

HOW TO WRITE AN EFFECTIVE RESUME

Resume Layout

Unless you are going into the performing or visual arts, a standard chronological resume is the format “most preferred” by HR personnel in most private, nonprofit, and public sector jobs and internships. NOTE: Resumes for government agencies have their own rules and are covered in detail [here](#).

- List your relevant experiences (both paid and unpaid) in reverse chronological order from most recent to oldest
- Always include your current job - even if it isn't glamorous/relevant (you can omit some older things)
- At minimum, the resume will contain two sections: **Education and Relevant Experience**
- You may also wish to add sections such as:
 - [Professional Summary](#) (click link for info)
 - **Skills** (Must be objective/quantifiable such as [Languages](#), not subjective such as [Strong Communicator](#))
 - **Academic Projects** (Great for long-term class projects where you worked with a team, but also gained personally valuable experience the employer is interested in hiring you for)
 - **Professional Certifications** (CPR, PMP, CFP, etc.)
 - **Professional Affiliations** Any kind of membership you hold in a professional organization or society)
 - **Publications** (ideally with a link to a website or article in tiny.url rather than a giant list)

Step One: Create a Master Resume / Kitchen Sink Resume

1. List *everything* you might potentially include on your resume no matter how old: jobs, volunteer experiences, campus involvement, major class projects, etc...
2. Start writing down what you achieved, accomplished, or learned in each experience; not just the duties you performed, but the [transferrable skills](#) you gained
3. Don't worry if it starts to seem too long, you will *never send this version*. It's meant to be the template from which you will create tailored versions to send out

Step Two: When You Find a Job/Internship You Wish to Apply For...

1. [Evaluate all of the position's qualifications](#) (both required and desired). If you have at least 2/3 of what they seek, ask yourself: “Which of my skills/experiences will most benefit the employer based on *their* needs?”
2. Skim the employer's mission and vision statements on the web to make sure you want to work there
3. Do a “save as” on your Master and begin to edit the new version
4. If you want to ensure that your “best stuff” is at the top of the resume, your experiences can be divided into the following headers: **Relevant Experience** and **Additional Experience**
 - [Relevant](#) is for those experiences you deem most relevant to the employer (still listed in reverse chronological order)
 - [Additional](#) is for items you want to include on the resume but either without bullet points or with just a few bullet points. This header goes nearer the end so that it doesn't pull focus from the “good stuff”
5. Write Strong Bullet Points:
 - Start each bullet point with a [Power Verb](#) and clearly articulate your knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) related to what you achieved or accomplished in the job/internship/volunteer experience
 - All verbs should either be in present tense (“evaluate”) or past tense (“evaluated”)
 - You may use either past or present tense for ongoing experiences but should always use past tense for activities which have ended. The most important thing is that don't mix past and present tense verbs within the same description
 - **Do not** use gerunds (“evaluating” “overseeing”) or verbiage that sounds like you took it directly from the position description (“evaluates” “oversees”); stick to simple present or past tense
 - Try to avoid weak verbs like “helped” or “assisted” – if you did a thing you did a thing!
 - Never start a bullet point with the phrases: “responsibilities included” or “duties included”
 - Be sure that your bullets answer the following questions:
 - “How does this bullet point relate to the job/internship 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?”

Tips for Formatting & Content

- **Length** - One page is still the rule of thumb for events like career fairs and networking, 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 it is *fine* to have a two-page resume. If you do have more than one page, make sure the content is relevant, and that it takes up *at least half or more* of the second page; include your last name and the page number at the top right corner
- **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
- **Qualifications** - No matter how silly a requirement may seem: "ability to lift 20lbs," if the employer specifically asks for it and you have it, be sure to mention it somewhere on the resume
- **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 the Career Coordinator 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, hard to edit, and you will need to make changes later that may force you to start over from scratch
- **Electronic Format** - Unless the employer requests a submission in Word (".doc/.docx") convert it to a ".pdf" before sending. This will ensure that your document looks the way you intended if the recipient downloads it
- **Naming the Resume and Applying Online**
 - Save each tailored resume as: Title of Position, Agency, Your Last Name (Policy Analyst, WI DHS – Smith)
 - If you apply via email rather than an electronic submission on the employer's site, the email subject line should be the same as above -- 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** – 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)
- **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 an opportunity because you sent out a resume with misspellings or words used inaccurately

Things NOT to Include on Your Resume

- Personal pronouns (I, me, my)
- Photos, height, weight, age, date/place of birth, marital status, sex, race, 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](#)) or the words "References available upon request"
- Interests and hobbies (*unless* directly relevant to the position or the recruiter in some way)
- Anything about high school (name, degree, year graduated). Work you did during your high school years is fine if not too old and somehow relevant but that goes in Experience, not Education