

HOW TO WRITE AN EFFECTIVE RESUME

Resume Layouts

There are two basic resume layouts used to apply for most private, nonprofit, and public sector jobs (government agency resumes have their own rules and are covered in separate handouts)

- **Chronological** – In this most widely used resume format, your most relevant experiences (both paid and unpaid) are listed in reverse chronological order with the most recent listed first. At minimum, all that is necessary are two experience sections: Relevant Experience and Additional Experience (see sample in this document)
- **Hybrid** – In this style, you review your most relevant paid and unpaid experiences for themes, then create 1-3 categories and list experiences in reverse chronological order within the categories. (E.g.: Analytical Experience, Government Experience, or Health Policy Related Experience)

Always Tailor Your Resume

It's important to carefully review your resume *each time* you submit it and alter/update your content in order to tailor the items you highlight to the needs of the prospective employer. No matter how silly a requirement may seem (ability to lift 20lbs, ability to use Microsoft Word), if they specifically ask for it and you can do it, be sure to mention it

Start Putting it Together

- **Create a First Draft** – Gather *everything* you might potentially include in your resume: jobs, volunteer experiences, campus involvement, major class projects, campus leadership roles, etc... and start writing down ideas about what you accomplished or learned in each. Don't worry if it's "too long" at this stage
- **Order of Sections** – Interns and recent grads usually begin the resume with the Education section followed by one or more Experience sections. If you worked for a few years before grad school, or otherwise have a significant amount of work experience, you may reverse this and start with Experience first (you make the call)
- **Length** – One page is still the rule of thumb for many employers and for events like career fairs and networking nights, but if you have extensive work experience, a graduate degree (or two), or otherwise would leave things off that might help the employer hire you, then a longer resume may be warranted. If you have more than one page, make sure the content takes up *at least half or more* of the second page, and include your name and the page number at the top right corner
- **Content** – You *don't* have to list everything you've ever done. Some experiences are "bullet point worthy" and others are not...or can be omitted entirely. Items on your resume should answer the following questions:
 - "Which of my skills and experiences will most benefit a prospective employer based on their needs?"
 - "How does this entry/bullet point relate to the job I am applying for?"
 - "What personal qualities do I most need to communicate about myself to the employer?"
 - "How does this bullet help the employer know I am a good fit for the company/agency and job?"
- **Style** – There are no absolutes about how your resume should look, but there are some basics addressed in the "Tips" section. You can also review other examples on the La Follette website/Canvas
- **Verbs for Bullet Points**
 - **Tense** - All verbs should either be in present tense ("evaluate") or past tense ("evaluated"). Do not use gerunds ("evaluating"), or verbiage that sounds like you took it directly from the position description ("evaluates" – who does? You? Someone else?)
 - Each sentence should start with a **Power Verb** (see additional handout) in the appropriate tense that speaks to what you achieved or accomplished. Try not to start with weak verbs like "helped" and *never ever* start a bullet with "responsibilities included" or "duties included."
- **Proofread** – Get a second or third pair of eyes to review your content before you apply. The last thing you want is to lose the chance at a job because you sent out a resume with misspellings or words used inaccurately

Things NOT to Include on Your Resume

- Personal pronouns (I, me, my)
- Height, weight, age, date/place of birth, marital status, sex, race, photos, graphics, or social security number (some of these may be expected on resumes for jobs outside the US – check standards by country)

- Abbreviations and jargon – If in doubt, spell it out! Never assume the recipient will recognize the abbreviation
- Salary, supervisor’s contact information, reasons for leaving previous jobs (these often go on an application)
- References (These go on a separate page – see handout)
- The words “References available upon request” (this is a given; no need to waste valuable space on the resume)
- Interests and hobbies (*unless* directly relevant to the position or the recruiter in some way)

