

Résumés

The most momentous business correspondence you write may be the résumé you use to apply for a job. It's wise to take great pains with it, for it will enable a busy personnel manager to quickly decide whether your application deserves any follow-up. To write a good résumé, you will need to draw on many of the skills and strategies for clear and persuasive writing that you have learned about and practiced throughout your academic years. Direct, persuasive, correct prose can help you stand out amongst the crowd.



In a résumé, you present yourself as someone who has the qualification needed to excel at a job, someone who will be an asset to the organization to which you are applying. You will want to consider every word and format decision carefully, revising and revising again until the finished product gleams like a jewel. Because of the time and expense spent in crafting a good résumé, job seekers often have multiple copies of a single résumé on hand to include with all their applications; any relevant information not highlighted in the résumé can be discussed in the accompanying application letter. However, if you have access to a word processor or computer and can easily print out attractive copies, you may want to customize your résumé for each job for which you are applying.

A résumé is a highly formatted document, but also one that allows a wide variety of decisions about style, organization, and appearance. In this section, we describe a typical résumé, but you should know that there are many acceptable formats. Unless you have a great deal of experience, your résumé should be no longer than one page. The standard résumé consists of a heading and labeled sections that detail your experience and qualification in a number of areas.

Heading: Put your name on the first line; street address on the second; city, state, and zip code on the third; and phone number on the fourth. The heading is generally centered on the page.

Employment Objective: Although this section is optional, we recommend it because it allows personnel officers to see at a glance what your goals and priorities are. Try to sound confident, ambitious, and eager, but not pompous and presumptuous.

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Education: This is generally the first section and is almost always included. For each postsecondary school you've attended, specify the name of the institution, your major, your date of graduation (or expected graduation), and your grade point average (if it reflects well on you). You can also mention any mention any awards or honors or any course work that may be relevant to the job.

Experience: This is the most important section of the résumé. List each job separately, starting with the most recent one first. You can include both full-time and part-time jobs. For each job, give the name of the organization, your position, your responsibilities, and the dates you held the job. If you were involved in any unusual projects, or were responsible for any important developments, describe them. Remember that the point of your résumé is to show your prospective employer that you are well qualified for the position you want. Highlight the details that show relevant work experience and leadership ability. Minimize information about jobs or responsibilities that are unconnected to the job for which you are applying.

Skills: If you have special skills that your prospective employer might find attractive (data processing, technical drawing, knowledge of a foreign language) but aren't that obvious from the descriptions of your education and work experience, you can list them.

Interests: You can either specify professional interests and activities (*Member of Birmingham Bricklayers Association*) or personal pursuits (skiing, hiking, needlepoint). In either case, this section should show that you're a dedicated and well-rounded individual.

References: If you are answering a job advertisement that requests references, give them. Always contact your references in advance to make sure they will be willing to give you a good recommendation. For each person, give the name, his or her organization and position, and the organization's address and phone number. If references have not been requested, you can simply say, "Available upon request." Keep your résumé brief and pointed by using phrases and clauses rather than complete sentences. Use action verbs (supervised, ordered, maintained) and the active voice whenever possible. Highlight labels with underlining, boldfaced, or a larger type size. And remember that a neat, attractive, professional appearance is extremely important. Arrange information on the page so that it is pleasing to the eye, use the best paper you can, and either print your résumé on a laser printer or have it typeset.