

HOW TO WRITE A CV



A resume is a marketing tool and is used to promote yourself. When writing your resume, you should consider how it will be rated by a potential employer or recruiter.

Your resume should tell a clear and concise story about your career progression, including the scope, responsibilities and achievements in each role. Ask yourself, "Will this make me stand out against other applicants with similar experience, and would a manager want to talk to me about this vacancy?"

We've put together some of the most frequently asked questions so that you can make sure your resume is always at the top of the pile!

WHAT IS A RESUME?

A self-promotional document that presents you in the best possible light, for the purpose of getting invited to a job interview.

- It's *not* an official personnel document
- It's not a job application
- It's not a "career obituary"!

WHAT SHOULD THE RESUME CONTENT BE ABOUT?

It's not just about past jobs! It's about you, how you performed and what you accomplished in those past jobs - especially those accomplishments that are most relevant to the work you want to do next.

A good resume predicts how you might perform in that desired future job.

HOW LONG SHOULD A RESUME BE?

Try and keep your resume to a maximum of 5 pages. Hiring managers and recruiters are extremely unlikely to read beyond the first few pages, so be sure to present only relevant and succinct information. Avoid wasting one page on a title page containing only your name.

HOW SHOULD A RESUME BE PRESENTED?

- Be sure to use a font other than Times New Roman, and also avoid less formal fonts such as Comic Sans MS, which is better suited to non-business documents. Suitable fonts include Arial, Tahoma, and Garamond
- Choose one font and stick to it; don't use different fonts for different elements of the document
- You can use a larger size font for your major headings, but try and keep the majority of the text the same size. Somewhere between size 10 and 12 is ideal
- Be consistent with your spacing; if you go with one line before and after a list of bullet points then ensure this is the same throughout the document
- Use page breaks instead of multiple carriage returns to move to the next page; if you're uncertain how to do this, just press Control+Enter. It looks much more professional
- Keep your resume in a simple format; either .doc or .pdf. Avoid things like .rtf files as they are not recognised on all applicant tracking systems

WHAT STYLE OF WRITING WORKS BEST?

Your resume should be written in the first person: 'I am'; try not to use third person: 'Susan is'. The reader should be engaged within the first page of reading, so avoid elaborate or story-telling styles of writing.

WHAT'S THE FASTEST WAY TO IMPROVE A RESUME?

Try to minimise anything that starts with "responsibilities included" and replace it with on-the-job accomplishments.

HOW MUCH DETAIL SHOULD I GO INTO?

If you are applying for a specific position, for example a Project Manager, BA or a technical position, in your summary you should state your relevant experience and achievements from previous jobs. This catches the reader's eye, as it relates to the role for which you are applying.

WHAT IS THE MOST COMMON RESUME MISTAKE MADE BY JOB HUNTERS?

Leaving out a Career Objective. This helps the reader get a clear sense of the path you are on, and the type of position and/or company you are seeking.

Don't be afraid to be specific: having a clearly stated goal doesn't have to confine you if it's well written. Do however be sure to keep your objective statement brief – no more than 1-2 sentences, and avoid motherhood statements which are vague or ill-defined.

If you are applying for varying role types, be sure that your stated objective is in line with the role you are applying for. This may mean that you have more than one version of your resume.

WHAT ARE THE FIRST STEPS IN WRITING A RESUME?

- Understand the picture and perception that you would like the reader to have of you after they have read your resume
- Decide on an effective Career Objective that can be stated succinctly
- Be bold but honest when writing

HOW SHOULD I POSITION MY RESUME?

A recruiter or hiring manager knows the type of person they are looking for before they read the deck of resumes in front of them. They are looking for someone with particular experience, particular skills, and particular training. If you give this some thought and try to write exactly what they want to hear, you should get an interview.

Remember that the recruiter or hiring manager is looking for the applicant that best demonstrates they can do the job.

SHOULD I USE PARAGRAPHS OR BULLET POINTS?

Many resumes are written in the traditional paragraph format that is not easy to read. The person recruiting has 50-100 resumes and they will speed-read 1-2 lines of each paragraph. Write your resume in a bulleted format that will enable the recruiter or hiring manager to scan it.

- Bulleted job descriptions are 3 times faster to read than the long paragraph format
- In 20 seconds they can read a bullet formatted resume
- It takes 60-90 seconds to read a paragraph format

It's well documented that employers spend only 20 seconds on the initial reading of a resume. The bullet format enables you to say a lot and still be easy to read, as opposed to the paragraph format where the more you say the less they will read. Bulleting is a win-win technique!

SHOULD I USE A CHRONOLOGICAL RESUME OR A FUNCTIONAL ONE?

The Chronological format is widely preferred by employers (with your most recent position appearing first on your resume and then working backwards), and works well if you're staying in the same field (especially if you've been upwardly mobile). Use a Functional format if you're changing fields, and you're sure a skills-oriented format would show off your transferable skills to better advantage; and be sure to include a clear chronological work history!

