RESUME PREPARATION

PREPARING YOUR "STANDARD" RESUME

How do I write my resume?

A resume is a brief summary for prospective employers designed to hook their attention. It is one of your main 'sales' documents designed to get an employer interested in you and will include details about you – your education, experience and other relevant material. It is used to promote your skills and background to a prospective employer and ensure you stand out from a crowd and are selected for an interview. It therefore needs to be clear and unambiguous, be inviting to read and easy to read. Constructing a great resume requires careful planning and preparation. It is not something that can be created in a short time – remember that this is an investment for your future and so dedicating time and energy up front pays dividends later!

Your resume must make the job of the reader as easy as possible. Prospective employers are busy people, on average an employer will spend thirty seconds reading a resume. Don't expect them to analyse disjointed bits of information and read between the lines. Be explicit. Fill in the gaps and say what you mean.

There is much advice available on writing an effective resume and if you asked one hundred people how you to write a resume, you would probably get one hundred different and /or conflicting opinions. However, this also allows you some flexibility and creativity to build a resume that suits you, your history, your style and allow your individuality to shine through. There is really no one correct answer on how to write a resume, however we have included some guidelines here to assist you in preparing your resume.

Content of Resume

Contact details

All your contact information should go at the top of your resume and include name, address, home number, work phone, mobile number, and email address. Some points to remember are:

- Avoid nicknames
- Use a permanent address
- Use a permanent telephone number and include the area code. If you are not at home during the day, make sure an answering machine or voicemail is available for messages. Remember the best resume in the world is useless if the employer cannot contact you. Also, many employers don't like silly recordings on answering machines and therefore don't leave a message.
- Add your email address as this is also another important contact point for an employer and many will find it useful. Again only use professional-sounding email addresses.

Birth date and marital status

There is no legal requirement for you to supply either of these. However, if you think displaying your birth date would be of some advantage, then include it.

Other personal details

You do not need to include gender, dependents, religion, health, place of birth or race.

If applicable, include citizenship or work eligibility.

Objective

Forget this section - a career overview or profile might be better. A Career Overview / Profile should provide the reader with a quick preview of what he or she will find in your resume. It should be a few sentences and written as one paragraph. It should include a smattering of your professional, academic and industry training. Some personal attributes are optional.

Avoid ambiguous statements and only include factual information.

Key Strengths

Summarise your strengths upfront. You can do this two ways, either via a list of Key Strengths represented as dot points or by including this under a heading like Career Profile (above). The aim of this section is to give the person reading your resume a quick snapshot of what you have to offer in the hope that they instantly place you in the short list pile.

Skills Summary

It is essential to highlight your skills in your resume, and preferably on the first page. It is not the job of the reader to go through every job you have had to figure out your likely skills. Tell them straight! You may want to prepare a Skills Audit to help you determine your skills. Ask family, friends and employers to help you identify your strengths. List your key professional skills (prepare strategic business plans), a few generic skills (ability to conduct research) and your IT skills (advanced spreadsheet skills).

Education and Qualifications

Include university, TAFE, and / or school details and information on any other qualifications you have gained. Start with your highest qualification first and put in chronological order. Unless you are fresh out of school, leave your secondary school history out.

Additional Training

Keep short and simple; limit courses attended to those applicable to the role.

Professional history:

This can include details of both paid and unpaid work (casual, temporary, voluntary or community work). Try not to leave long, unexplained time gaps in your employment history eg travel, study, family responsibilities.

Outline your career history in reverse chronological order. The structure to follow for each role is: Job title, employer, dates. What you did, for whom and when.

Description of employer

An address is not necessary; simply state the suburb (if in Sydney), the city or town if other than Sydney or the country. Provide a brief description of the company eg multinational import/export company with a turnover of $50m (AUD) or small family-owned catering business employing 10 staff. Indicate the basis on which you worked such as full-time, part-time, casual and the number of hours you averaged working per week if not on a full-time basis.

Responsibilities

People make the mistake of believing the more responsibilities listed the better. Include *only* the key things you were "responsible for" (accountable for). Don't list every single thing you did.
Don't assume the position title is self-explanatory - list your responsibilities and achievements in bullet points. Begin each responsibility with a strong verb eg managed, trained, analysed, organised. Use past tense for all but your current position. Don't copy your position description or duty statement here. List the main duties and tasks you personally performed and put the most important or relevant responsibilities first.

Achievements (five or six per job is good).

Orientate your resume towards specific (and quantifiable) achievements rather than duties and responsibilities. It should tell prospective employers everything that might interest them and nothing that will waste their time. This is where you list the things that you did that you were not paid to do. Employers want to see detail of your achievements, both what they were and how they added value to the business. Items would include staff awards, special commendations, suggestions you put forward, scoped out or helped to implement that led to cost savings or an increase in revenue, access to new clients, higher levels of customer service, time efficiencies and so on.

Be specific and quantify your achievements. Use numbers or percentages to illustrate your successes or the impact you can have. Avoid claiming complete responsibility for achievements, implying no one else deserves any credit, which is usually not the case.

Responsibilities tell the reader what you are/were paid to do – achievements tell us what you did.

Follow this format for at least your last two to three jobs. Where employment history is lengthy, consider listing most recent and relevant positions held, then summarise other positions in terms of roles and responsibilities and don't go back more than ten years on your resume. You can include a paragraph under the heading "Other professional experience" if you want so you can mention earlier work of particular interest or relevance. Or you can provide a full summary of your professional history. You can end with the sentence: "Full resume available upon request."

Professional Memberships (Optional)

Include only those relevant to your career as well as an indication of how active you are in the organisation.

