

Résumé Writing

Source: The Career Center at Carnegie Mellon, Carnegie Mellon University

Overview

The résumé is the first impression an employer receives about a candidate and serves as a student's marketing tool. Students are encouraged to carefully write a résumé that clearly and concisely describes pertinent information about skills, experiences, and career goals. This may include creating a few versions of a résumé, which are tailored to specific career areas.

Since a résumé is made up of sections that help employers learn about the candidate, please know that some sections are essential, while others are considered optional. There is no one exact way to write a résumé. Even though you can get ideas from many people and many samples, you must decide what best communicates the most important information to an employer. Getting feedback from potential employers prior to the job search is recommended.

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1. Content

- Keep it to one page in length if you can; advanced degree students and candidates who have worked for several years may require more than one page. If more than one page, make sure your name is at the top of the second page.
- Include items that are most relevant to and supportive of a career goal.
- Consider including a career objective to show self-awareness and commitment to a field.
- Order items so that the most relevant items appear first.
- Use action verbs and highlight achievements, quantifying results if possible.
- Avoid abbreviating names of organizations, titles, and descriptors.
- Include both campus and permanent address, if applicable, so employers can easily locate you.
- Include e-mail address. You may include home page address if showing sample work, but be certain all aspects of your home page are suitable for employer viewing.

2. Format

- Be sure it is easy to read with clean, simple line and reasonable use of white space on the page. Artistic résumés should not be over-designed, saving the portfolio for showing work.
- Use light-colored paper, standard 8 1/2 x 11."
- Print only on one side of paper if a two-page résumé.
- Use font size that is readable, typically no smaller than 10 point or larger than 14 point (name may be up to 32 points, if desired.)
- Use formatting, such as boldfacing, underlining, and italicizing sparingly. Do not use two special formats in one phrase.

3. Additional Tips for Computer Scannable Résumés

Some companies are scanning résumés into a computer to create searchable databases. Whether you need to produce a scannable résumé will depend on your employer targets. Some studies indicate that about half of mid-sized companies and most large companies use this type of system. Use sans serif fonts (such as Arial and Helvetica).

- Make sure your name is the first readable item on each page appears on its own line.
- List your phone number on its own line.
- Focus on nouns and verbs that describe your skills, experiences, education and professional affiliations. Computer scanners are programmed to search résumés for key words that describe the requirements for a job. You may include action verbs for sentence flow and human eyes, but make sure you have also included numerous key words such as writer, French (language fluency), BS, Java and Society of Technical Communications.
- Use common headings such as: Objective, Education, Experience, Employment, Positions Held, Accomplishments, Skills, Summary of Qualifications, Strengths, Affiliations, Publications, Papers, Licenses, Certification, Examinations, Honors, References.
- Use jargon and acronyms specific to your field.
- Avoid **italic**, or underlined text. Capitalized words are okay as long as letters do not touch each other.
- Avoid graphics, shading or reverses (white letters on a black background). Don't compress between letters.
- Avoid vertical or horizontal lines as well as boxes. Avoid a two column format.
- Avoid folding your résumé or using staples. If folding is unavoidable, do not fold on a line of text.
- Avoid using a type that is too light, dot matrix and low quality copies.

4. Writing a Career Objective

This is usually the hardest part of résumé writing. A well-written objective can give you an edge on the competition. A poorly written one can make you appear either indecisive or too specialized. You'll hear many different opinions on how to write an objective or whether one is even necessary. (Describing it in a cover letter is often cited as an alternative). As with the entire résumé, it is a personal decision. The Career Center advocates having a career objective on your résumé. You don't need to know exactly what you want to do in order to write one. A good objective simply reflects knowledge of your intended field, self-awareness, and some preferences in job functions.

Why Have a Career Objective on Your Résumé?

