

# Résumé Writing



The résumé is often the first contact a potential employer has with a job seeker. To be useful, it must make a good impression immediately. The current practice of corporate personnel is to give each résumé a quick glance (10-20 seconds), discard those that appear disorganized or too wordy, and file the rest. On the average, only one or two out of 100 résumés mailed will result in an interview. However, employers still ask for résumés, and a good résumé continues to provide a competitive edge in the majority of professional, administrative, and managerial occupations.

## What Does A Résumé Accomplish?

A résumé tells the prospective employer what you have accomplished in the past and what you can do for their company now. The résumé's primary function is to sell your talents and skills to an employer - clearly, forcefully, and quickly. In a sense, you are selling yourself and your résumé is your advertisement. It serves as your advance contact to spark an employer's interest and to generate an interview.

## When Is A Résumé Used?

- **Mass mailing campaigns** - Résumés frequently have been used by job seekers to contact each and every potential employer in an industry or selected area. You may not know if the company has a job opening, but you want them to know that you are available and that your experience and talents can be an asset to their firm. Mass mailings of this kind can be very expensive and the odds of promoting an opening are slim. You can improve your chances of getting interviews by composing specific résumés for different companies. One suggestion is to sort your targeted companies into groups with similar characteristics, and write a résumé highlighting your appropriate strengths for each group.
- **Responding to a want ad** - The most effective résumés are tailored for a particular employer. If the job requirements listed are vague or unclear, call the employer for more information. Try to get a clear picture of the job duties, education, and experience requirements. It's a good idea to list your questions in advance. Find out at the outset to whom you are speaking. Also try to find out the name and title of the individual who will review your résumé. If you are speaking to someone in authority and the call is going well, try to schedule an interview. Remember to thank your information giver.
- **Interviewing** - The résumé operates as a script for both you and the employer. When you compose your résumé, keep in mind that it gives you the chance to choose those topics you wish to discuss during the interview. Be prepared to expand on all the accomplishments you listed. A rehearsal with friends and honest critics will help.

## What To Include On Your Résumé

Be prepared to spend some time and effort in writing an effective résumé. You will need two types of information:

- **About Yourself** - You need a clear picture of your job talents, work history, education, and career goals. It may be helpful to refer to the United States Employment Service's Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT) which contains generalized job descriptions of all the jobs you held or those you wish to pursue in the future.
- **About the Job** - Gather as much specific information as possible about the position for which you are applying. Your résumé should show that your skills, education, achievements, work experience, and past job achievements are related to the position requirements. The DOT may prove helpful here as well.

### **Where To Get Additional Help**

There are many sources of information on how to write the best résumé.

- **Books** - There are as many variations in résumé styles and formats as there are books on the market. Most books describe these variations in great detail and provide numerous examples. Some are specific to particular industries or to specific groups of job seekers. Check your local library, bookstore, or the resource center at Workforce Solutions East Texas for them.
- **Computer programs** - There are several software programs that can inventory personal attributes and job history, and can format a résumé in the style of your choice. Check software listings at bookstores and computer stores.
- **Workshops** - Many workshops run by public and non-profit agencies, including Workforce Solutions East Texas will help you write a résumé so will private, fee-charging firms.

### **Making Yourself More Marketable - Transferable Skills**

People who have held or who are seeking middle-management positions face increased competition. To help prepare for this increased challenge, it is important to emphasize transferable skills. When you are thinking about your past work history (especially your most recent positions), think about skills you developed and responsibilities you had that could be appropriate to the performance of other jobs in different industries. For example, if you are in a sales or marketing position within the insurance industry, think about how you could apply those skills to the health care industry. The same is true for your accounting, computer, management, communication, and analytical skills.

To get a better idea of transferable skills, it might be helpful to look in the Occupational Outlook Handbook and the Dictionary of Occupational Titles. Both publications contain job descriptions which include lists of skills. By emphasizing transferable skills, you will expand your potential job market.

### **Types Of Résumés**

All of the résumés described in books and computer programs are based on variations and combinations of two formats: reverse-chronological and functional. The key to writing an effective résumé is choosing the right style for you - one that emphasizes your strengths and de-emphasizes your weaknesses. Whichever résumé style you choose, be sure to include examples of results that you produced that benefited your previous employer(s). Employers want to see measurable achievements. They want to know they are going to hire someone who can contribute to their organization's bottom line.

### **The Reverse-Chronological Résumé**

This format lists the jobs you've had by dates of employment, starting with your most recent job. The usual arrangement is:

- Dates of employment.
- Job title.
- Name and address of company.
- A brief description of the duties performed.
- Skills used.
- Major ways you have benefited the company.

Make sure you include all transferable skills. This format stresses what you accomplished in each of the positions you held.