Hobbies and interests (Optional)

There are mixed opinions about the wisdom of including a "Hobbies and Interests" section. If you want to include it, place it before Referees.

Some career experts warn that the section could work against you if the reader dislikes or is threatened by the activities you list.
However, many employers like to read this section as it gives them a better insight into what you are like outside the workplace. They also look for 'solitary' hobbies to see if you can unwind after a stressful day at work and 'group' hobbies to indicate that you are a team worker, have good communication skills and possibly leadership qualities.
Don't put in more than five or six hobbies.

Referees

References/Referees come at the end. Ask people if they are willing to act as references before you give their names to a potential employer.

Include at least two, preferably three referees. At least one should be a current or recent supervisor / manager. Names and phone numbers, along with relationship, are the most acceptable presentation. Add a sentence: "Written references available upon request" if you wish.

People who receive resumes usually use them for screening you 'out' rather than 'in'. Be aware that the first person to look at your resume for a specific job is often not likely to be the person who will do the interviewing; the person screening out inappropriate resumes may only have a list of criteria to match. Your resume will have to get beyond this point to ensure you are considered for an interview.

When you get to the interview, your resume can act as an agenda for your discussion, given the interviewer a springboard from which to launch the inquiry. Yes, it is acceptable to keep it in front of you but only refer to it as, and when, you need to.

How long should my resume be?

You will hear advice from time to time to keep your resume short - down to just a couple of pages. Employers, who are the people you are trying to impress, will generally tell you otherwise. It can be quite frustrating for an employer to become very interested in you because of your excellent letter of application and then, when they are keen to learn more about you, find that you have a skimpy two-page resume leaving questions in the employer's mind unanswered.

For school leavers and those that have been in the workforce for a few years, two pages is fine but for everyone else three to five pages is advised.

- Keep paragraphs under seven lines. Since resumes are often scanned by recruiters, it has a better chance of being read if it is condensed.
- Be honest. Don't exaggerate your experience to make it sound more impressive. If it can't stand up to scrutiny in the interview, you will blow your chances of getting the job.
- Make sure your resume is clear and visually pleasing.
- Make your resume unique. List technical skills, certificates awarded, professional memberships, military experience, travel and community work if it relates to the job you are seeking.
- Give yourself enough time, writing a great resume takes many edits
- Leave space between each piece of information
- Send the original, not a photocopy

Don't:

- Use a narrative style. Highlight your accomplishments in a bullet point format, then you don't need as many complete sentences. Brief points must be carefully thought out and your statements must be backed up by evidence at interview stage based on your track record or education.
- Be vague. Use percentages and numbers wherever possible, such as "Cut subsidiary costs by 25%, saving the company $1,400 for the fiscal year."
- Be too focused on job duties. Go above and beyond, listing the new programs you took part in.
- Write about inappropriate and unnecessary personal experiences. Always ensure your activities relate to the job you are seeking.
- Use personal pronouns, such as "I" and "me."
- Include copies of transcripts, letters of recommendation or awards.
- Include reasons you left your previous job.
- Use words or phrases with a negative connotation
- Use acronyms and jargon, unless explained with the first usage
- Use 'etc' or 'etcetera' as it indicates you can't think of what else to say
- Crowd each page
- Break a section of information with a new page
- Overuse styles such as bold, italics, underlining and upper case
- Use colour paper, colour printing, graphics, borders, your photo or gimmicks
- Have a single spelling, typographical, punctuation or grammatical error
- Rely on a spell checker.

Finally, once your resume is complete, have it reviewed and critiqued.

- Run a spell check on your computer before anyone sees your resume.
- Get a friend to do a grammar review.

Ask another friend to proof read. The more people who see your resume, the more likely that misspelled words and awkward phrases will be seen (and corrected).

Do not write a novel. It should concisely paint a picture of you and your job history. Key points should be highlighted to develop interest and excitement about you as a potential candidate. Include the kind of information you would like to know if you were hiring someone. The reviewer must be drawn to wanting to meet you in person.

Lay out

Again, this is really open to debate but keep it simple. Layout and deign should be legible, consistent and easy to follow with good clear headings, large easy-to-read type face and not typographical or grammatical errors. Font style should be easy to read like 11 point Times New Roman or Arial. Don't use table format as this wastes a lot of space and is hard to follow and ugly. Centering contact details and your Career history or Career summary (see next section) is fine and then placing the other information flush left.

Bold for headings is easier to read than bold and underline (overkill). Use dot points if you want, but just the one type. Also avoid colours. The content of the resume is the most important thing.

Design:

- Use high quality paper that is A4 and white or off-white paper.
- Print on one side of the paper.
- Use a font size of 12 to 14 points.
- Use normal margins (approx 2 cms on top and bottom, approx 2.5 cms on sides).
- Use non-decorative typefaces.
- Choose one typeface and stick to it.
- Keep headings consistent in size and style
- Avoid italics, script, and underlined words.
- Do not use horizontal or vertical lines, graphics, or shading.
- Staple in the top left corner rather than binding
- If you must mail your resume, put it in a large envelope and avoid folding

Resume Do's and Don'ts

When writing a resume, ensure that you:

Do:

- Research the position and the company thoroughly
- Match your skills and personal qualities with the job requirements
- Quantify your achievements.
- Tailor the resume for each position
- Concentrate on the relevant information
- Write in clear, concise terms using active words (eg accomplished, created, enhanced, launched, negotiated etc) and keeping pronouns (I, we, they) to a minimum or avoid them altogether.
- Use action words, such as developed, managed and designed.
- Use strong verbs eg planned, initiated, completed rather than participated in
- Carefully select every word and check for clarity
- Use bullet points where possible rather than long paragraphs