

WRITING A RESUME IN A HURRY

In an ideal world, you would take your time to craft a resume, and go through multiple iterations to get it right. Often, working with a resume writer is a good investment. But if you are reading this, you need a resume, and you need it fast. It is possible to get a basic resume written, proofed and decently formatted in a few hours. Here's how

Format

- **Start with a blank document.** You don't have time to play around with embedded formatting, or painstaking editing of existing text. Start with a blank slate and build a new resume.
- **Don't use a resume template:** It might look like it will save you time, but the rigid formatting of these templates is often at odds with resume best practices.
- **Two Pages:** Unless you are right out of school or have only had one or two jobs, plan on having a two-page resume. Two pages is a perfectly acceptable length. The old conventional wisdom of "keep it to a page" predates our current complicated and mobile career patterns. Go to 3 pages only if you are very senior and have had a stellar or a varied career.
- **Font size:** No smaller than 12 point. Smaller fonts looked cramped and are hard to read.
- **Font type:** Use clean, unfussy, easy-to-read fonts. San Serif fonts look more modern: Open Sans, Calibri, Helvetica, Avenir. Avoid Times Roman and Arial—they look dated.
- **Margins:** Use one-inch margins all around. The white frame makes the resume pop.
- **Paper:** If you are meeting or interviewing in person, you should have printed copies of your resume. Use excellent quality paper and a high quality ink-jet or laser printer. Use white, off-white, cream or pale gray paper.
- **PDF emailed resumes:** To preserve your formatting, PDF your resume and attach that to the email.
- **Name in header:** Make sure your name and page number are on the second and all subsequent pages. Readers have short attention spans—don't make them flip back to page one to remember your name.
- **Personal Information:** Don't include information such as marital status, health, kids, hobbies, etc., unless you have a good, career-related reason.
- **List years of employment only:** Don't include months. This makes it easier for people to calculate how long you were at a job. If your stint was REALLY short, you can say "Summer, 2001". Place the dates flush

against the right margin. This helps to balance the page, and it makes it easy for people to see that your chronology of employment is uninterrupted. If there are breaks in your employment, don't bother trying to hide them. Deal with them in the interview.

- **Use Right Tabs.** DO NOT space dates over to the right margin. These often go wonky when opened in different programs, and they are a pain to change and edit. Using the right tab ensures that the dates line up perfectly along the right margin. Don't know how to use a right tab? Google it.
- **Minimize Guiders:** Use attention-grabbing tactics such as boldface type, capital letters or italics for your information, not for phrases like "summary" or "professional experience."

Common Resume Problems

No Focus

It is nearly impossible to write a resume unless you know what position you are seeking. You decide what to include on a resume based on the job you want. If you are having difficulty with your resume, perhaps your professional objective needs to be clarified. If you are doing a resume in a hurry, it is presumably because there is a position you wish to apply for. Use the position description to focus the resume.

The All-Purpose Resume

Unfortunately, you need a resume for each type of position you are seeking. There are no "one-size-fits-all" resumes. Trying to make a resume fit several types of positions will make it impossible to write a clear, concise resume.

Not Designed to Be Visually Scanned

An employer takes 5-10 seconds to scan a resume. Eye scans show that recruiters read the top of the resume, the dates along the right margin, and the job titles and beginning of bullet points.

Knowing this, build your resume to be scanned. Include a summary section that lists the skills and accomplishments most relevant to the job. Assume this is all they will read about you. Make bullet points short, 2-3 lines. Adding more verbiage won't help, it isn't going to get read.

Too Much Information

Resumes get dense and wordy because people try to describe EVERYTHING they did in every position they have had. Focus instead on the three or four key

accomplishments for each job. List the most impressive things you have done, and your ability to do the smaller tasks will be assumed. Spend most of your time on the past ten years of your career. Early jobs can be listed without further explanation, or even grouped together “Other retail positions, 1972-1978.”

Jargon/Technical Language

Use simple, easy to understand phrases to describe your accomplishments. How would you explain this achievement to your grandmother, or a teenager? Start with that language, then tighten it up so that it sounds professional: “I reorganized our Department so that we could do the same work with fewer people, saving the company \$10 million in the first year.”

Objective Statements

Nothing screams “dinosaur!” like a resume with an objective statement. Just don’t do it.

Specific Elements

The Summary

This is the most important part of the resume, because it is likely to be the only thing that gets read. Since you need a resume fast, spend the bulk of your time on the summary section.

There is no one “perfect” format for a summary section. The information used and format will vary depending on what you need to communicate. Sometimes a key word list is best. Other times, 4-5 short bullets will work better. Many resumes do a combination of key words and bullets.

The following elements are among the things you should consider for inclusion in any summary:

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| Headline: | Use a headline to indicate the position or field of interest “VP of Sales”, “International Development”, “Public Accounting”, “Graphic Designer.” |
| Years of experience: | Unless you have had a year or less in the desired field, or have had such a long career that it will make you look too old, include the amount of experience you have had. |
| Industries/Specialties: | If you have functional job, such as accountant or lawyer, include information on the industries you have |

worked in, or the technical specialties you have experience with.

Companies/Clients: If your experience is with well-known companies or clients, include this information in the summary.

Keywords: Sometimes, a list of keyword that describe your skills and experience is the best way to communicate what you bring to the position.

Accomplishments: If you have always been an outstanding salesperson/manager etc., say that. If you have turned around numerous businesses, say that. Summarize your talents. Provide details in the body of the resume.

Degrees/Certifications: If you are a CPA, have a license or certification, are admitted to the bar, are a certified network administrator or have other relevant credentials, include this in the summary.

Languages: Any language ability should be included in the summary.

Professional Experience

- This section should come immediately after the summary section. The only time education should come first is if the degree is brand new, and directly relevant to the job. Otherwise, list education last. If you have work experience, but list education first, the employer may mistakenly assume you are less-experienced or fresh out of school.
- List either the job title or the organization first, selecting the one that reinforces the theme of the resume. If the organization you worked for is well known, but your title was non-descript, list the organization first. But if you had an impressive title, lead with that. Make this decision job-by-job. Readers won't view this as an inconsistency as long as the overall formatting looks the same.
- List locations only if your geographic assignments add to your qualifications. For example, if you are in the world of international development, list the countries where you have worked.
- List only the years you worked, not the months, and place the dates flush against the right margin.
- Use space under your title and company name to either describe your company, if that will help the reader understand your career, or to describe the scope of your job. Omit for older positions.

- Use bullets to describe your accomplishments. No bullet should be longer than four lines.
- Describe accomplishments, not responsibilities. The only one who should be able to use your resume is you. If you simply describe responsibilities, it will read like a position description.
- Tell little stories, focusing on the result achieved.
- Use adjectives: successful, ground-breaking, first, innovative, award-winning.
- You should have the most to say about your current job, and the least to say about jobs you held long ago.

Related Experience

- If appropriate, use this section to highlight volunteer work or work in non-paid positions such as internships.

Publications

- If you only have a couple of publications, try listing them under the jobs where they were published. If you have a long list, include that list as an appendix to the resume.

Education and Certifications

- List the school, your major, the degree, any honors and the date.
- I recommend including the date of graduation. Yes, the employer will be able to calculate how old you are, but if you omit the dates, the employer will just assume you are old enough to be trying to hide it, so you don't really gain anything.
- Don't include GPA unless you are in a field, such as law, accounting or engineering, where that information is expected.

See the Sample Resume for Maria DeSoto, also in this resource list. It meets all the criteria laid out in this document. The only fancy formatting is inserting lines and using the right tab to make a clean right margin.