Building a Great Resume

Basic Guidelines

An effective resume reflects your career focus and an understanding of how your experiences, skills, and personal attributes contribute to your immediate goals, usually employment or graduate school. You can create distinct versions of your resume for different career goals.

How Employers Use Resumes

Employers use resumes at various points in the hiring process to:
• Draw inferences about transferable skills—such as attention to detail—from how well you present yourself on the resume.
• Determine whether to interview you, based on a perceived "fit" between your skills and interests and the organization's needs.
• Develop interview questions or start a conversation about your experiences, abilities, interests, etc.
• Verify the accuracy of your information. Correct reporting of your GPA, degree status, employment history, achievements, extracurricular activities, etc. is an important predictor of ethical behavior in the workplace.

Goals in Creating a Resume

Develop a resume that helps the reader answer the question, "How/what will this candidate contribute to the organization?" The following guidelines will help you demonstrate your potential:
• Target your resume to reflect that you understand the qualifications necessary to do the job and are familiar with industry-relevant language and the career field.
• Illustrate that you have transferable skills related to your career focus or skills valued by all employers.
• Provide enough detail to enable the reader to evaluate your contributions rather than simply to review a list of your responsibilities.
• Include results-oriented statements that show you have met or exceeded goals and expectations.
• Quantify when possible, including numbers and/or descriptive words such as "doubled" or "increased."

Now that you have a strong sense of what content will be used to create your resume, it is time to organize your information. Use Ready Reference Sheet "Resume Types" to help you decide which resume formats will best showcase your qualifications. If you are looking for more than one type of position, you will need more than one resume. You may choose to use different formats for different resumes based on the requirements of the position for which you are applying.

Where to Begin

Complete the "Skills Exercise" or the "Top Ten Reasons to Hire Me" so that you have all the "raw material" you need relating to your strengths and accomplishments.

Elements of a Resume

Although all resumes contain somewhat standard elements, there is no one "right way" to prepare a resume. You can change section names, add or omit sections, etc., to draw attention to the content that is most pertinent to your career focus or job target. Just remember to be consistent in applying stylistic approaches throughout your resume, and be sure that your final product is error-free.

Contact Information

Include your name, local and permanent addresses, and the phone number and e-mail address you use most frequently. Near the end of the school year, you may want to include the date you will move to your permanent address.

Objective

An objective statement can be helpful when:
• You have a highly specific career target.
• Your academic background is not closely related to your immediate goal.
• You can state clearly what you will contribute versus what you expect to gain from the experience.

Opinions differ among employers and career professionals on the need to include a career objective on a resume. Check with a career advisor to see whether an objective statement is recommended for the kind of position you are seeking.

Alternatives to an Objective

A more experienced candidate, or one with a diverse work or academic background, may prefer to use a two to three-sentence descriptive statement rather than an objective statement. This would be titled Summary of Qualifications, Highlights, or Career Focus and should appear immediately under Contact Information.

Education

In this section, include:
• Postsecondary institution(s) and location(s), majors(s), and any official concentration(s).
• Degree(s) and date(s) received.

• Study abroad experience, honors thesis title, etc., as applicable.
• Cumulative GPA, if it is at least 3.0, and major GPA, if it is higher.

Beyond sophomore year, do not include your high school unless it is nationally recognized, is located in an area where you want to work, or otherwise supports your goal.

If you are a transfer student, list the name of your first school if your resume includes activities/experiences from that institution.

Honors and Awards

Dean's List, awards and scholarships based on academic merit, and honor societies can be listed in a separate section if you have two or more entries. Otherwise, incorporate them into your Education section.

Relevant Courses

List courses that are pertinent to your objective and the employer's (or other reader's) needs, particularly if your major does not directly relate to your immediate goal.

Experience

You can demonstrate work ethic, ability to reach goals, leadership potential, and other qualities employers seek through both paid and unpaid experience:
• Full-time and part-time work during the summer, academic year, and school breaks.
• Research experiences, courses, co-op positions, or internships.
• Volunteer work and extracurricular activities.

List positions held, organization names and locations (city and state), and month and year of your involvement. Summarize your accomplishments in each experience in results-oriented statements beginning with action verbs (see Ready Reference Sheet "Skills, Qualities and Action Verbs.") Use verb tense to indicate current activities (present tense) and past accomplishments (past tense). It is not necessary to include every experience you have had, but it is preferable to show continued employment, if possible. You can organize unrelated experience into an Additional Experience category.

Special Skills

In general, it is best to indicate your skills by providing specific examples of how you have used them (for instance, in your Related Experience section). Include in this section:
• Languages and level of expertise, such as "Conversational."
• Computer languages and programs.
• Additional related skills not mentioned elsewhere.

Activities and Interests
Although not required on a resume, your activities and interests may help convey additional information about you. In order of importance, list:
• Student organizations, professional associations, community involvement, and committees, including any offices held.
• Interests such as music, sports, and the arts.
• Include high school activities only if directly relevant. Some students choose not to include religious activities or those representing extreme political views.

References

If you are asked for references, provide a list on a separate piece of paper titled "List of References for (Your Name)." Do not include the statement "References available upon request" on your resume. Be sure to notify individuals on your reference list that may be approached by prospective employers.