WHAT TYPE OF INFORMATION DO I NEED TO PROVIDE?

Personal details - It is essential to include contact details in your resume to enable interested employers to get in touch with you (and as an aside, if you're job-hunting, make sure you have voice mail set up on your phone – they may not call twice!).

Avoid putting your details within a header, as when the document is open these are not always immediately visible dependent on which system they are being viewed through.

Your personal details should include:

- Your first name and surname (middle names are unnecessary)
- The suburb in which you live (as a minimum): otherwise prospective employers may think you are situated out of the country or interstate
- Your postal address (if applicable)
- Your contact phone number(s)
- Your email address
- Your visa or citizenship status if not born in Australia

Career history, past employers and job descriptions - Focus on the following areas:

- Skills
- Experience
- Responsibilities
- Scope
- Achievements
- Evidence of progression

Overview of your employer – If the company you worked for isn't a household name, it is worthwhile including a sentence describing the company and its primary function. For example "Brown and Brown is a leading second-tier CRM software manufacturer with 350 employees, targeting the Asia-Pacific market."

Awards and achievements - Make sure you include a list of your achievements—your accomplishments are an important selling point.

Educational qualifications - Qualifications you have gained since leaving school. Only include fully completed qualifications, unless you are currently studying. List the educational institution, the full and correct title of the qualification, and the year of completion or intended completion.

Vocational and professional qualifications - Details of all training courses, industry accredited courses in specific skills, technical training, management courses. If you have been in the workforce for some time, this may be a very long list, so only include recent and/or relevant items.

Scope - There are many Team Leaders in the market – did you manage a team of 3 or a team of 30? If you are a Project Manager, have you managed \$50,000 dollar projects or \$5M projects? This level of detail is critical to paint a clear picture of the level and nature of experience you have, and will stand you apart from other applicants who don't provide that information.

Referees - Employers will want to contact referees when they are considering you for a position. Contact your referees in advance to advise them that they may be contacted for references.

Ideally your referees should be people you have reported to directly. Co-workers or character references are not generally appropriate; a referee should be able to give a detailed response on your work and your abilities from a management perspective.

When listing referees, include the following information about them:

- Name
- Job title
- Name of organisation
- Telephone number
- Email address

If your referee is no longer in the same position, list them in the position in which you reported to them, and then list their current position.

List work phone numbers wherever possible; mobile numbers can cast doubt on the validity of the referee information.

To keep this information confidential, include the statement "referees will be supplied upon request". However do bear in mind that sometimes the positions held by your referees alone will provide you an advantage over competitors who choose to withhold this information. For example, if you reported to the CEO as opposed to a Team Leader, this instantly changes how you will be perceived.

WHAT DO I DO IF I HAVE GAPS IN MY WORK EXPERIENCE?

It is always preferable to show something, rather than leaving a gap. It is perfectly acceptable to take time out from your career to travel, study, or focus on your family.

For example:

- ⇒ 1993-95 Full-time parent - or
- ⇒ 1992-94 Maternity leave and family management - or
- ⇒ Travel and study – or
- ⇒ Full-time student

SHOULD I INCLUDE A CAREER OBJECTIVE STATEMENT AT THE START OF MY RESUME?

Career Objectives can help the reader get a clear sense of the path you are on, and the type of position and/or company you are seeking. However there are a few things to keep in mind when deciding whether to include one on your resume:

- ⇒ Don't include a Career Objective just for the sake of it: if you are a career contractor, there is no need to include one - only those seeking permanent roles should consider doing so.
- ⇒ It is also not necessary if you are in a technical role; eg IT, technicians etc.
- ⇒ If you are sending a covering letter with your application, there is no need to repeat yourself by including a Career Objective in the body of your resume. Even worse, sometimes the goals stated in the covering letter may not be the same as those listed in the resume!
- ⇒ If there is no covering letter, then you can include a Career Objective. Don't be afraid to be specific: having a clearly stated goal doesn't have to confine you if it's well written. Do however be sure to keep your objective statement brief – no more than 1-2 sentences, and avoid motherhood statements which are vague or ill-defined.
- ⇒ If you are applying for varying role types, be sure that your stated objective is in line with the role you are applying for. This may mean that you have more than one version of your resume.

WHAT IF I HAVE A FRAGMENTED, SCRAMBLED-UP WORK HISTORY, WITH LOTS OF SHORT-TERM JOBS?

To minimize the job-hopper image, combine several similar jobs into one "chunk," for example:

- ⇒ 1993-1995 Secretary/Receptionist; Jones Bakery, Micro Corp., Carter Jewellers - or
- ⇒ 1993-1995 Waiter; McDougal's Restaurant, Burger King, Traders Coffee Shop - or
- ⇒ 1993-1995 Temp work: Helpdesk, Desktop Support; Big Bank, Bigger Bank of Victoria, Bank-o-rama

Drop some of the less important, briefer jobs. But don't drop a job, even when it lasted a short time, if that was where you acquired important skills or experience.

