Resume Writing

The Itasca Community College Writing Center is dedicated to advancing student writing and promoting a writing culture on the ICC campus. We offer individualized conferences to students at any stage in the writing process, from research and outline to final draft, as well as a resource library. We are located in the library and can be reached at 218.322.2454 or at writingcenter@itascacc.edu. For more information about resume writing see the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development at http://mn.gov/deed/job-seekers/job-guide/resumes-letters/resumes.jsp

General Resume Tips
There are many things you can do to add flair to your resume, but these are essential for every resume.

- Lead with the strongest statements related to the job or goal.
- Emphasize your skills.
- Keep it brief, no more than two pages
- Use 8.5 by 11 inch paper
- Correct all typographical, grammatical, and spelling errors
- Include your employment-related accomplishments
- Target your qualifications
- Clearly communicate your purpose and value to employers
- Use the best resume format to showcase your skills
- Make your resume relevant to the job
- Always include a cover letter when mailing your resume

Things to Avoid on Your Resume

Finely polished resumes avoid certain words, content, and design that can detract from the overall quality. These may seem like small, subtle suggestions, but they can have a tremendous effect on how your resume is perceived by a potential employer. Here are some common things to avoid:

- Using abbreviations. Exceptions include middle initial and directions, such as "N" for north.
- Using personal pronouns such as "I" to refer to yourself.
- Mentioning wage history.
- Using elaborate fonts, binders or exotic paper.
- Including a photograph. (Rare exceptions include modeling.)
- Making statements that you cannot prove.
- Including personal information such as age, heights, weight, family status.
- Highlighting religious or political affiliations, unless you're applying for a job with such an organization.
- Changing the tense of verbs or using the passive voice.
- Using the title "Resume" at the top.
- Including references on the resume. References should be included on a separate sheet.
- Including hobbies or social interests unless they contribute to your objective.
- Stapling or folding your resume.
- Using the same action word more than twice.

Resume Pre-Writing

4-Step Process

Regardless of where you're starting in writing a resume you should follow a simple four-step process to help you organize your information into a presentable document.

1) Take a look at some resume samples to see how they're formatted, the language job seekers use and how they describe skills, careers, interests and lives.

2) Establish clear objectives for your search. What kind of company do you want to work for? What size? In what field? The same industry you have been in or a different one? What sorts of jobs are you seeking? Answer those questions for yourself and then you can begin to tailor the section of the resume called "job objective."

3) Conduct a skills and jobs inventory. Put all your skills together on a sheet and match them as much as possible with your accomplishments as a leader or an employee. Future employers are only marginally interested in the fact you worked for Mega Corporation or DMZ Operations; they want to know what skills you displayed in your work and whether those skills saved money, improved efficiency, led to a more motivated workforce, or whatever. Ask and then answer these questions: What talents have I exercised in my previous positions? How are they relevant to the set of employers I am pursuing? Trunk, the job search author, encourages you to "list achievements, not job duties...anyone can do a job, but achievements show you did the job well." A case in point, she writes, is when a job seeker writes: "Managed two people and created a tracking system for marketing." Instead, she says, consider this: "Managed the team that built a tracking system to decrease marketing costs 10 percent." The second example obviously sounds more impressive and leads to a primary goal in resume writing: Always emphasize your achievements in your resume.

Having made an inventory of skills and jobs, you can move on to competencies. What are you good at and what evidence do you have of that? Thinking about competencies is less about listing what you have done and more about your ability to research, work on a team, lead, write, present material before audiences, learn new machinery in a plant environment, or raise a family. This is similar to listing your skills, but focuses instead on skills that have not necessarily been used in jobs. Competencies are exercised skills.

4) List all your jobs in a reverse chronological order, with dates of employment and various positions held within various companies. (List your most recent job first, and so forth.) If you have had a rich and varied job career you can list the last three or four jobs and skip your earlier career, or truncate it into single lines: "U.S. Bank, teller, 2000-2005."

Types of Resume Formats

The five common resume formats are chronological, functional, combination, targeted and keyword. Each format has distinct advantages and disadvantages. The choice of which one to use should be driven by several factors, all of which focus on presenting your skills in the best possible light for potential employers.

The good news is once you have written a decent resume it's easier to go back and customize it for a different employer.

You can cut and paste, add and subtract. And by having a relatively simple design, you'll be able to use the same resumes for e-mail attachments, online job seeking sites and snail-mailed submissions.

Following is a brief overview of the three approaches.

Chronological Resumes
The emphasis for this format is on a chronological listing of employment and work-related duties, responsibilities, experiences acquired while on the job for any specific employer.

The format highlights recent employment, while de-emphasizing jobs held years ago. The chronological resume is best for those with a consistent employment history, no gaps in employment and job experiences directly relate to their current goals.

A warning: This may not be the best format for individuals with job gaps, recent graduates or a person changing careers. Those job seekers need to emphasize skills more than work experience.