Formatting & Content Tips

- **Font** – Select and use a single font style throughout the resume. Best choices are Calibri or Arial
- **Font Size**—With the exception of your name and category headers, use the same font size throughout. Do not go smaller than 10pt or it will be hard to read
- **Emphasis** – Be consistent and don’t overuse bold, caps, or italics; all section headings should match
- **Spacing** – Be careful to leave enough white space to give the eye a break, but not so much that it looks like you have no experience. It’s better to have a second page than a scrunched up document!
- **Margins** - If you need to save space, you can go as small as .6 on all four sides, but do not go smaller than that or it will look too crowded
- **Tense** –You may use either past or present tense for ongoing activities, and should use past tense for all activities which have ended. The most important thing is that you are consistent within your entry (don’t mix past and present within the same description).
- **High school** - Do not include high school student club or team involvement. Jobs or experiences you held outside of, but during, high school are usually fine if not too old
- **Relevant Coursework** – If included, make sure to only list courses that will demonstrate breadth (not obvious from the name of your major), depth (specialized study in one area), or which add to your hireability in some way. Grad students need not list any for undergraduate degrees.
- **Controversial Areas** - Take care when including experience in areas that may be controversial to some people, such as religion, politics, sexual orientation, etc. You can include it, disguise it, or omit it. Please speak with a staff member if you are concerned about how to describe these kinds of experiences
- **Resume Templates** - We recommend that you don’t use them at all. Templates tend to be inflexible and you will need to make changes later. Plus they’re not as creative as you hope. Employers have seen them all!
- **Electronic Format:** Unless the employer asks for the resume to be submitted in Word (“.doc/.docx”) convert it to a “.pdf” before sending. This will ensure that your document looks the way you intended when the recipient downloads it
- **Naming the Resume and Applying Online** – Since you will submit a tailored resume for each job, save the resume as: Title of Job/Internship – Your Last Name. If you apply via email rather than on the employer’s website, the e-mail subject line should be the same as the document unless the employer specifies otherwise
- **For Jobs Outside the USA** - For information on resume standards in countries other than the USA, log into Handshake and look at the resources on GoInGlobal for guidance
- **Paper Resumes** – It is not necessary to use special resume paper since the majority of the time you will submit your application materials online. When you do print out your resume (e.g. career fairs), make sure that it’s laser-printed on white paper. If you do need to mail your application materials, post them in a large manila envelope so that you don’t have to fold them (and don’t staple)

Extra Resume Sections – While the bare minimum necessary on any resume are: Education, Relevant Experience, Additional Experience, and Skills, it may be beneficial in some cases to add other sections such as:

- *Academic Projects* (great for long-term class projects where you did NOT take a leading role, but did gain valuable experience the employer is interested in hiring you for)
- *Professional Certifications* (CPR, LPC, CFP, etc.)
- *Professional Affiliations* (student chapters of professional organizations or societies)
- *Publications* (ideally with a link to a website rather than a giant list)
- *Invited Presentations* (outside of those given during a course or job/volunteer experience {which would be listed with the relevant job}, such as one given at a professional conference you chose, or were invited, to attend)

A Look at Each Section of the Resume

The Header

- At a minimum, this section includes your name, one phone number and one email address.
- Make sure that your voicemail message and email address are both professional.
- You may or may not list a street address (this is becoming less common), but if so, only list *one* address
- You may include a link to your LinkedIn.com page and/or blog or online portfolio

(Optional) Summary of Qualifications/Professional Summary

- This is NOT an objective statement, and in general they are best used by experienced candidates vs. recent college grads. For advice on how to write one and examples go to: <http://go.wisc.edu/787ack>
 - *Ex: Proficient in managing multiple tasks to meet short- and long-term deadlines. Work experience includes both administrative and supervisory roles. Able to clearly explain and teach complex technical information to colleagues*
 - *Ex: Multilingual professional with over five years' experience in research, project management, budget development, and grant writing in domestic and resource-challenged, international settings*
- If you use a summary, start with a sentence (or three) that highlight your top qualifications for the position you seek based on the job announcement. It should focus *solely* on what the employer needs and how your top skills match those needs, not what you want from the employer

The Education Section

- Start with *University of Wisconsin – Madison, La Follette School of Public Affairs*
- Spell out your degree - *Master of (International) Public Affairs* & anticipated graduation date – e.g. *May 20xx* & specialization(s) if any
- Spell out your undergraduate university, degree, major(s), minor(s)
- List any Study Abroad program(s) by name, location, and dates
- DO NOT list your high school unless there is a very good reason to (eg: NYC prep schools often have networks)
- DO NOT list universities that you transferred credits from unless you received a degree from them (or are referencing experiences you had while attending them that make no sense without them being listed)
- *OPTIONAL*: Relevant coursework, honors, and academic awards, and GPA. If you decide to include a GPA, make sure you show it as “x.x/4.0” so the employer knows the scale.

