

Preparing Your Resume

Your resume is by far the most important document you will use in your job search. It is often a potential employer's first introduction to you. Think of it as a marketing device and be sure it accurately reflects your qualifications.

1. Analyze Skills, Knowledge and Accomplishments

As a first step in preparing to write a resume, you will have to conduct a thorough inventory of your background, skills and qualifications. This is a difficult yet necessary step which will make writing your resume much easier. To make this task more manageable, make a list of your work experience (including work-study, summer, internships and co-op jobs), course projects or research experience, volunteer work and activities. Analyze each item on this list for the skills acquired, knowledge gained and key accomplishments.

On your resume, you will want to be sure to emphasize the skills, knowledge and accomplishments most directly related to the type of position you are seeking.

2. Choose a Format

There are two basic formats for resumes: chronological and functional. The first emphasizes job titles and employers, and presents information in reverse chronological order. The second presents information according to broad skill headings and serves to deemphasize job titles and employers' names. The majority of people choose to use a chronological format and some even use a combination of the two styles. If you are unsure of which to use, see a career counselor in the CCPD for advice.

3. Look at Resume Samples

The Center for Career and Professional Development (CCPD) has samples on our website and in the CCPD Guide as well as several books that include sample resumes in the CCPD office. Review these, or check out your friends' resumes to get ideas on how you want to format yours. Get ideas only, do not plagiarize or exactly copy a style!

4. Prepare a Draft of Your Resume

In preparing your draft, keep these hints in mind when creating the individual sections:

Objective - This is a short statement of what type of position you are seeking. Some people choose not to have an objective on their resume, but instead include it within their cover letter. Candidates with a great deal of experience sometimes choose to replace an objective with a "Summary of Qualifications."

For resumes that you submit to the CCPD, we strongly encourage you to include an objective statement since they are sent to employers without an accompanying cover letter. Try not to be too broad or too specific in your objective. This is a difficult task; you may want to seek some advice from a counselor in the CCPD. Avoid using the word "challenging." It is used so frequently that it has become a cliché.

Education - The most frequently asked questions in this section concern GPA. You are strongly advised to include your GPA if it is 2.7 or higher; if you are a transfer student, you may present your cumulative GPA as a weighted average of your courses at both schools. However, this must be clear to the reader. If you are concerned that your GPA is very low (2.3/2.4), you may choose to leave it off your resume.

List all schools you attended where the courses will support your degree from Rensselaer.

Experience Sections - Depending on your personal situation, you may divide your experience into several sections, or include it all in one. For example, include all "Relevant Experience" together and list other jobs held in an "Employment" section. Keep in mind that employers are interested not only in paid work experience, but also in course projects, research projects, volunteer work and leadership roles.

Be sure to use short, descriptive statements beginning with action verbs to describe your responsibilities or accomplishments for each entry. Refer back to Step One. Do not use "I" in your statements; it is understood. Also, do not use phrases like "responsible for" or "duties included."

Other Sections - There is no set rule for how many sections a person can have on a resume, or what should be included in each section. You need to set up your resume to best showcase what you have to offer an employer. You may also want to think about including activities, athletics, honors, skills and/or community service.

The layout and aesthetics of your resume are as important as the content. Use the following checklist as a guide.

- Be sure that the type on your resume is between 10 pt. and 12 pt. in size and is a simple, readable font.
- Leave margins of ½ " to 1" on all sides of your resumes.

- Be selective about what you choose to emphasize (through bullets or bolding, etc.). If you try to emphasize too much, nothing will stand out.
- Most companies scan resumes into their databases. Many scanners cannot read italics, underlining or reverse type so avoid using these styles.
- Stick with just one or two font styles throughout your resume.
- Use a consistent format for each entry in a section and organize each section in reverse chronological order.
- You should keep your resume to one page if at all possible; if you have a great deal of experience, you may be able to justify having two pages.
- Always save and send your resume as a .PDF whenever possible.

5. Have Your Resume Critiqued

Have your resume critiqued by a career counselor in the CCPD during our walk-in hours or by making an appointment for an in-person critique.

If you have difficulty with English grammar and usage, you may want to take your resume to The Center for Communication Practices in Folsom Library for assistance before bringing it into the CCPD for a final critique.

You may also seek advice from professors or experienced professionals in your field. Be aware though that you can show your resume to ten different people and get ten different opinions!

The “visual” resume is simply the standard copy you that will mail/hand to an employer. The “scannable” resume is a neutral color like cream or white. You should use matching paper and envelopes for your cover letters and resumes. These are stored on a computer as an image. The computer then “reads” the resume and creates a database of your relevant skills, degrees, and achievements in the form of key words. Here are tips for both versions:

A. Visual

- Use high-quality bond paper in neutral color like cream or white.
- Leave margins of ½” to 1” on all sides.

- Be sure that the type on your resume is between 10 pt. and 12 pt. in size.
- Be selective about what you choose to emphasize with bullets, or bolding, etc. (If you try to emphasize too much, nothing will stand out).
- Use a consistent format for each entry in a section, and organize each section in reverse chronological order (most recent first, and so on).
- You should keep your resume to ONE page. Unless you have a great deal of experience, you may be able to justify having two pages.

Scannable

- It is essential that you describe your skills and accomplishments in key words or phrases.
- Use Times New Roman, or Arial fonts
- Use a font size between 10 and 12 points.
- Avoid italics and underlining. Use boldface for emphasis or all capital letters.
- Avoid graphics and shading or shadowing.
- Do not compress or expand the space between letters.
- Vertical or horizontal lines should be used sparingly. If you do use them, allow at least ¼” of space around the line.
- Do not double space within sections.
- The resume you submit should be an original, laser-printed copy on white paper.
- Do not fold or staple your scannable resume.

6. Print Your Resume

After you have had your resume critiqued and you are finished editing, **spell check** and **proofread** carefully one final time. You want to be sure your resume is perfect before making multiple copies.

One Final Note

Never mail out your resume by itself; it should always be accompanied by a cover letter.