#### ***Use this format if:***

- You have progressed up a clearly-defined career ladder and are looking for career advancement.
- You have recent experience in the field you are seeking.
- You have a continuous work history in your field.

#### ***Do not use this format if:***

- You have had many different types of jobs.
- You have changed jobs frequently.
- You are trying to switch fields.
- You are just starting out.

#### ***Tips for preparing a Reverse-Chronological Résumé:***

- List your most recent jobs first.
- Give dates for each job.
- Briefly describe the main duties you performed and your accomplishments in each job.
- Emphasize duties performed and past accomplishments that are relevant to the job you currently seek.

### **The Functional Résumé**

This format emphasizes your skills and accomplishments as they relate to the job for which you're applying. Like other résumé formats you should include all transferable

skills. A functional résumé presents a profile of your experience based on professional strengths or skill groupings. Your employment history usually follows, but in less detail than in a chronological résumé.

***Use this format if:***

- You have worked for only one employer, but have performed a wide variety of jobs.
- You are applying for a job that is different from your present or most recent job.
- You have little or no job experience, for example if you have recently graduated from school.
- You have gaps in your work history.
- You are re-entering the job market after several years of freelancing, consulting, homemaking, or unemployment.

***Do not use this format if:***

- Your work history is stable and continuous, because employers sometimes assume that a functional résumé hides a spotty, unstable work history

Whichever résumé format you use, keep in mind that the more unusual the appearance, the more likely it is to distract the employer from your accomplishments.

***Tips for preparing a Functional Résumé:***

- Study the duties for the job you are seeking; identify a few general skills that are important to the job.
- Review your background and experience.
- Identify talents and accomplishments that demonstrate your ability to perform the job skills.
- List these talents and accomplishments under the job skills to which they are related.
- Emphasize activities that demonstrate qualities such as leadership and/or organizational skills, at work or in organizations such as clubs or fraternities.

**General Guide To An Effective Résumé**

The following suggestions apply to any type of résumé. The order below is recommended, but you can be flexible:

**FORMAT**

- **Heading** - Your name, address, and phone number should be prominently displayed at the top of the page.
- **Summary or Objective** - If you use a summary, highlight your experience and accomplishments in two or three sentences. Clearly communicate the type of job you want and what you can offer to an employer. If you prefer to state an objective, make it broad enough to embrace closely-related jobs, but not so broad that you appear lacking in focus or willing to take anything (this

- should be done in one sentence). Whether you choose a summary or an objective, indicate a level, function, and industry for the position you are seeking. Be concise but general. Use your cover letter to make your summary or objective specific to a particular employer.
- **Experience** - Indicate your major responsibilities. Emphasize accomplishments and their measurable benefits to your former employer, e.g. situations improved, savings/earnings, new concepts adopted by firm. Achievements should be consistent with career direction, with a concentration on recent successes.
  - **Skills** - List special skills such as word processing or an ability to operate special equipment. **Education** - Start with the most advanced degree and give the name and location of the institution, major and minor fields, and all career-oriented scholarships and academic awards. Include career-related extra-curricular activities, workshops, and seminars. **Licenses, Certifications, & Publications** - Include only those that are career-related, without elaboration.
  - **Additional Personal Data** - Include only if career-related, such as memberships in associations.

## CONTENT

### **Do:**

- Be positive.
- Identify your relevant accomplishments; they should be quantitatively stated where appropriate and describe how they benefited the employer.
- Have friends who know your professional accomplishments comment on your résumé and suggest items you may have forgotten or perhaps dismissed as unimportant.
- Be specific; choose words carefully, make every word count, and eliminate unnecessary words.
- Use concise sentences.
- Use bullet entries for a clean, easy-to-read look.
- Use action verbs.

### **Don't:**

- Don't devote space to items not directly related to the job you are seeking, such as hobbies, personal data (height, weight, and marital status), or descriptions of jobs from your previous career.
- Don't use more than a few lines to describe your accomplishments; a one- or two-page résumé is best.
- Don't explain employment gaps.
- Don't include references; a separate list of references should be prepared ahead of time and should be available for distribution to employers on request, especially at the interview (individuals and firms listed as a reference should be informed that a contact may be made on your behalf).
- Don't include salary requirements.

## **APPEARANCE**

### ***Do:***

- Type your résumé or have it professionally printed (if you use a computer printer, make sure the print is letter quality); use 8 1/2" x 11" quality paper.
- Use wide margins; single space within sections, double space between sections.
- Center or left-justify and capitalize all headings.
- Make sure your résumé is neat, readable, symmetrical, and visually balanced.
- Proofread your résumé carefully and then have someone else proofread it (be sure your spelling, grammar, and punctuation are flawless).

### ***Don't:***

- Use abbreviations, except for names of states (e.g. TX, LA, NY)