The Relevant Experience Section - Each entry should include four parts:

1. Employer/organization name
2. Your title/role
3. Location (City, State, Country or University name)
4. Employment dates (for current jobs show as: “Month, 20xx – Present” Spell out months whenever possible)

Bullet Points

- After the four parts above, craft bullet points to highlight your achievements/accomplishments/skills. Each bullet should attempt to answer: *How did you do X? Why did you do X? What was the outcome?*
- “Relevant” should combine both paid and unpaid experiences such as jobs, internships, student organizations, major class projects, and volunteer activities. Employers don’t care whether you got paid to acquire a skill, they only want to know you have it, where you got it, and how much experience you have using it!
- Each entry should be listed in reverse chronological order with most recent listed first

The Additional Experience Section

- Jobs you deem “not bullet point worthy” but worthy of inclusion
- Student clubs or organizations where you did not have a leadership role

The Skills Section - Skills are objectively provable things you can do. If you can be tested for ability, it’s a skill. If not, it’s a quality and should be included in your bullet points (e.g Fluent in Spanish vs good with people). A skills section might include:

- Language(s) spoken along with level of ability (fluent, conversational, basic, etc.)
- Computer hardware, software and databases/platforms you are skilled in using along with level of ability
- Laboratory research techniques

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Education

University of Wisconsin – Madison

La Follette School of Public Affairs

Master of Public Affairs with specialization in health and education policy, Expected May 20xx

University of Wisconsin – Green Bay

Bachelor of Arts, May 20xx

Double Major: Political Science and Spanish, Certificate (Minor): Criminal Justice

CIEE Summer Language & Culture in Alcala, Spain, January - May 20xx

Relevant Experience

Population Health Institute

Madison, WI

Evidence Analyst

August 20xx – Present

- Research and systematically assess, rate, and summarize evidence of effectiveness for policies and programs that can affect health, and provide recommendations for changes to current programs
- Write policy and program descriptions, summaries of evidence, and implementation examples to provide community leaders with well-researched strategies to respond to health priorities
- Create 40 policy write-ups for inclusion in “What Works for Health” database, viewed by an international audience

Madison Urban Ministry

Madison, WI

Intern

May 20xx – August 20xx

- Connected ex-offenders with community resources and educational opportunities, facilitating their reintegration to society while also researching which programs lead to a decrease in recidivism
- Led workshops to help clients with limited English improve their language skills

State Senator Erin Jones

Madison, WI

Policy Intern

September 20xx – December 20xx

- Effectively assisted constituents with questions, compliments, and complaints. Wrote between 25-60 letters and emails per week and responded in a kind and professional manner to all phone contacts
- Shadowed professional staff during committee meetings and took notes for future reference

Green Bay Times

Example of working two different positions for one employer

Madison, WI

Editing Intern

September 20xx – May 20xx

- Selected and edited between 20-45 weekly submissions and managed Instagram and Twitter accounts

Reporter

April 20xx – September 20xx

- Wrote two feature stories per week while honing writing and interviewing skills
- Interacted effectively with fellow staff members and community members, gaining access to exclusive stories

Additional Experience

Jobs and other things which are “resume worthy,” but not necessarily “bullet point worthy”

La Follette School Student Association Member, September 20xx—May 20xx

Noodles & Company, Server, May 20xx—December 20xx,

City of Green Bay Public Parks, Lifeguard, Green Bay WI, June 20xx—August 20xx

Skills

Computer: Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint (proficient), Microsoft Access, Adobe Page Maker and Photoshop (familiar), Comfortable using both Windows and Mac operating systems

Languages: Spanish (highly proficient), French (conversational)