- **It makes the employers want to read the résumé.** You - probably more than other candidates - appear committed to their field of interest.
- **It can improve the body of your résumé.** By having a goal on your résumé, you can make better decisions about which courses to list, how to order experiences, and what to highlight in descriptions.
- **It forces you to make some career decisions and focus your search.** Anxiety may cause you to want to "keep your options open;" often what that reflects to the employer is "I'll take anything-please!" You're forcing the employer to do all the work of decision-making for you, that is if they make the effort. If you are pursuing too many career goals simultaneously you can't focus your search enough to really **go after** what you want; rather you get a little bit of everything that **happens** to come your way.
- **Preparing a targeted résumé can help you prepare for your interviews.** With this approach, you are more than writing down dates, employers and descriptions, you are beginning to analyze your skills and market yourself.

First, what it is **NOT**...

- **It is not what you want out of the positions, but what you can offer to the employer.** Avoid phrases like "an opportunity to develop my skills..." or "to gain experience in the field of..."
- **Avoid what is too general or vague. How** do you want to "work with people"... collaborating, servicing customers, public speaking? Even "management trainee" by itself is vague. Do you prefer to manage data or supervise people? What type of industry, product or service interests you?
- **Leave out clichés that say nothing, i.e. "challenging work," "position of responsibility."** Do you think someone would define a college-level vacancy as "unchallenging with little responsibility?"
- **Listing a string of diverse fields in one objective can reflect indecision or desperation.** It is acceptable to have two résumés with two different objectives. You may find that the content even changes in order to better support the objectives. You are probably spreading yourself too thin if you have more than three.
- **It probably should not reflect long range goals, particularly if it is not a common next step in the career ladder of the employer.** Otherwise, the employer will unnecessarily anticipate a move out of the organization, or figure you are hoping for your potential supervisor's job.

5. Elements of a Career Objective

The key to a good objective is to find the delicate balance between being so vague or diverse that you show indecision or being so specific that you eliminate good options. The most specific term that exists is a job title - what one particular employer labels a specific job. Another employer may label the same tasks or functions differently, so make sure the terminology you use is general enough that it has meaning to several potential employers. A good career objective should contain a few of the following elements:

- **Job Function** - Whether you work for an arts, service, financial or scientific organization, the tasks performed will involve some of the following basic functions:
 - Production of goods or services
 - Research and Development
 - Management/Administration
 - Finance and Accounting
 - Sales and Marketing
 - Technical Services

These are general types of **activities**, and are often reflected as different departments in an organizational structure. The important question is "What will you be **doing** with your body of knowledge or skills?"

- **Occupational Field or Title** is a more specific label of what you want to do and communicates something about the **content** of the work. Examples: biologist, writer, illustrator, banker, public relations, social worker.
- **Specialty Areas** could describe a specialized function within an occupational field (i.e., advertising is made up of creative, media, research, and account services subfields); or it can describe a specialized body of knowledge that you want to use in your field (i.e., among the areas in which a biologist could specialize are molecular, genetical and physiological content areas).
- **Type of Organization** - Small, medium, large, local, national, international, private or public sector.
- **Industry (products or services)** - Computer equipment and software, education, electronics, entertainment, government, health and medical services, insurance, printing and publishing, social services, telecommunications, etc.
- **Functional Skills** - An ability or expertise that is significant to the career. Examples are supervisory skills, creativity, attention to detail, knowledge of HTML, familiarity with statistical packages, communication skills, analytical skills, etc.

6. Sample Objectives

The following are sample career objectives that you can use as guidelines in preparing your individual and unique statement:

- Permanent position in the management information systems field. Areas of interest include applications programming and system analysis and design.
- To work in the field of industrial design using a modern approach to create new products.
- A position in the health field using experience in organizing groups, clarifying ideas and problems, making public addresses, and writing reports and newsletters.
- Research responsibility in a public affairs area of a corporation.
- To obtain a position as an engineer in the field of structural engineering, stress analysis, or civil engineering.
- A position as an assistant in product marketing, development or general research.

IF YOU'RE STUCK...

