Résumés: The Basics

Proof you have the "right stuff" for the job.

Who you are, in 15 seconds or less.

If the cover letter is the introductory smile, the résumé is the firm handshake. Together they are designed to get you in the door for that all-important first interview.

Your résumé is a summary of who you are and demonstrates why you are the best candidate for the position. Although it highlights your skills, achievements, and experience, it should be written with the employer's needs in mind. Résumés are often skimmed rather than read through thoroughly, so yours must convince the recipient in 30 seconds or less that you have the "right stuff" to merit an interview. You need to quickly and clearly define your skills, goals, and objectives in a logical sequence and without wasted language.

Format follows function.

There are three basic résumé styles to choose from: 1) Chronological — the most common, and generally for those with steady work history in the same field. It shows consistent growth by starting with the most recent job dates, and working backwards; 2) Functional — more suited for job seekers with a less ongoing work history or those entering a new field. It highlights skills and responsibilities, rather than dates and names; and 3) Combination — combines your skills and responsibilities with a brief work history. It can emphasize your stronger traits, especially If your skills and experience are not evenly matched.

Presentation: It's how you say it.

Your résumé should be neat, organized, and easy to read. Keep it to one page. Start at the top with your name, followed by your address, phone number(s), and email address. Leave space or use a separating rule between your contact info and everything else. Use readable typefaces (no more than two), such as 10- or 12-point Helvetica, Arial, or Times, in regular weight; match your cover letter. Only use boldface or all-caps for your name and section headings. Be consistent with punctuation and capitalization. No paragraph indents. Leave 1" margins all around; don't crowd your information.

The basics.

Here are key steps when writing your résumé:

-- Organize your résumé into sections. These include: Objective; Education; Skills; Experience; Honors/Achievements (if relevant);

-- No personal information such as age, race, or marital status. It's ill-advised for companies to request this prior to hiring and your résumé could wind up in the trash. No salary information. Provide references separately and only upon request;

-- Use reverse chronological order; list most recent experience/education first;

-- Begin sections with action verbs, not pronouns: "Edited campus paper," not "I edited the campus paper";

-- Brief is better, and easier to scan;

-- NO TYPOS and NO LYING!

Use black ink on quality 8.5 x 11" ivory or white stationery to match your cover letter. PDFs are best for emailing. Before mailing or uploading, have someone else review your résumé. It must be perfect! Show respect and keep your language formal. Don't lower your chances with one misspelling or poor grammar. For greater presence, consider mailing your résumé and cover letter unfolded in a high-quality 9 x 12" white envelope instead of the standard #10.

It's actually not all about you.

Ultimately, the employer wants to know how you and your capabilities will meet the company's needs. Remember this when listing accomplishments, and provide a benefits-oriented Objective.

If you are the product, then the résumé is your ad, and addressing the needs of your audience is your ticket to the interview.

ℹ️n a nutshell:

Your résumé is a marketing tool to position you as the best candidate:

• **Promote your strengths; create strong, positive images**

• **Target your audience's needs**

• **Focus on what you can offer**

• **Be authentic and provide specific, relevant examples**

• **Employ action verbs; omit pronouns**

• **Brief is best; use bullets (dashes, if an e-résumé) to highlight achievements**

• **Include only relevant info**

• **Proof for typos, spelling, consistency, and grammar**

Go ahead, toot your horn! Just make sure it's pitch perfect.

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