

Career Development Center

OccidentalCollege



WHAT IS A RESUME?

A resume is an advertisement of who you are and your abilities and accomplishments. It emphasizes your skills, personal attributes, education, experience, and other background information that demonstrates your qualifications for the type of position you are seeking. The resume attempts to answer the prospective employer's question, *"What can this candidate do for my organization."* It is the beginning of a well-planned job search.

Although there is no one, right formula for this marketing tool, the following guidelines and suggestions are designed to assist you in preparing and writing a resume that best reflects your potential.

What is the Purpose of a Resume?

- Helps emphasize your transferable skills. Every job has a set of skills associated with it, and applicants are measured against this desired skill cluster.
- Provides you with an opportunity to make the impression you want, since you control the information presented in your resume.
- Helps you get interviews.
- Provides a framework for discussion during the interview.
- Reminds the interviewer of you after the interview is over and justifies the hiring decision to others.

Writing a Resume

Step 1: Personal Assessment

Personal assessment provides an opportunity for you to identify important characteristics that may help or hurt your job search. It shows you how you might fit into an organization. This knowledge can point you and your job search in the right direction.

Step 2: Identify Target

Identify and make a list of the position(s), area(s), and/or industries that interest you. Research skills and other qualifications required for the type of work you have identified. Assess which of these qualifications you possess. Some common skills and personality traits that employers seek in college students include:

ability to learn quickly
accepts responsibility
analytical thinking
attention to detail
communication skills
computer literacy
creativity
efficiency
entrepreneurial skills
flexibility/versatility

honesty/integrity
interpersonal skills
leadership skills/team player
multi-lingual
positive attitude
problem solving
self-confidence
self motivated
well organized

Step 3: List Accomplishments

List your different work experiences (paid and unpaid) and review each experience to identify possible *accomplishments* (e.g., problems you solved, special projects, special assignments, awards, honors, training, and commendations). Determine which of these accomplishments are related to your job target, are of interest to the reader of your resume, and illustrate important transferable skills.

Also, consider your participation in activities and your education for possible relevant accomplishments. Accomplishments for resumes should be written in short, measurable, and results-oriented statements. Use numbers, percentages, statistics, and superlatives (i.e., first, only, most, best, top), when appropriate.

Examples:

- Managed student phone-a-thon, raising \$190,000 (89% of goal).
- Consistently exceeded weekly and monthly advertising sales quotas for local newspaper.

Step 4: Format

Choose an appropriate resume format for your situation and job objective.

Chronological

This is the most common format used by college students and recent college graduates. It is a historical time-line presentation of your education and experience, in reverse chronological order, with the most recent events first. This format allows you to emphasize job titles and places of employment and to elaborate on your accomplishments, duties, and responsibilities for each position.

Skills/Functional

This format is advantageous if your prior experience is unrelated to your current career objective but you have performed the skills related to your objective. It allows you to emphasize experience relevant to the position you are pursuing and places less emphasis on dates, job titles, and responsibilities.

Combination

This format begins as a functional resume by listing significant skills that are pertinent to the position. The second section lists the positions and the employers for whom you have worked, in reverse chronological order. Job responsibilities and achievements are listed for each position. This format is a good choice for professionals who can demonstrate both relevant skills and a successful career track. This format is generally not used by those having less than 12-15 years in the workforce.

Step 5: Categories

Review categories listed below to determine which areas are appropriate for your resume. The categories on the resume should be listed in order of importance.

Heading

Include your name (bold, cap, 14 point is suggested), address (do not abbreviate and, if applicable, use box #), zip code, telephone number and, possibly, your e-mail address or FAX #. You may want to add a message phone number.

Objective (*optional*)

Use your cover letter to convey a focused objective that relates your specific skills and experience to the job you are seeking. If you have a specific objective, state it briefly and precisely in one line. However, liberal arts majors often have broad employment objectives and stating a specific objective could limit the range of positions they want to consider. Do not include a vague, unrealistic, or self-serving objective in your resume.

Examples:

- Clear objective: "An internship in public or corporate accounting."
- Vague objective: "Seeking a challenging entry-level position in a progressive organization that provides career growth."

