

5.2.2: Writing Effective Résumés

Learning Objectives

- Identify characteristics of an effective résumé

For many people, the process of writing a résumé is daunting. After all, you are taking a lot of information and condensing it into a very concise form that needs to be both eye-catching and easy to read. Don't be scared off, though. Developing a good résumé can be fun, rewarding, and easier than you think if you follow a few basic guidelines. In the following video, a résumé-writing expert describes some keys to success. (Refer to Module 2: Writing in Business for learning about word processing software used for document creation. This is a good example of a Microsoft Word document.)



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To get started you will create your baseline or generic résumé. This is the hardest part where you gather your best experiences together. Later, we will learn how we modify this resume to better match each position we apply for. The order of the following sections may change depending upon where you are in your career and your match to the new position. For example, if you are a lifeguard and are applying to be the lifeguard supervisor, you would list that work experience early in the résumé. If you are a lifeguard while you finish your college degree in Accounting, then you would list your education before your work experience. This is one of many reasons to modify a résumé for each position applied to.

The purpose of a résumé is not to get a job, but to get to the next level in the screening process.

The following activity will introduce you to the components of a résumé, what you should and shouldn't include, and a few good and bad examples of resumes.

A link to an interactive elements can be found at the bottom of this page.

[Click here for a text-only version of the activity.](#)

Digging In Deeper

There are a few sections of a résumé that merit deeper discussion as they should be the main content of the document:

- **Work experience**
- **Volunteer experience**
- **Education and training**

Work Experience

Depending on the résumé format you choose, you may list your most recent job first. Include the title of the position, employer's name, location, and employment dates (beginning, ending)

Work experience is on all résumés, even if you feel the work is not directly connected to the job you are trying to get. Even a first-time entrant to the job market has some experience. Perhaps you have been a baby sitter or lawn mower. Those hard skills of diaper changing or emptying grass bags may not be a part of the new job, but your reliability and customer service will be.

Listings of your work experience should offer sufficient detail that the reader could check your background if needed. Do remember this document is marketing you, so while one would never, never ever lie, it is okay to list the jobs you've had that are most relevant to the current position, but you do not need to list every job you've had. If you have been in the work force for twenty years, that first job you held for two years as a cashier may not be relevant to this District Manager job that you are now applying for.

There are times where location establishes the veracity of your background. At other times, the location may not be relevant. Say you have worked for one company for ten years and been transferred to three cities. The employer's name is likely sufficient without listing all the various locations in which you have worked for them. However, if you have moved from a small store to managing a flagship location, for example, then location can be a critical part of the impact of the listing in your résumé.

Dates can be another touchy subject. Perhaps there has been an awkward time where you went through several jobs in quick succession, and you would prefer not focusing on all those early departures. You could consider another résumé format, or while still listing the jobs in order, remove the dates or perhaps only list the years, rather than months and years. Be aware that any resume gaps or other chronological anomalies are going to raise questions. Be ready to address these in your cover letter and in a prepared answer when you get to the interview stage.

Work experience is frequently listed near the top of the resume page or perhaps just below the Education section.

Volunteer experience

Assuming that you are not applying to a non-profit organization, use volunteer jobs in a limited fashion. For people new to the workforce with limited paid job experience, they can show important skills. They may also support the concept of a well-rounded, socially connected employee. With volunteer experience, there is the risk of triggering some unknown (implicit) bias of the employer. If you are listing your volunteer work to demonstrate leadership and organizational expertise, it will be up to you if you want to include your volunteer coordination of a local Beer Pong league (which may seem unprofessional to some) or your organizational work at any politically aligned organizations (which may not align with the politics of those in charge of the hiring process).

No one wants to work for a company that would intentionally discriminate, and you should not; however, it is sometimes wise to be sensitive to the things readers might read into your résumé before they meet you.

If your only work experience is volunteering, list it high in the résumé. If it is a supplement to work experience, list it toward the bottom of the résumé.

Education and Training

Formal and informal experiences matter; include academic degrees, professional development, certificates, internships, etc.

Education is most often separated from other sections with various titles such as Training or Certifications. When detailing your formal education, list from your highest degree down. If you have a high school or G.E.D degree, list it only if you have no college experience. Once you have college experience to add to your resume, the prior schooling is assumed and does not need to be listed.

Education is listed in a similar fashion to Work Experience. List the name of the school, location (yes, there is a Miami in Ohio (Miami University) and in Florida (University of Miami). If you are under forty, list the graduation year for any degree. After that age, the choice is yours about listing the year. If you are still in college and expect to graduate in one year, it is fine to list that year. The reader will know that you are finishing the degree by next May.

There are other relevant items of training that should be listed to improve your chances of earning an interview. Label that section as such and then follow a standard listing that is usually the name of the training or certification, provider or certifying body, and date. For example, a CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) certificate means more to those applying to be paramedics than accountants and might be optionally listed or not at all listed. Yet a CPA (certified public accountant designation) will be a huge boon to those applying to some type of accounting or bookkeeping position and should be listed. Certifications are generally listed toward the bottom of a resume.

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