

Guidelines for Writing a Professional Resume

What is most impressive to employers when reviewing a resume? Professionalism. Nothing fancy, no gimmicks - just a well written, visually pleasing resume that reads clearly and easily.

Employers read resumes to determine experience and qualifications. Your resume will get a very quick initial read, so it is imperative to convey the most important information first. The following guidelines will help you develop a resume that projects a professional image.

1. **Keep your resume brief and to the point.** The "meat" of your resume should be your education and experience. Additional categories may include honors, activities, computer experience, military service, volunteer experiences, and scholarships or others. Prioritize information according to its relevancy. When deciding whether to include an item, ask yourself, "Is this relevant to the job I am seeking?" or "Does it enhance my qualifications as a candidate?"
2. **Your name should be the biggest item on the page.** Increase the font size of your name so that it can be read easily and clearly - even at arm's length.
3. **State specific degree and any certifications.** Near the top of your resume, state your specific degree, any certifications you hold and, if applicable, the grade levels included in a teaching certification. (Example: Elementary 1-6).
4. **Use reverse date order.** Your most relevant and sophisticated experiences will likely be your most recent ones. List experiences in reverse date order in each section.
5. **Emphasize what you did.** A description of your duties, responsibilities and experience is the most important part of each experience that you include. Where and for whom is not nearly as important and the "what". Do not include other people's names on your resume – save those for your reference page.
6. **Use action words and sentence fragments.** Refrain from using complete sentences on your resume. Instead, use sentence fragments and begin each sentence fragment with a different action word. (action word = verb + ed) Start each sentence fragment on a new line. Avoid repeating the same action words over and over.

Example action words: planned, implemented, coordinated, organized
7. **Avoid vague language.** Words like numerous, various, or etc. do not convey a professional image. Make your language concise and specific.
8. **Avoid extraneous information.** Do not include hobbies on a professional resume. However, an employer or a school may want to tap into special talents and abilities of its employees. For a teaching position, it may be helpful to include a category such as "Sponsorship Interests" or "Coaching Interests" and list specific sports you can coach, foreign language clubs you would like to work with, or student activities you can make a contribution toward.
9. **Focus on recent activities.** Include the activities you have been involved in over the past four or five years. Leave off your high school diploma. Leave out high school activities, unless you can make them apply to the position or sponsorship activity you are seeking. Include all field experiences, organizations, offices held, committee work, honors and awards, scholarships, and volunteer activities.

10. **One page or two?** The bulk of your most important information should fit on one page. You can shrink font sizes and extend page margins to allow yourself more room, but it is still important to keep your resume crisp and clean instead of crowded. Only if you have an abundance of experience and information would a second page be necessary. If your second page is less than half full, then work with your layout to either eliminate the second page or fill it up.
11. **Keep the lay-out simple.** It's okay to use some formatting such as bold and indenting to create white space and an appealing look. However, using bold, underlines, multiple indents and italics all on the same page creates confusion. Err on the side of simplicity.
12. **Use your tab key instead of the space bar; line up all tabs.** Your resume will look neater and cleaner if you line up the information so it has a consistent location on the page. The best way to accomplish this is to use the tab key and make sure your tabs appear in the same location on each line. Using the space bar to line up your information is not recommended – the difference in letter width will usually result in an uneven line.
13. **Keep sections together.** Avoid splitting major sections between pages. Keep all of your work experience on the same page, keep all of your field experiences on the same page, etc.
14. **Use white space appropriately.** Use the full page both horizontally and vertically, allowing for approximately a one-inch margin all the way around. Do the "arm's length" test when your resume is complete: hold it away from you at an arm's length. The text should look balanced all the way around and the page should look fully utilized. Sections should be easily discernible and logical.
15. **Spell check and edit, then spell check and edit again.** Your resume is a representation of your best work so it is expected to be perfect. Computer spell checks will catch many mistakes, but will not catch all of them. Typos that spell another word will slip by, as will grammatical errors. Ask someone else to review it for you so a "fresh set of eyes" can see it.
16. **Use quality reproduction.** Print your resume on a laser printer. Copy it on quality paper that is at least 20-lb. weight. If using colored paper, stick with soft neutrals such as off-white, light gray or cream. Beware - some colors will not make good photocopies, which presents a problem because resumes are often photocopied for other screeners. Test if needed. Avoid "cute-sy" designer papers such as blue cloud designs or ABC designs. Present yourself as a mature professional.
17. **Include references on a separate page.** Names, addresses and phone numbers of your references are important pieces of information to be distributed when needed or when requested. Include references on a separate page, complete with contact information, and make your references available upon request. Do not upload a list of your references, with contact information, on the Internet. Keep this information protected and respect the privacy of your references.
18. **Put your name on all pages.** Put your name and "Resume, page X" on additional pages as well as your reference page.
19. **Be consistent with EEOC guidelines.** Employers have to follow all equal employment laws. As a result, they do not want photographs, marital information, height, weight, health or any other extraneous information that would infringe on a fair hiring process. Keep the content of your resume focused on job-related characteristics.

Quick Resume Checklist

- Is the resume printed on conservative paper that will photocopy cleanly?
- Does the word "resume" appear at the top of the page? (It shouldn't.)
- Do the section headings stand out?
- Is your name the largest item on the page?
- Are you using space wisely? (Margins not too large, items not spaced too far apart)
- Are your indentations even? (Use your tab key instead of space bar to make indentations even.)
- Are there any spelling errors or typos? (Unacceptable.)
- Is there consistency throughout on the use of headings and fonts?
- Are pronouns eliminated? (They make your descriptions more wordy than necessary)
- Does the word "I" appear? (It shouldn't.)
- Are vague words such as "various" and "numerous" eliminated?
- Do descriptions begin with a variety of action words? (Avoid repetition.)
- If there is a second page, is your name and "Page Two" in the upper corner?

Need Some New Action Words? Check Out These Resources:

Job Web

http://www.jobweb.com/Resumes_Interviews/resume_guide/action.htm

Quintessential Careers

http://www.quintcareers.com/action_skills.html

Placement Manuals Online

<http://www.placementmanual.com/resume/resume-02.html>