

RESUMES FOR GRAPHIC AND WEB DESIGNERS

CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER

“The resume itself is definitely information which should demand my undivided attention. It needs to be designed. Your choice of typefaces and typography, the layout and the organization of information, the paper stock, etc., all contribute to the way I perceive you as a potential designer working for us.”

Steff Geissbuhler
Principal, Chermayeff & Geismar Inc.; New York, NY

As a student of graphic or web design, you've probably completed countless projects for fictitious clients. Creating a resume, then, might be your first experience with marketing a very real, very important product: yourself. As Steff Geissbuhler points out, prospective employers in design industries will evaluate your resume not only by its *content* but also by its style. Choosing appropriate content and developing an appropriate style first requires an understanding of your audience's needs, values and expectations. This handout will guide you through these tasks.

MEETING YOUR PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYER'S NEEDS

A successful resume will earn you an interview by indicating to prospective employers that you have what they need. Determining an employer's needs requires you to read the job posting carefully: in it, you will find valuable information about the particular skills, traits, as well as the breadth and length of experience the ideal applicant should have. Even if you are sending your resume without the help of an ad posting, you can assume that a prospective employer will probably need you to possess the following:

- ◆ Related work experience
- ◆ Creativity
- ◆ Ability to work independently or in groups
- ◆ Consistency in meeting deadlines and the ability to handle multiple deadlines
- ◆ Ability to communicate effectively both orally and in writing
- ◆ Attention to detail
- ◆ Knowledge of specific computer applications

After determining the needs of your prospective employer, your next task is to determine how your experience matches up with those needs. As a student, you might not have a lot of paid work experience to dazzle them with. If this is the case, avoid the tendency to compensate by listing every job you've ever held. As Sara Tack of Smith & Jones advises, “Do not put your high school job at the local supermarket on your resume; only put relevant work, intern, or freelance experience on it.” (Of course, if you designed the supermarket's weekly mailer and other promotional materials, the job is probably worth mentioning.) You should also avoid the tendency to embellish your work history. If you designed your Aunt Sally's Christmas card last year, it's probably not a good idea to list the project as freelance work. As L.A. designer Petrula Vrontikis of the Vrontikis Design Office cautions, “Beware: listing a lot of experience, employed or freelance, but not showing any of the work in your book makes me suspicious.”

So, with little work experience, how do you show employers that you meet their needs? First, include all related employment experience that you do have. (In fact if you have interned or worked for a design office, Vrontikis recommends including a letter of recommendation with your resume.) Then consider the kinds of academic work you've completed, reflecting on how they meet your prospective employer's needs. Which courses prepared you best for a design job? List them. Which course projects required extensive creativity? Were they created for a real-world client? Did you work alone or on a team? Did you deliver a presentation? Consider listing those projects much like you would list a job, including the title of the project and highlighting the kinds of work you did. (Just make sure to keep these projects separate from your non-academic work experience, even if they were completed for a real client.) And finally, you should list the relevant computer programs in which you are proficient as well as any related affiliations with professional groups (e.g., the AIGA). Developing these types of content will hopefully show employers that you're qualified to meet their needs.

DEVELOPING A STYLE APPROPRIATE TO YOUR PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYER'S VALUES

Creative professions are celebrated for their ability to manipulate and even break conventions. While this characteristic liberates you from the standard resume format, it does not mean that your resume should be, for example, glittered or three-dimensional. Vrontikis advises you to “[k]now the difference between ‘cool’ and wrong. A current example of this is using all lower case letters. It may look cool elsewhere, but for [resumes], it's just wrong.” Avoid designs that are wild, flashy, “cartoony,” cute, or otherwise unprofessional.

Your resume must convey your design style, but it must also attract your audience. Being attractive, however, does not mean that you should change the design to fit the corporate styles of every agency to which you apply. Says Tack, "You'd never design two logos for a company," adding, "I think it is important for a future employer to know who you are, and the [resume] design says a lot about you. Either you are right for that agency and the agency is right for you or not."

While you won't design a new resume for every employer, you should keep in mind that the industry as a whole has certain values about resume design:

Organization: Above all, your resume should be exceptionally readable, so the organization of your resume should take top priority. After all, prospective employers will evaluate your layout to determine your design sensibilities. Pay special attention to how your typography and white space move the eye through your document. (To gain optimum control over your design, use a program like QuarkXPress or Adobe Illustrator rather than Microsoft Word.) Doing so will not only illustrate your design skills, but it will also help your prospective employer scan your resume with ease, which is essential when your reader is short on time and when your resume is competing with countless others.

Color: As with any design project, choose your colors carefully and tastefully. Also, keep in mind that if you send your resume electronically, its colors will probably appear different on the viewer's monitor. Hence, it's best to limit the number of colors you use and to "test-view" the document on a variety of monitors.

Fonts: Limit your fonts, and beware of trendy ones like Twylitezone and Matisse. Not only are such fonts difficult to read, they don't get much respect in the industry.

Personal Logos: In theory, creating a logo for yourself not only helps prospective employers remember you, but it also communicates much about Brand You. Nonetheless, heed the advice of Steff Geissbuhler: "No elaborate personal logos, please, especially if you're just out of school. It's a bit pretentious." As you design, remember that prospective employers might photocopy (even fax) your resume to other employees, so your design should be able to survive a black and white.

SATISFYING YOUR PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYER'S EXPECTATIONS

The expectations of graphic design and multimedia agencies are not entirely different from those of other companies. In general, they expect that you:

Include a cover letter. Many employers won't even consider a resume if it's not accompanied by a cover letter. This letter should introduce you, identify your reason for writing, explain (briefly) why this particular company interests you, and outline what talents and experience you can contribute. Your letter should also "ask" for an interview, stating that you will call or email in hopes of arranging one. And finally, the cover letter should be addressed to a specific person (do your research – it not only puts your letter in the right hands, it also conveys your attention to detail).

Spell everything correctly. Sometimes design agencies have reservations about hiring people right out of school, so paying special attention to important details like spelling will show them that you're a conscientious, detail-oriented worker.

Provide, if asked, samples of work. Be prepared to show prospective employers examples of your best work or to provide a link to an electronic portfolio. For guidelines on how to present your work, see the Writing Center's handout "Portfolios for creative professionals."

Format for Scanning Resumes

Resume management systems scan your hardcopy resume into their databases for recruiters and hiring managers to search for new consultants. Guidelines to follow when sending hardcopy resumes that will be scanned include:

- Mail an original copy without folds or staples. A faxed resume may not scan.
- Left justify the entire document.
- Avoid graphics, italics, underlining, bold and shading.
- Save the file as "Text with Line Breaks," and put a hard return at the end of each line.
- Avoid tabs.
- Parenthesis, brackets, horizontal or vertical lines will not scan properly.
- Do not use compressed lines of print.
- Use a sans serif font in size 10-14.

