

TIP Sheet

HOW TO WRITE A RESUME

Job seekers compete in the labor market. And, as with other products in other markets, job seekers must offer good value. A resume advertises a jobseeker's value and packages his or her qualifications in an appealing wrapper that an employer won't pass up.

Just as shop owners take inventory of their stock, job seekers take inventory of their qualifications. Using their inventories of qualifications, they select an occupation and prospective employer. They compile pertinent facts into concise, well-written resumes, then write cover letters to introduce their resumes and ask for interviews.

An inventory of your qualifications includes experience, volunteer work and/or internships, educational background and academic achievements, awards, honors, scholarships, student body or club offices held, or athletic affiliations. This inventory provides the bank of information from which you will select facts for your resume.

Take inventory

The inventory of your educational background should contain all learning experiences after high school, including military training, on-the-job training, college equivalency programs and college courses.

If you went to college, list the schools you attended, the dates enrolled, degrees earned, and the dates they were awarded. Name your major subject, average grade in your major fields, and overall grade point average. Also, list any honors you received, such as being on the dean's list or in honor societies.

Non-collegiate instruction gained in military training or on-the-job training is especially important for people without a college degree. When listing non-collegiate learning, describe the type of training, its length, where and when you were trained, and the evaluation of your performance. If you have taken college-level equivalency tests or courses from home-study schools, list subjects and grades or scores.

Next review your work experience, listing where and when you worked, what you did, and what you accomplished. "Work" includes full- and part-time employment, military service, volunteer work, and work overseas. When you note when and where you worked, give specific dates (month and year) and addresses (city and state) for all your previous jobs. In discussing what you did, list your title, duties, and, most importantly, your accomplishments, for example, developing a system or enhancing an existing system which resulted in higher production or more efficiency. Finally, evaluate your performance critically and honestly and cite any awards or recognition you earned.

The next section of your inventory should contain personal information such as hobbies, memberships and offices held in professional associations, work on civic projects or in community service, and special interests. It should *not* include your state of health, weight, and physical disabilities. Information about your personality and your goals in

life won't appear on your application; but, since this information plays a major role in your selection of jobs to apply for, include it in your inventory.

Packaging yourself

Your resume is a written sales presentation. It creates a first impression of you while presenting your abilities and experience. A resume may be a response to an ad, part of a direct mailing campaign, a calling card at an interview, or a reference for friends and acquaintances who may discuss you with their employers. It is a fact sheet that tells an employer that you have the qualifications for the job; therefore, each element of your resume must prove that you do. A resume has three main parts: the introduction brings you and the job for which you are applying to the attention of the reader, the main body presents your qualifications, and the conclusion offers references to cement your claims.

Place your name prominently on the resume. Your full name, address, home telephone number, and business telephone number (if you wish to be reached there), and e-mail address go at the top of the page. Next comes a job objective, a short statement of the job you want. A statement of long term objectives, called a career objective, may follow the job objective. Some employers say objectives can be limiting because they restrict job opportunities with a company. Others say they show an applicant has direction and ambition. Decide on the best approach for you.

The main body of your resume comes next. It includes your educational background, work experience, and pertinent personal information. The way you arrange the sections may determine whether or not you are asked for an interview. If employers have to read through unimportant information before they get to your qualifications, they may not read your resume at all. To make sure they do read it, you must emphasize your strongest points by placing them first. For example, if education is your strong suit, place it first; if your work experience is stronger, place that first.

You can arrange information either chronologically or functionally. The *chronological format* lists education or experience by date, in reverse order, most recent accomplishments first. This format is best used by applicants whose recent experiences have been in a field related to the job they're applying for. The *functional format* divides qualifications into major functions or categories such as management, sales, or writing. The functional format can be especially helpful for applicants with narrow or erratic work experience, by showing accomplishments made in a short time or by highlighting job functions rather than employment dates.

Education

If your educational background is strong you might list it first. If it is weak, play it down by placing education after work experience or by stressing military training or other sources of learning.

Note the schools you attended and degrees earned, if any. Always include the names of schools, addresses, and dates attended, but be more selective in listing courses or areas of concentration within a major. Spotlight only the courses necessary or supplemental to the

job you're applying for. For example, courses in art history would be irrelevant to a job as an accountant, but courses in economics would be considered supplemental. If your educational record is strong, list class standing, grade averages, and honor society memberships. Although these elements are usually less important, they emphasize your scholastic achievements and may help you competitively.

An optional element to include in the section on your educational background is the percentage of your educational expenses that you paid, if your contribution would demonstrate commitment, willingness to work, and enthusiasm. Some employers are impressed with the industriousness and zeal of students who worked to pay their way through school.

Work experience

The next section describes work experience—an even more important part of your resume if your educational background is weak or narrow. Although you can list your work experience either chronologically or functionally, the functional format is preferred because it is more forceful.