The chronological approach works well, however, if you have had a steady work record that can be effectively showcased using this format. After topping the resume with your name and contact information—more on that later in this section—you list the company, years you worked there (some job seekers use months: "June 2001-present") and a description of your work and accomplishments.
List back previous jobs until you fill a page. If you have had half a dozen jobs over 20 years list at most the last three or four positions and then offer earlier work experience with just the name of employer, your title during that time and dates of employment. For example, "Genetic Corporation, Accounts Payable Associate, 2006-2009."

Moreover, jobs from more than 10 years ago begin to lose impact. If you have valuable experience beyond 10 years, there are ways to present it other than chronologically. Read the following sections on functional and combination resume formats.

Functional Resumes

The functional resume highlights skills, experience and accomplishments more than specific dates, names and places. Information is organized by functions or skills that advertise specific qualifications needed for the occupation.

This format may work for first-time job seekers and those re-entering the workforce after a gap in employment. Functional resumes allow you to focus more on professional capabilities and much less on chronological achievements.

"The functional resume format is traditionally recommended for first-time job seekers as well as career changers with little or no specific focus," writes Burton Jay Nadler, author of "The Everything Resume Book" and director of the Career Center at the University of Rochester. "Skill summaries tend to be lengthy, presented with the hope that some broadly chosen phrases might stick in the minds of readers and encourage interviews."

Although the goal of this format is to de-emphasize chronological dates, you should still include some employment or volunteer history toward the end of the resume. Failure to include employment or volunteer history could cost you an interview. Including some employment history is better than including none at all.

Combination Resumes

The combination resume brings the best of both the chronological and functional resumes. It features a functional section that highlights skills and accomplishments, as well as a chronological listing of employment, education and employment-related experiences. The combination resume is a perhaps the most effective format for many job seekers because it marries your "qualifications" with a list of your past jobs, duties and accomplishments. You can more easily tailor a combination resume to the job you seek.

Targeted and Keyword Resumes

All resumes should target the needs of a specific occupation. This approach takes it a step further and targets the resume to the specific needs of a specific job. It requires careful research of the employer's needs.

Sources of information include company websites, position descriptions, employer profiles, industry publications, networking and informational interviews.

Targeted resumes are an absolute necessity for executive positions and specialized technical jobs.

When drafting a targeted resume, use keywords and even industry jargon in your resume. This will help you stand out in applicant tracking systems set up to identify the specific skills of applicants.

Applicant tracking systems are software programs an employer uses to identify individuals with certain traits and backgrounds that fit job openings. This allows companies to avoid having to look at hundreds of resumes, many from people poorly qualified for open positions.

If it's likely the target of your resume is using an applicant tracking system—and the larger the employer, the more likely that will be the case—you should develop a keyword resume. Critical occupational skills placed at the beginning add impact to the resume and help capture the reader's attention.

The drawbacks of a targeted resume? If a company doesn't have the targeted position available, you may be overlooked. After all, you're applying for a specific job. To avoid this problem use the cover letter to highlight your desire for a specific job yet your openness to being considered for other related openings. That indicates the kind of flexibility many employers seek.

Basic Resume Writing Rules

When writing resumes, there are a few basic rules to keep in mind and a few pitfalls to avoid.

Resumes are documents meant mainly to get you an interview with employers by recounting your career and skills in the most economical way possible.

The secret to a strong resume is striking a balance between giving enough information but not too much. It's knowing what to say—and how to say it effectively, using as many words as you need but no more.

Understanding and playing by a few common rules will help you avoid embarrassing mistakes and help you produce a winning resume.

Keep it Brief
One to two pages is just about right, unless you are a professor or a doctor.

Focus
Target your job search and your resume to your specific occupational goals.

Prepare Multiple Resumes
Write one well-written resume that targets your immediate job search but be prepared to change it. Or, have another version ready that addresses the needs of other prospective employers. At least two resumes are a necessity for many people, especially those planning to pursue a new occupation.

Provide a Visual Impact
A resume has 10 seconds to convince hiring managers and employers that you should be interviewed, so make it readable. Use white space and bullets. Use indentation.

Check Grammar and Spelling
Double and triple check for typographical, grammatical and spelling errors and ask for another set of eyes to proofread it.

Ensure Integrity
Accentuate the positive, skip the negative, be honest.

Target Your Resume
Target resumes to the level of employment, occupation or employer. Make changes to your baseline resume when you re pursuing a different occupation or you re going for a position less advanced than your former job. (This pertains in particular to workers applying for jobs that might pay less than they earned in the past.) Consider taking out information not pertinent to the job you're applying for and add in anything that illustrates the skills that the position requires.

Make It Scannable
Today, you can create a nice resume in Microsoft Word and most employers will be able to scan it. Some job sites, including MinnesotaWorks.net, require you send your resume as an RTF file. That's easy. Once you have created your resume in Word or Google docs, or whatever word processing program you're using, open it, go to the "save as" button and save it as an RTF file under a different name. Then open the new resume and remove any lines or computer gibberish that spoils the look of the document.

Use High Quality Paper
Don't go cheap. Use 24-pound or higher grade, 100 percent cotton fiber paper for a clear, sharp image. White, cream or gray works fine. Avoid colored paper or glossy, high shine finishes. Paper size should be the standard letter size, 8 1/2 x 11.

