

Resume Writing Guide

What is a resume?

A resume is a summary of background, skills and qualifications, which is sent to employers for review. Consider it to be your personal marketing brochure with the goal of gaining the employer's attention and to giving them the information they need to bring you to the next step in the hiring process, an interview.

Why is a resume important?

Your resume is often the first document that an employer would typically look at, so it serves as your first impression in the employment process. A well-written and formatted resume tells the employer a lot about your professionalism, and improves the chances for receiving an interview. Consider that employers compare resumes to decide who to interview.

How should you prepare for writing a resume?

The best way to begin writing your resume is do a self assessment. Think of past successes and achievements that you have experienced and write them down. These could be related to academics, volunteer activities or work experience and can even include things like travel, hobbies or any life experience where you learned and grew. Once you have finished brainstorming, narrow down the points that you want to focus on and prioritize them based on their applicability to qualities an employer may find important. You don't have to include every single point on your resume; quality is always better than quantity.

What are the different types of resumes?

The three basic types of resumes are:

Chronological Resumes have work experience organized with the most recent employer first, followed by the employment experience before that, and so on. This reverse chronological order helps the employer see the history of where you worked and is the most generally accepted resume type.

Functional Resumes highlight groups of skills and capabilities rather than presenting them chronologically. For example, if you gathered technical skills from a variety of sources such as courses taken, job experiences and as a hobby, you may want to use a functional resume to showcase those skills.

Combination Resumes are the happy medium between the two other types. This type works well for someone who has been preparing for a particular career and has held recent positions which were related to the job which they are applying for.

What are the most important considerations for resume writing?

Resume writing is about sales and the challenge is to write a resume that effectively showcases talents. One of the best techniques is to showcase accomplishments rather than simply list out job duties or tasks.

Here is an experience example before showcasing:

Performed cashier duties and answered customer questions

Here is the same example after showcasing:

Handled as many as 200 financial transactions per day and assisted customers with product selection. Received training and refined customer service skills. Was commended for being timely and accurate and given additional responsibilities.

Quantify your accomplishments and help the reader to understand what you are capable of. It is not just what you are able to do, but how well you can do the job being pursued. By presenting specifics, the reader will gain a much better picture of your skillset and add to your credibility. Ask yourself questions like: How did I improve something? What did I learn and how did I grow? What skill did I demonstrate? How did my employer benefit from my work?

Position your resume by considering the qualifications and requirements for the job being pursued and addressing those in the resume. For example, if you are seeking a position which requires strong analytical skills, you will need to write about your analytical skills and how you use them to resolve problems. One technique for doing this is called C.A.R., which stands for Challenge, Action and Result. Write about a challenge you had, the action you took to meet that challenge and what the result was. For instance:

Recognized that phone calls were being dropped due to long hold times. Changed the on-hold message and added background music, decreasing dropped calls by 30%. This led to an increase in business and customer satisfaction.

What sections will I need in my resume?

The OptimalResume program will present you with several options for defining your resume sections, and you can customize them for your specific needs. Typical resume sections include OBJECTIVE, EDUCATION, HONORS AND AWARDS, EXPERIENCE, SKILLS, and ACTIVITIES. As you write your resume, you will be able to view examples and help and you can always go back and add, change or delete sections.

Perfecting your resume

Resume writing is an ongoing process and will likely continue throughout your career. Gain feedback from employment professionals, peers, industry insiders, friends and family and always keep your resume up to date. The time spent producing your optimal resume will be rewarding!