

Resume Tips & Tricks

Common Concerns for Resumes

a. Formatting

Formatting a resume can be challenging. Here are some things to consider while formatting your resume:

i. How Information is Presented

When presenting information in a resume, a clear layout for necessary information is key. Are there templates or criteria that are degree-specific? If so, look at how the template's example presents information and consider how it can apply to your document.

ii. Sections

The following examples are commonly included sections in a resume. Note that there may be other sections added in to enhance a resume.

- Personal Information Section
 - Located at the top of the page and includes name and contact information such as: phone number, personal email, physical address, and a link to a professional social media profile (eg. LinkedIn).
- Objective Section
 - Should be 1-2 sentences that clearly explain intent for applying. If applying to several different positions, less specificity may be desired, but vague language that states no clear goal or intention should be avoided.
 - Example: Seeking a [Full/Part]-time position with [Company] in [Field], with a focus on [Area of Interest].
- Education Section
 - Frequently included information: estimated graduation date, universities attended, degrees earned, and GPA.
- Experience Section
 - Includes: place(s) of employment, dates of employment, position(s) held, and duties performed.
- Skills Section
 - Highlights *relevant* capabilities and includes: technical skills, programming languages, spoken/written foreign language skills, and other proficiencies.
- Honors and Organizations
 - Frequently included information: organizations, clubs, teams, or honor societies.
 - Tells an employer about a candidate's personality, interests, and/or hobbies.

iii. *Alignment*

Many writers struggle with aligning their document. To improve layout and alignment, keep in mind which word processor is being used and research tips or videos showing how to handle the formatting, and apply the [CRAP](#) Principles below.

- **C**ontrast- Implement various text sizes and colors to make certain information stand out.
- **R**epetition- Using a consistent design pattern helps to make a resume uniform and easy to read. This strategy also improves the cohesiveness of the sections - creating a clear progression or flow.
- **A**lignment- Alignment connects a resume's content and will improve cohesion and clarity. This is likely the most essential principle that applies to resumes.
- **P**roximity- Keep information close to the sections that it pertains to. This reduces clutter and enhances clarity by providing context through proximity to other sections.

b. Common Mistakes Concerning Resume Content:

i. *Including elements that are more effective in a cover letter* - Some areas of experiences can be better explained in a cover letter, and excluding them can save space on a resume.

1. Soft skills - depending on desired position
 - Skills like communication, leadership, work ethic, reliability, and similar skills are crucial, but they are subjectively valuable to various employers and are often better suited for a cover letter.
 - Provide specific examples to back up soft skills. A story in a cover letter about how an applicant led a team project gives employers an idea of how they delegated tasks, managed conflict, and kept their team focused.
2. Volunteer work that does not fit on a resume
 - Multiple organizations - Some students do volunteer work through their school, especially during high school, and it is often a variety of one-time jobs through various organizations or individuals. If this is the case, pick one or two particular jobs that were influential for you and describe them in a cover letter.
 - Lack of space in resume - Sometimes a person may volunteer somewhere regularly and want to include it in their resume. In order to save space, it can be moved to a smaller "Activities" section or omitted to make way for other career experience. Volunteer work can be discussed more in-depth in a cover letter.

ii. *Downplaying things that matter* - Some elements of a resume are more important than others, and it is critical to ensure that the key elements of a resume are present and easy to see.

1. Examples of common key elements:
 - GPA - While not necessarily required for a resume, some employers will assume that a student's GPA is low if it is omitted and automatically eliminate them from consideration.
 - Job title - If an employer is looking for a particular kind of experience they will likely skim through the positions a candidate has held, so include all job titles at a company to allow a recruiter to quickly evaluate the experience.

2. Emphasizing key elements:
 - Formatting - Using bold text or underlining are common methods for emphasizing important information in a resume.
 - Text arrangement - Balancing white space and arranging the sections of a resume so that key elements do not blend into the rest of the text can be an effective way to emphasize certain aspects

iii. Assuming that paid positions are more important than other experiences - Volunteer work and other unpaid experiences can be valuable in a resume - providing employers with insight into a candidate's character and interests. Additionally, unpaid experience is a great way to demonstrate skills to a potential employer before you have significant work experience.

1. Volunteer work - Although it is unpaid, volunteer work can show dedication and self-discipline. When adding volunteer experience, include the name of the organization and title held. Other key things to include are how many hours per week were served and main responsibilities held.
2. Unpaid experiences - Some experiences are significant but don't quite fit the category of a job or a volunteer position. Some examples include: rebuilding engines in your spare time, being heavily involved in a design team, running a small business, or working on a family farm.

c. Grammar:

- i. Phrasing is a common issue in resumes. In a bulleted list of skills, duties, and responsibilities for each job or position, the phrasing should reflect the actions and should use action verbs at the beginning.
- ii. Examples:
 1. Writing multiple reports → Developed multiple reports simultaneously
 2. Recordkeeping → Managed records and paperwork

Key Takeaway: Start bullet points with an **action verb**.

d. Audience:

- i. Relevant skills/experiences
 1. If a candidate has prior experience working at the company or a similar one, focus on those experiences.
 2. The skills section is often brief, but it is still a key part of a resume. Prioritizing what skills need to go here is important. Certain companies may be more likely to hire a student who has some knowledge of some programs or certifications, but not all companies will care about every skill.
 3. In general, look at the job that is being applied to and consider what is valuable to employers. If the target industry is highly technical, focus more on experiences and skills related to that industry.

e. Other:

- i. Identifying/listing character traits:
 - 1. “Team-player” aspects/mentions are often valued but should be validated by experience (e.g. Design team president, player on a sports team)
 - 2. Work ethic/reliability can be validated by extended time at a company with significant responsibilities (e.g. Personal secretary)

Further Suggestions for Writing Resumes

a. Have a “Master” Resume:

- i. A master resume should include all of a candidate’s experiences and involvements and can be used as a resource that specific content is pulled from for fine-tuned resumes. Preserving and updating this document provides you with sections that can be copied and pasted into a resume tailored to a specific job or position. This master document reduces revising time and serves as a record for dates, supervisors, position titles, duties, responsibilities, and skills.

b. Do not feel restricted by resume examples:

- i. Do not approach a resume like a rubric - in any case where you are not being graded on following certain guidelines, understand that the formatting or guidelines can be modified or eliminated if they do not fit the intended audience.

c. Focus on perspective:

- i. Candidates sometimes feel not all of their positions are not associated with skills, responsibilities, or duties worth mentioning. It is important to understand that it is a matter of perspective - if you worked as a cashier, then you have customer service skills, provided support and assistance to customers, etc.

d. It’s not bragging – it’s marketing accomplishments:

- i. This is one of the most common concerns people face. It’s important to remember that if you have gained the experience, worked the position, or built the skillset, it is not bragging to include the achievement on your resume. A resume exists to market your skills to employers and highlight your accomplishments.

e. Don’t be afraid of including experiences that did not go well:

- i. All experiences can be valuable in one way or another. Reframe negative experiences as learning opportunities. Try asking your advisor or professor for feedback which will help you to revise your resume to best fit your field if you need more job/field-specific guidance.



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