

Resumes

The Writing Center
At Rensselaer

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Introduction

A resume (sometimes spelled *résumé*) is a brief summary of your abilities, education, experience, and skills. Its main task is to convince prospective employers to contact you. **A resume has one purpose: to get you a job interview.**

Resumes must do their work quickly. Employers or personnel officers may look through hundreds of applications and may spend only a few seconds reviewing your resume. To get someone to look at it longer, your resume must quickly convey that you are capable and competent enough to be worth interviewing. The more thoroughly you prepare your resume now, the more likely someone is to read it later.

This guide will be useful if you're writing your first resume or want to analyze the effectiveness of your current one. The Writing Center can also help you draft your resume and cover letters and can give you sample resumes and related handouts.

Overview: How to Prepare Your Resume

- gather and check all necessary information
- match your skills and experience with an employer's needs
- highlight details that demonstrate your capabilities
- organize the resume effectively
- consider word choice carefully
- ask other people to comment on your resume
- make the final product presentable
- evaluate your resume

Gather and Check All Necessary Information:

Write down headings such as EDUCATION, EXPERIENCE, HONORS, SKILLS, ACTIVITIES. Beneath each heading, jot down the following information:

EDUCATION usually means post-secondary and can include special seminars, summer school, or night school as well as college and university. If you are just starting college, you can include high school as well. List degrees and month/year obtained or expected; names and locations of schools; major and minor, if any; grade point average. A brief summary of important courses you've taken might also be helpful.

EXPERIENCE includes full-time paid jobs, academic research projects, internships or co-op positions, part-time jobs, or volunteer work. List the month/years you worked, position, name and location of employer or place, and responsibilities you had. As you describe your experiences, ask yourself questions like these:

- Have I invented, discovered, coordinated, organized, improved or directed anything professionally or for my community?
- Do I meet deadlines consistently?
- Am I a good communicator?
- Do I enjoy teamwork?

Even if you're new to a field, you aren't necessarily starting from scratch.

HONORS. List any academic awards (scholarships, fellowships, honors list), professional awards or recognition, or community awards (i.e. for athletic skills).

SKILLS. List computer languages and software, research, laboratory, teaching or tutoring, communication, leadership, or athletic, among others.

ACTIVITIES. List academic, professional, or community organizations in which you hold office or are currently a member; list professional and community activities, including volunteer work. Listing extra-curricular activities or hobbies is optional.

After you have all this information down, check it for accuracy. You'll need full names, in some cases full addresses, correct and consistent dates, and correct spellings.

Match Your Experience and Skills With an Employer's Needs:

POSITION: What kind of position do you want for this job-search? Make notes. Now match your wishes up with positions that are actually available. You can get this information through postings, ads, personal contacts, or your own research.

Also, the Rensselaer Career Development Center (CDC) can help you with job-search techniques. The CDC offers workshops, materials, personal assistance, and on-campus recruiting. It also coordinates a "Focus Program" to help freshmen,

sophomores, and juniors find out about their field from Rensselaer alumni. Call the CDC at 276-6234, or drop by the Darrin Communication Center, Room 209.

EMPLOYER: For a certain position, what aspects of your education, experience, or skills will be most attractive to that employer? List SPECIFIC coursework, areas of specialty, specific skills, or knowledge that you think would interest the employer.

Highlight Details That Demonstrate Your Capabilities

Look over what you've written and try to select details of your education, experience, honors, skills, and activities that match an employer's needs in a few important areas. The most effective resumes result when you go through this process for each position/employer, so by the time you graduate, you most likely have several resumes, designed for different positions and employers.

Organize the Resume Effectively

PERSONAL INFORMATION: Top center of first page. Name (no title); addresses; phone numbers; e-mail and/or fax addresses; type of visa, if applicable.

NOTE: In the United States, a potential employer has no legal right to request information about age, sex, race, religion, nationality, marital status, health, physical appearance, or personal habits. Don't include such information on your resume.

EDUCATION: Often comes first in student resumes, especially if it is a strong asset.

EXPERIENCE: Use one of two formats:

Functional: To emphasize skills and talents, cluster your experience under headings that highlight these skills, for example, leadership, research, computers, etc. This format can be helpful if you have little relevant job experience.

Chronological: To emphasize work experience, list jobs beginning with the most recent. Some hints:

- write all job descriptions in parallel phrases, using ACTION verbs
- list the most important responsibilities or successes first
- list similar tasks together
- emphasize collaborative or group-related tasks

AWARDS/HONORS: Use reverse chronological order; include titles, places, dates.

ACTIVITIES: Generally, list hobbies, travel, or languages only if they relate to your job interests. In some cases, you may wish to emphasize your willingness to travel or relocate.

REFERENCES: You need not put these on your resume. Instead, you can prepare a separate list of references, with complete name, title, company name, address, and telephone numbers for each individual. Usually, you give this list to prospective employers after your interview.

Consider Word Choice Carefully

In a resume, you need to sound positive and confident: neither too aggressive, nor overly modest. The following words and phrases are intended as suggestions for thinking about your experience and abilities. Whatever your final word choices are, they should accurately describe you – your skills, talents, and experience.

Choose ACTIVE VERBS that describe your skills, abilities, and accomplishments. Examples: I can contribute, enjoy creating, have experience in organizing. . . While at X Company, I administered, coordinated, directed, participated in. . .

accomplish	develop	plan
achieve	direct	perform
analyze	establish	present
adapt	expand	propose
balance	improve	reorganize
collaborate	implement	research
coordinate	invent	set up
communicate	increase	supervise
compile	initiate	support
conduct	instruct	train
contribute	lead	travel
complete	organize	work (effectively, i.e. with others)
create	participate	write (effectively)
delegate	perform	

NOTE: You can change the forms of any of these verbs to stress different aspects of your abilities and experience: organize → organized, organizing, organization.