Education

Include degree, major (if applicable, minor or emphasis), school's name, location, and anticipated graduation date. Overall and major GPA, typically 3.0 or above, are included on your resume if this is a selling point. Your education is listed in reverse chronological order (e.g., most recent degree first).

Example:

Master of Science, Psychology, May 2007
University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA

Bachelor of Arts, Sociology, May 2004
Occidental College, Los Angeles, CA GPA: 3.9

This section may also include selected classes, professional training, honors, awards, study abroad, research, or special projects. Generally, college students **do not** include their high school accomplishments.

Experience

This section includes part-time and full-time jobs, temporary positions, self-employment, internships, volunteer or community service experience, and work for a faculty member. When describing your experience, you need to stress *accomplishments* by carefully selecting action verbs and phrases that will advertise your key skills and illustrate your potential (see list for action verbs). Each experience should include position title, name of employer, geographic location, and dates of employment.

Activities, Community Service or Affiliations

In this section, you can list your involvement in clubs, organizations, committees, sports, community service, professional associations, and other affiliations related to your job objective or industry. List and emphasize those activities in which you utilized leadership, teamwork, and other skills relevant for the employer. If you held an office, list the position held and the outcomes or benefits of your efforts. Hobby-type activities are usually not included on your resume.

Languages

In today's global economy, language skills are a marketable asset. Different approaches to presenting these skills include: fully bilingual/bicultural in....; speak, read, write, translate, interpret ... documents; conversationally fluent in...; knowledge of Asian business protocol.

Special Skills/Technical Skills

This section may include computer skills, especially software programs you have knowledge of; lab techniques and the use of specialized equipment; and other specific knowledge skills related to your career field.

References *(optional)*

Employers assume you will be able to furnish references on request. If you choose to include this category, most often the statement *'references available on request'* is used. You should have in mind the names of three or four people who know you well enough to positively appraise your abilities and who have agreed in advance to act as references on your behalf. It is a good idea to provide them with a copy of your resume. Usually references will be requested *after* a resume is submitted. See link for sample.

Additional

This section may include: foreign language skills, research, projects, credits (theater/film) publications, or any loose items that you feel are important to convey to a potential employer.

Personal

Information regarding your age, height, weight, and marital status should be omitted from your resume.

Electronic Resumes

Many organizations scan applicants' resumes into a database retrieval system. When employers have job openings, they identify possible candidates by searching for specific skills and qualifications of the applicants in their resume database. Resumes intended to be read by computers rather than humans must be prepared with *keywords*. For more information about preparing resumes for scanning, consult books in the Career Development Center.

Additional Resume Writing and Format Tips

- Use formal language; avoid pronouns (I, me).
- Resumes should be short and concise; designed for easy skimming, and kept to 1 to 2 pages in length.
- Make sure all verb tenses are consistent (present for present experience, past for past experience).
- Present your experience in reverse chronological order.
- Do not start job with *responsibilities include...*
- Resumes should be truthful and accurate.
- Resumes must be done on a word processor and printed on laser printer.
- Carefully manipulate font size, boldface, caps, margins, line spacing, and design to make your resume presentation look balanced and easy to read.
- Avoid using underlining and italics, except for book titles and foreign words.
- Do not over use the bullet.
- Use numbers or percentages to describe your accomplishments.

- Use white, off-white, or light gray, and heavy weight paper. Use the same paper for resumes cover letters, and references.
- Always include a cover letter with your resume.
- Update your resume whenever you change jobs, receive awards, etc.

Final Edit and Critique

- Evaluate your resumes to make sure your key selling points stand out.
- Organize your resume categories as they relate to your job target. Place the most important sections first. Most recent college graduates list their education before their experience.
- Use the jargon of your desired job target and industry.
- Do not use abbreviations. Use acronyms, only if the reader will understand them.
- Carefully proofread your resume for spelling, grammar, punctuation, and typographical errors. Do not rely on spell check.
- Always tailor your resume to the type of position you want. Prepare a different version of your resume for each career/job objective.
- Have your resume edited by one or two individuals who can be objective and point out unclear or awkward areas.
- Remember: A resume is a work in progress!