

Perfect on Paper: Making Your Resume Stand Out from the Pile

We know that there is a plethora of information out there telling you how to write a resume and how *not* to write a resume; but at s•com, we prefer to keep it simple. To put your best proverbial face forward with a resume, be clear and concise to showcase your skills to a recruiter. These easy tips will help you along the way.

First Impressions: Cover Letter. A person gets just one chance at a first impression, and when you're looking for a job, that impression is your cover letter. Your cover letter should serve as an introduction to recruiters and potential employers, giving a condensed overview of your professional experience and outlining the skills you would bring to the table that would make you an ideal candidate for the position at hand. The tone of your cover letter should be personable but professional and should give the reader a feeling of who you are as a person, helping you stand out from the pile of resumes on the reader's desk. It is important to customize your cover letter for each position for which you apply; recruiters can spot a re-used cover letter from a mile away, and this shows a lack of attention to detail that might disqualify you from consideration.

Say What?: Language. Remember, your resume is a tool to help you get to the interview, *not* a comprehensive work history. When writing your resume, always remember to be **precise** and **concise**; use proper spelling and grammar, and don't use a more complex phrase than necessary to convey a thought. Use capitalization sparingly and appropriately and avoid any industry-specific buzz words and general business jargon! It's always a good idea to have a friend or colleague review your resume before submitting it to check for clarity and readability.

Good Looking: Formatting. Your goal in formatting your resume is to make it as clean and as easy-to-read as possible for the recruiter reviewing it, so as with your resume's language, its formatting should be similarly simple. Use a plain font in a legible and uniform size, and use the bold, underline and italicize functions to indicate section headings. Rather than writing long paragraphs in each section, use bullet points and key words to effectively and succinctly demonstrate your skills, experience and accomplishments.

What to Include? Your resume should contain, at minimum, the following sections.

- **Contact information.** Make it easy for your audience to reach you; be sure to include, at the very least, your full name, cell phone number, e-mail address and LinkedIn URL, preferably at the very top of the page. Including home addresses and home phone numbers is an outdated practice in today's always-connected world.
- **Summary.** Replacing the once common "Objective" section and occasionally replacing a cover letter, the Summary should serve as a brief *summary* of your qualifications, professional achievements and what you have to offer a company, rather than what you're looking for in your next position. Turning the focus back onto the employer helps them more easily envision how *your skills* can align with the company's goals.
- **Skills.** Briefly outline your skills, knowledge and abilities as they are related to the position to which you are applying. In other words, what makes you a good fit for the position you're seeking? Your skills can include anything from specialized knowledge in a certain area, to certifications in a particular piece of software or even soft skills.

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- **Education.** Include the school name and degree(s) or certification(s) earned for high schools, colleges/universities and technical/trade schools attended, as well as any continuing education you have completed. Only include other information, like extra-curricular activities or honors, if they are relevant to your goals. Don't include years attended or unfinished degrees or certifications.
- **Experience.** Your most recent experience should **always** be top, front and center in this section. For each position held, include the company name, employment dates, title, and bullets outlining your main responsibilities and accomplishments in the role. These should be tailored as they are relevant to the position you are applying for, and they should be brief and should capture the reader's attention; once you've landed an interview, *then* you can go into more detail. Be sure to address any employment gaps and describe how you used that time (e.g., volunteering, continuing education and/or research, etc.).
- **Certifications and organizations.** List any relevant certifications you hold or professional memberships, including dates and certification numbers if applicable.
- **References.** References are not typically included in a resume but be sure to have them available upon request. Your references should be people whom you've worked with in the past – bosses, colleagues, or people with whom you've done business – who have agreed to attest to your proficiency and work style. Be sure that their contact information is up to date, and let them know that a prospective employer may be calling them soon so they can prepare to give you a glowing recommendation.

What *Not* to Include. As your resume is your first impression to a recruiter and, subsequently, a prospective employer, it's important to present yourself as a capable professional; leave the puns, jokes, and pop-culture references for a blog post. Do not include a photo (e.g. headshot) of yourself when submitting your resume; many companies have equal opportunity employment policies, and seeing your photo prior to reviewing your resume removes proof of objectivity, possibly disqualifying you from consideration. Separating yourself from the pile of resumes on a hiring manager's desk isn't easy, but you don't need to go to extreme lengths to do it!