

Résumé Writing Guide

When beginning to write a résumé you should start with gathering information. If you have specific job in mind then use the job posting or position description to help you design your résumé. If you are writing an initial résumé, you need to think about the type of job you would like to pursue and the skills and experiences that need to be included.

A résumé is a one or two page summary of your education, skills, accomplishments and experience. Your résumé's purpose is to get your foot in the door. A résumé does its job successfully if it *does not* exclude you from consideration for the position.

To prepare a successful résumé, you need to know how to review, summarize, and present your experiences and achievements clearly and concisely on one page. Unless you have considerable experience, you don't need two pages. Outline your achievements briefly and concisely.

Your résumé is your ticket to an interview where you can sell yourself!

Step One - Gathering information

Make a list of all your previous work experience, including:

- job descriptions
- performance reviews
- previous résumés
- presentations you have given
- certifications
- on-the-job trainings attended
- transcripts
- licenses, awards, honors
- whatever you feel is relevant to your work
- volunteer programs

When in doubt about including something, include it.

This file will be added to as you continue on your career path. Update, whenever you take on new jobs, new skills, responsibilities, trainings and classes you have attended.

Step Two - What do you include:

Think about the following questions before you begin your résumé.

- What do I do best?
- What skills have I developed?
- What work experiences have I found satisfying?

If I am looking at a specific job description:

- What knowledge, skills and abilities are needed for the job?
- Work related experiences.
- What is my education, (degrees and specific courses).
- Unique experiences or talents I want to share.

Step Three - What format:

There are various résumés that document your professional accomplishments, your formal education, experience and your personal accomplishments.

The three types are professional, formal and personal. [Examples of these are listed on the Résumé Development page under résumé templates.](#)

[A link to additional templates from Microsoft Office can be found on the Résumé Development page.](#)

Step Four - What sections are included:

Résumé's contain sections that highlight:

- objective or summary
- your education
- work experience profile
- summary of qualification

Objective or Skills Summary

Objective:

Your objective is to grab the reader's attention. This follows your name, address and contact information.

A summary statement is a one- to two-sentence overview that captures the essence of your skills and experience. It highlights what makes you a qualified candidate as well as what makes you different (and better) than other applicants.

An objective gives potential employers an idea of the work you're hoping to do.

- Make your objectives specific about the job you want. For example:
Obtain an entry-level position within a financial institution requiring strong analytical and organizational skills.
- Tailor your objective to each employer; target every job you seek.

Examples:

Job Objective: Assistant to the Director
 Software Developer
 Marine Biology

Skills Summary:

- Vice president of marketing in an organization where a strong track record of expanding market share and Internet savvy is needed.
- Senior staff position with a bank that offers the opportunity to use my expertise in commercial real estate lending and strategic management.
- An entry-level position in the hospitality industry where a background in advertising and public relations would be needed.
- A position teaching English as a second language where a special ability to motivate and communicate effectively with students would be needed.
- To obtain an entry-level position requiring strong analytical and organizational skills in the engineering department.

Your Education

Regardless of the format you use, you will likely have an education section on your résumé. In the education section, you will want to highlight formal programs and continuing education or on-the-job training. In writing this section, you will want to be consistent in the layout (listing the college first, then the degree, or vice versa). Start with the highest degree you have earned and work backwards.

If you do not have a degree; emphasize your strongest credentials. Highlight alternative education and training, and show in-progress education.

Work Experience Profile

Look at job descriptions, performance reviews and awards or achievements related to this position. What can you say about your performance? For example, how many people did you supervise? What size of budget did you manage? How many seminars did you lead? What skills did you develop? What was your biggest accomplishment? You want to paint a clear picture for the reader of the résumé in terms of your success and the skills you have developed. They want to hire people who have been successful.

Summary of qualification

If you have skills you have utilized and developed in a number of settings, it may be better to demonstrate your competence by highlighting the skill rather than where you worked. For example, a counselor may have worked in private practice, a clinic and an educational setting. Counseling may be one skill this person has developed in all of the settings, so it would be somewhat redundant to describe it in each place. By pulling out counseling as a primary skill, and then describing the populations worked with, the number of clients seen, the types of problems encountered, etc., this person will be able to show his/her ability to work in a wide range of settings.

Do's and Don'ts of Résumé Writing

In the résumé writing guide, you were provided the basics of writing a résumé. Before starting the actual construction of your résumé, here are some suggestions on how to make improvements, while showing how to avoid pitfalls, in drafting your résumé. Remember use common sense.

DO'S

- It is important to have both a electronic and paper copy of your résumé
- **Write a draft;** customize it for each job application, particularly if you want to highlight a skill for that job.
- Emphasize concrete examples of the experienced you have received in other jobs.
- Show the dates of your employment. Don't make the employer guess when you worked at a particular job or acquired a particular skill.
- Indicate the contributions you made to your last employer by explaining the specific items/tasks you completed for them.
- Keep it simple.
- Present relevant information only. Rule of thumb: no more than ten years of job related information.
- Be definite. Put your skills in the best light possible.
- Use power words in your text. For example "implemented" is better than "did".
- Use simple language, free of jargon.
- Be concrete, not vague.
- Vary sentence length.
- Use action words, power words or action verbs as set out in this site. They liven up a résumé and make it stand out. [Examples of résumé actions words can be found on the résumé development Web page under résumé action words.](#)
- Always proofread the résumé for errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation and typos.
- Choose a job objective that is the focus of your résumé.
- Research what skills, knowledge or special training is required for a specific job description.
- Make a list of your strongest skills that meet the requirements of the job.
- For each of these skills review your previous employment history, or experience with other organizations and list some concrete examples where those skills can be illustrated.
- List education or special training that would apply to this particular job opportunity.
- Arrange these skills and actions in the résumé format you are using.
- Refer to a thesaurus regularly to improve the words you have chosen for the text.

DON'TS

- Don't use long wordy sentences.
- Don't make the employer guess why you are writing. State your purpose.
- Don't use slang or abbreviations.
- Don't use catch phrases or clichés, such as "self-starter". Improve upon these descriptions with actual goals or projects.
- Don't talk about unrelated career goals.
- Don't waste space with unnecessary information. It will weaken your presentation.
- Don't use inappropriate stationary. Pictures of flowers on the border might be acceptable in a letter to your mother, but not to a potential employer.
- Don't include erroneous company information. It is the fastest way to turn off the employer's interest in your application.
- Don't misrepresent yourself. It will become obvious in the job interview or if discovered later and may become grounds for dismissal. You wouldn't want the employer to lie about the responsibilities of the job. Don't lie to the employer about your qualifications.
- Do it over until it is perfect.
- Don't just describe your past employment history; take this opportunity to tell the employer about your accomplishments in those jobs.

Now you should be ready to write your first résumé. It is likely that you will write several drafts before you are happy with your final product.

And remember: *"It's not enough to be good, if you have the ability to be better."*