Deciding on career goals involves matching your interests, abilities and values to a work function. If you are having difficulty formulating an objective, perhaps you need more information about the world of work or a clearer picture of yourself. Consider meeting with a Career Consultant at your college's career center.

7. Sample Résumé Format

Contact Information

Name, address (home and campus/local if applicable), telephone number (include area code), email address, home page (if applicable)

Job Objective

Describe briefly and clearly the type of work you are seeking and the skills you are offering.

Education

Name of institution *	Year of graduation or expected graduation
Field of study	Degree awarded or to be awarded (degrees may be written out or abbreviated)
Relevant courses	Refer to any special training in addition to formal education Name and briefly describe thesis topic, if applicable

Experience

Name and describe paid employment, internships, summer jobs, field study, and/or project work.
(Project work can also be listed under "Education" or under a separate section such as, "Academic Experience," "Project Work.")

Traditional résumé formats begin with present/last position and record information in reverse chronological order. However, your most important and relevant experiences should ideally appear first. If you have had non-relevant work experience after a more relevant experience, try creating more specific categories such as "Relevant Experience, Writing Experience, Computer Experience, Work Experience" and list experiences accordingly.

Usually, listing experiences in these types of categories will naturally result in a reverse chronological order within each category. Include the following:

Employer Name	City, State/Location
Job Title/Position	Dates of Employment/Experience

Skills

Refer to any distinct skills specific to your field.
List computer skills and foreign language proficiencies.

Honors

Special Awards, Dean's List, Scholarships

Achievements

Shows, Exhibits, Publications (can also be listed in a separate section)

Activities

Campus/Community Activities, Leadership and Volunteer Positions (can also be listed under "Experience" if relevant to objective), Hobbies/Interests (optional)

References

It is optional to indicate that references are available upon request. It is suggested to mention that items such as portfolio or writing samples will also be furnished upon request.

***NOTE:** The appropriate way to write Carnegie Mellon is without a hyphen. Also "CMU" is an abbreviation often used within the university, but should not be used when writing résumés, cover letters, and other official documents.

8. List of Alternative Headings For Résumés

CURRENT ADDRESS:	HOME ADDRESS:
COLLEGE ADDRESS	PERMANENT ADDRESS
LOCAL ADDRESS	FORWARDING ADDRESS
UNIVERSITY ADDRESS	TELEPHONE NUMBER
TELEPHONE NUMBER	
EMAIL ADDRESS	
HOME PAGE ADDRESS	

CAREER OBJECTIVE:	PROFESSIONAL OBJECTIVE, JOB OBJECTIVE, PROFESSIONAL GOAL, OBJECTIVE, SHORT-TERM OBJECTIVE, LONG-RANGE OBJECTIVE
EDUCATION:	EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND
RELEVANT COURSE WORK:	RELEVANT COURSES, COURSES, COURSE WORK, PROJECT COURSES
EMPLOYMENT:	WORK EXPERIENCE, FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT, PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT, PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE, EXPERIENCE HIGHLIGHTS, WORK HISTORY, RELATED EXPERIENCE, SUMMER WORK, CAREER HISTORY
SKILLS:	SPECIAL SKILLS, CAPABILITIES, ABILITIES, SPECIAL TRAINING, LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY, ARTISTIC SKILLS, COMPUTER SKILLS, TECHNICAL SKILLS
ACHIEVEMENTS:	ACCOMPLISHMENTS, SCHOLASTIC ACHIEVEMENTS, EXHIBITS
HONORS:	AWARDS, HONORS/HONORARIES, SCHOLARSHIPS
ACTIVITIES:	CAMPUS LEADERSHIP, EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES, VOLUNTEER WORK, COMMUNITY SERVICE
PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:	PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS, MEMBERSHIPS
RESEARCH PROJECTS:	PUBLICATIONS, PRESENTATIONS
REFERENCES:	FURNISHED UPON REQUEST, AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST