to expedite the process of updating and revising in the future--use a word processor and a disk.

Happy and successful job hunting!