WHAT IF MY JOB TITLE DOESN'T REFLECT MY ACTUAL LEVEL OF RESPONSIBILITY?

When you list it on the resume, either replace it with a more appropriate job title (say "Accounts Payable/Receivable Officer" instead of "Commercial Operations Assistant" if that's more realistic) OR use their job title and your fairer one together, i.e. "Commercial Operations Assistant (Accounts Payable/Receivable Officer)"

HOW CAN I AVOID AGE DISCRIMINATION?

If you're over 40 or 50 or 60, remember that you don't have to present your entire work history! You can simply label that part of your resume "**Recent Work History**" or "**Relevant Work History**" and then describe only the last 10 or 15 years of your experience in the main body of your resume.

Below your 10-15 year work history, you could add a paragraph headed "Prior relevant experience" and simply bullet point any additional important (but ancient) jobs without mentioning dates.

WHAT IF I'VE NEVER HAD ANY "REAL" PAID JOBS - JUST SELF-EMPLOYMENT OR ODD JOBS?

Give yourself credit, and create an accurate, fair, job title for yourself. For example:

- A&S Hauling & Cleaning (Self-employed) - or
- Household Repairman, Self-employed - or
- Child-Care, Self-employed

Be sure to add "Customer references available on request" and then be prepared to provide some very good references of people you worked for.

In this instance it can also be appropriate to provide character referees, ideally who hold a management position within a recognised company.

Note that it's important to be honest about your lack of experience; acknowledge it in your opening Career Objective, and don't try to make more out of your roles than there really is. "Managing Director, A&S Hauling & Cleaning" will not work to your advantage.

HOW FAR BACK SHOULD I GO IN MY WORK HISTORY?

Far enough; and not too far! About 10 or 15 years is usually enough - unless your "juiciest" work experience is from farther back. For example, if you have moved into a professional career path there is no need to list your first few jobs in retail while you were studying or the secretarial jobs you had after leaving school.

HOW CAN I LIST STUDENT LIST SUMMER JOBS?

Students can make their resume look neater by listing seasonal jobs very simply on one line, such as "Spring 1996" or "Summer 1996" rather than 6/96 to 9/96.

WHAT IF I DON'T QUITE HAVE MY DEGREE OR CREDENTIALS YET?

You can say something like:

- Graduate studies in Instructional Design, in progress - or
- Master's Degree, anticipated completion December 2012

WHAT IF I WORKED FOR ONLY ONE EMPLOYER FOR 20 OR 30 YEARS?

Then list each different position you held there separately, so that your job progression within the company is more obvious.

WHAT ABOUT LISTING HOBBIES AND INTERESTS?

Don't include hobbies on a resume unless the activity is somehow relevant to your job objective, or clearly reveals a characteristic that supports your job objective. For example, a hobby of sky diving (adventure, courage) might seem relevant to some job objectives (Security Guard, Karate Instructor) but not to others.

WHAT ABOUT REVEALING RACE OR RELIGION?

Don't include ethnic or religious affiliations (inviting pre-interview discrimination) unless you can see that including them will support your job objective. Get an opinion from a respected friend or colleague about when to reveal, and when to conceal, your affiliations.

Similarly, if you are the president of your local chapter of the Green party, this is also not suitable information for a resume. Unless you are applying for a job with the Green party!

WHAT IF MY NAME IS ROBIN WILLIAMS?

Don't mystify the reader about your gender; they'll want to know whether you're male or female. So if your name is Lee or Robin or Pat or anything else not clearly male or female, use a Mr. or Ms. prefix.

WHAT IF I GOT MY DEGREE FROM A DIFFERENT COUNTRY?

You can say "Degree equivalent to U.S. Bachelor's Degree in Economics-Tehran, Iran."

AND FINALLY ...

Proofread and use Spellcheck!

The final rule when creating a resume is to proofread and eliminate spelling mistakes, grammatical errors and to format inconsistencies. It's a good idea to get someone to proofread it for you too.

Include a Cover Letter

Cover letters are a letter of introduction. In these letters you explain who you are and why you are applying for this particular job. It is a matter of courtesy that you introduce yourself when you are requesting an interview. It will also make you stand out from other applicants with similar experience who have not provided a cover letter, as it allows the reader to form a better picture of you, and thereby more closely identify with you.

Cover Letters Should Be Brief and Simple

Hiring managers only glance at cover letters. They have 50+ resumes to read, out of which they will select a few candidates for interviews. Letters should be 3-4 paragraphs at most.

Cover Letter Content

State the position you are applying for, where you learnt of the position or company, why you are interested in the position, and what you believe qualifies you for consideration. Also include your phone number so that they can pick up the phone and call you for an interview straight away if they like what they see!