Generally, cite only experience that is related to the job you are seeking. While some employers want to know about all previous employment, even part-time work during your school days, more often they are interested in experience related to your job objective. You must decide which approach would be stronger for you. If you think that showing you worked part-time throughout school would present you as an industrious person, include it.

When describing your work experience, specify the dates of employment and positions held in a previous job. Emphasize your accomplishments. Don't simply state your duties; explain how you helped to improve the company. Don't say, in effect, "I was great." Tell *why* you were great. Sometimes a short summary of your experiences, followed by more detailed information, is helpful to the evaluator.

If you have worked in a foreign country or served in the armed forces, try to describe your work in familiar terms and relate what you did to similar functions performed in the civilian labor force. For example, a supervisory position in the military can be equated to a management position in private business, and a mechanic overseas with the Air Force is equivalent to an airline mechanic. Always translate foreign job titles into English. Self-employed applicants should describe their work as though they have been working for someone else. At the same time, they should emphasize their independence, responsibility, and accomplishments while running their own business.

Reasons for leaving former jobs need not be mentioned in your resume. Some people argue that if you don't tell why you left a job, the employer will wonder why or assume that you left on poor terms. Generally, however, reasons are not necessary or can be explained during the interview. If you do include reasons, don't blame your former employer. Acceptable reasons include: "I left for a better opportunity" or "I wanted better pay and more challenging work."

Personal information

There are conflicting opinions on what personal information is right to include in a resume. Special interests, affiliations, travel, or foreign languages are widely considered appropriate elements; physical appearance, health, marital status, and age are not.

You may include information concerning association memberships and travel experience related to your occupational field, and language fluency. Hobbies and other activities are sometimes suggested because they can show employers how you spend your leisure time and reveal a side of you that the rest of your resume cannot.

A prospective employer is usually interested in your qualifications, not your appearance, so a photograph is unnecessary. Personal facts such as height, weight, and health status should be omitted as they are frequently part of application forms for employment.

You need not state your marital status nor say if you have children. Keep in mind that some employers feel that a "family man" is likely to be more responsible than a bachelor. For women, the situation is more complex. Discrimination against women is illegal, but that doesn't stop an employer from wondering whether you can handle a job and a family at the same time.

Age is another controversial piece of personal information you should omit. If you are young and applying for a high-level position, your age may lead the employer to feel that you are too inexperienced. Therefore, omit your age and show your maturity and abilities through your accomplishments. Older applicants also face resistance from employers who feel that older workers do not adapt well to new work situations.

References

Your resume should conclude with a note about your references. Debate continues over whether references should be listed in the resume. To keep your resume as brief as possible, it is often wise simply to state "References available upon request," and have a list ready to present at the interview. On the other hand, if your references are persons who are prominent in your field of interest, mentioning them may be the key to unlocking an interviewer's door.

Salary

You may note that salary has not been mentioned. Do not discuss salary on your resume. Including the amount of a base salary in your resume could price you out of the market or limit you to a salary lower than the employer is prepared to pay.

Resume design

Now your resume content is complete. Design two documents—one to print and send "snail mail" and one formatted to be scanned into a prospective employer's electronic database. Visit the library for a book of sample resumes; the Butte Community College Career Center has many books containing sample resumes. There are also many Internet sites that offer help with resumes.

The electronic resume should be formatted in plain text, without bold or italic formatting, tables, hyperlinks, or other fancy elements. Use a simple font, simple caps for headings, a single line of space between sections, and left alignment throughout. Electronic resumes may include a separate list of keywords appropriate to the position you seek, or those keywords may be incorporated into the text of the resume itself.

For a paper resume, use a consistent form with titles for each blocked section. Unless you're applying for a position that requires creativity or design abilities, leave your self-expression for the cover letter. Try to keep your resume to a single side of a single page of heavy (24 lb), 8 1/2 by 11-inch light colored paper, printed in black ink. If you need two pages, use one page printed on both sides. If you use a copier, make sure the glass screen is free of lint or other marks that will show up on your resume.

Language

Emphasize your assets, not your liabilities; try to omit anything unfavorable. Be truthful. Don't exaggerate or misrepresent yourself. A survey of 200 public and private employers showed that 82 percent of them verify at least some information on a resume; 63 percent obtain full college transcripts, and 79 percent check with previous employers.

Use factual, concise language in writing your resume. State facts, not opinions. Use active verbs and simple, clear language. Use full names, not abbreviations. Be neat and make no typographical, spelling, or punctuation errors. Have someone read your resume before you draft the final copy. An objective reader can offer critical review and suggestions about things you might have overlooked.

Finally, keep old resumes for future reference.

As a well-organized packaging and marketing campaign can reap profits for manufacturers, a well-organized and thought-out resume and cover letter can open doors to employment for job seekers.