Choose ADJECTIVES and NOUNS that describe yourself positively and accurately:

able to	competent	flexible	multilingual
administrative	complete	global	multi-disciplinary
analytical	creative	handle stress	a negotiator
(fluently) bilingual	dedicated	imaginative	other cultures
broad scope	diversified	intensive	reliable
capable	effective	in-depth	responsible
communication skills	experienced	innovative	a supervisor
collaboration	efficient	integrated	teamwork
collaborative	extensive	listen (to others)	(well-) traveled
consistent	exceptional	motivated	work well with. . .

Resume Length: One Page or Two?

Most hiring managers prefer to look at a one-page resume. If you are an undergraduate student without much work experience, do not exceed one page. If you are a graduate student who has considerable work experience, research experience or skills, your resume probably warrants two pages. If you are applying for a position in academia, you will probably need to submit a curriculum vitae (CV), a longer, more detailed type of resume. Contact the Writing Center for more information on CVs.

Ask Other People To Comment On Your Resume

We strongly recommend that you have an advisor, potential employer, or someone in your field critique your resume. For more help, ask:

- the Writing Center staff
- the Career Development Center
- friends and family

NOTE: People may offer many different opinions. Use your own judgment and be open-minded about constructive criticism.

Make The Final Product Presentable

Use a computer and high-quality (preferably laser) printer. If you don't have a computer or laser printer, you should either have your resume professionally produced or use the resources that Rensselaer has to offer.

Evaluate Your Resume

Hold your resume at arm's length and see how it looks. Is the page too busy with different type styles, sizes, lines, or boxes? Is the information spaced well, not crowded on the page? Is there too much "white space"? Is important information quick and easy to find?

Content

- name is at the top of the page, highlighted by slightly larger type size, bolding, and/or underlining
- address and phone number(s) are complete and correct, with zip and area codes, and are well-placed in relation to name
- all entries highlight a capability or accomplishment
- descriptions use active verbs, and verb tense is consistent; current job is in present tense; past jobs are in past tense
- repetition of words or phrases is kept to a minimum
- capitalization, punctuation, and date formats are consistent
- there are NO typos or spelling errors

Organization

- your best assets, whether education, experience, or skills, are listed first
- the page can be easily reviewed: categories are clear, text is indented
- the dates of employment are easy to find and consistently formatted
- your name is printed at the top of each page

Format/Design

- no more than two typestyles appear; typestyles are conservative
- bolding, italics and capitalization are used minimally and consistently
- margins and line spacing keep the page from looking too crowded
- printing is on one side of the sheet only, on high-quality bond paper, white or off-white in color
- the reproduction is good, with no blurring, stray marks, or faint letters
- the right side of the page is in “ragged” format, not right-justified. Right-justification creates awkward white spaces

Now you're done! Just one more suggestion: If you are sending your resume to a prospective employer, you'll need to include a separate cover letter. This is usually one page long.

The letter indicates your interest in a particular company or position, summarizes the most important aspects of your education and experience, and lets the employer know where and when you can be contacted for an interview. The Writing Center and the Career Development Center can give you more information about effective cover letters.

Electronic Resumes

With the proliferation of computer technology and electronic communication, many companies now request resumes to be sent via e-mail or through the company's website. Others receive paper resumes and run them through a scanner to match keywords and skills with available positions. With an “e-resume” the content will remain much the same, but you will have to do some special formatting to fill these requirements.

Preparing a Resume for Scanning

The reasons to prepare a scannable resume are to make sure the employer's character recognition program accurately records the information in your resume and the employer's search engine picks your resume for further scrutiny.

- Use common headings, such as Objective, Experience, Employment, Skills, Education
- Use complete school name, degree and dates
- Increase your list of keywords by specifying the names of software you know, such as Microsoft Word or C++; use words/acronyms specified in the job announcement
- Use jargon and acronyms specific to your discipline and industry

The formatting that we do for a human reader often doesn't work for a computer reader, and vice-versa. To maximize your resume's scannability:

- Use a sans serif font such as Arial, Helvetica, Futura or Optima
- Choose a font size between 10 and 14 points
- Avoid italics, graphics, boxes, vertical and horizontal lines, shadows, etc.
- Do not fold, staple or paperclip the resume (send it in a large envelope)
- Avoid a two-column format or resumes that look like newsletters or newspapers
- Don't condense spacing between letters (i.e., no tight kerning or tracking)
- Print your resume on one side of the paper in black ink

Preparing a Resume to be Sent by E-mail

To attach or to paste? That is the question. Your best bet is to find out from the company if they prefer e-mail attachments of resumes or if they prefer the text of the resume placed in the body of the e-mail message. Pay attention to any format guidelines the employer gives you. If there are none, the best way to make sure the employer can read your resume is to save it in plain text (ASCII text).

If you attach a resume that is not in ASCII/plain text format, convert your document to a PDF with embedded fonts. That way, your resume looks as you have intended, and you don't have to worry about the recipient not having the same software or fonts.

Always include key information in the subject header, including job title and reference number. Send the resume and cover letter in a single e-mail message, with the cover letter in the body of the message and the resume attached (unless otherwise specified).

To create a plain text (ASCII) resume:

- To avoid text-wrapping, make sure you have no more than 65 characters per line. Sixty-five characters per line calls for left and right page margins of one inch.
- Use standard ASCII characters in place of bold, italics, underlines or graphics:
 - Change all bullets to asterisks (*)
 - Use capital letters for headers
 - Create a line of hyphens to separate resume sections
- Save your resume as a new text only (.txt) file
- Test your new ASCII/plain text resume by e-mailing it to yourself and to a friend who has a different kind of email access; also, test it by pasting the text into the body of the e-mail message.