Make Clear Reproductions
When making copies for distribution, use a laser printer when possible. You can bring your own paper to copy shops, load it in and print while avoiding the extra charge for higher grade paper. Public libraries and WorkForce Centers often have printers available. Test a copy before making dozens of them, and collate correctly.

Get Access to a Computer
Having a computer and Internet connection at home is extremely beneficial to your job search. If a personal computer does not fit your budget, buy a USB drive, which costs as little as $10, and save your resume on it. Whenever you have access to a computer, you can

work on your resume by plugging the drive into a USB port. Otherwise, there are several places to get computer access for free.

Computers are available at Minnesota WorkForce Centers, schools, social organizations, community agencies, print shops, religious organizations, county human service offices, community action agencies and, of course, public libraries.

The Language of Resumes

Skills statements are a way to effectively communicate your experience and make yourself stand out from other applicants. One formula goes like this:

Strong Skills Statements = Action Words + Details + Outcome

Choose action verbs that demonstrate responsibility. For example, "managed," "coordinated" or "designed." Vary the action verbs that you choose. This helps make your abilities sound more diverse and adds depth to your resume.

When writing about results, take a look back at your recent career and find projects where you participated greatly in a successful delivery of products or services.

Tell employers not just about what you did at work, but how you made a positive impact on business operations, productivity on the plant floor or whatever.

Think creatively. Consider these examples of strong skills statements:

Instead of saying ...
- "Answered telephones."

You could say ...
- "Responded to an average of 200 service inquiry phone calls per day in a helpful and professional manner."

Instead of saying ...
- "Waited tables."

You could say ...
- "Managed and maintained eight tables, using interpersonal skills to ensure customer satisfaction through prompt, cordial service."

Instead of saying ...
- "Drove a truck."

You could say ...
- "Responsible for ensuring safe and efficient delivery of goods to more than 15 vendors while driving a highly sophisticated vehicle."

Writing Resumes

Resumes are fairly predictable in features and information, but some choices have to be made. They are not typically creative documents used to show off your innovative design skills or creative writing skills. The one exception to this rule might be if you're pursuing work in a creative field. Yet even then these resumes must remain cautiously creative.

Now we're going to deconstruct a typical resume, section by section, and even line by line. We'll start at the top, end at the bottom.

Font Selection

There are two types of fonts, serif and sans serif. Serif fonts have tails or feet and sans serif fonts do not.

Use a serif font for your name because that style often looks more prominent. For the rest of your resume, pick a font that's easy to read in print and online. Helvetica is an example of a recommended font.

Name Block

Put your full first name on its own line at the top of the page. Choose your favorite professional-looking font. For ideas, look on the previous page at the list of common, readable fonts that work well for resumes. Your name can be in a different font than the body of the resume. Type your name in bold or CAPITAL LETTERS to make it stand out, and make it larger point size than the body of the resume.

Your address should not contain abbreviations. Include the area code in your landline phone or cell phone number. It should be a number where you can be reached at all times.

<div align="center">

Elizabeth Applicant
1443 HireMe Lane
Employmentville, MN 55555
555-555-5555
Elizabeth.Applicant@fakemail.com

</div>

Objective

Include an objective when you are pursuing a specific job goal or when you know the exact title of the position you are applying for. The objective statement, sometimes called a "summary," helps target your resume while limiting its use to those jobs that match your goal. Generally, objectives should be on your resume unless you're applying for a job in your current field and your qualifications are obvious. (You are a nurse, and you're applying for a nursing position, for instance.)

If you choose not to have an objective on your resume page, state one in your cover letter.

If you're applying for a specific job, use the title in your objective and even add the name of the company as in the following example: "Objective: Landscape Design Specialist at Creative Environments Inc."

Here are a few examples of objective statements that clearly indicate precisely what kind of position the job seeker wants.

- Transportation service representative
- Pharmaceutical sales representative
- Office manager
- Senior admissions and enrollment officer

Objective and Summary Statements
A summary statement is a longer version of the objective statement. This option can be used instead of an objective statement. An effective summary statement should sum up your work experience, achievements and skills suited to the position for which you are applying.

The summary should be two to four lines or a series of phrases that may be used in place of the employment objective, or just following it. Here are two examples. One is an objective summary, the other a combination where job hunters boldface the titles of jobs they seek.

Objective: Landscape Architect
Summary: Innovative Landscape Architect with extensive knowledge in construction, engineering and design. Recognized for creatively solving design and sustainability challenges with a positive, customer-focused attitude.

Combination Objective and Summary
Reliable, caring Certified Nursing Assistant with over two years experience caring for elderly and vulnerable adults. Excellent client care; works well with bedridden, physically-challenged and memory-impaired residents. Friendly and compassionate, with excellent interpersonal communication skills. Flexible: available days, evenings, weekends and holidays. Maintains confidential information.

"Qualifications" or "Achievements" Section
Many job seekers using the functional, combination and targeted resumes will feature a section called "skills" or "qualifications." The word "qualifications" does have a certain resonance that skills lacks, especially if you are applying for a particular job or in a particular field.

Qualifications don't necessarily have to be all career-related. Your work as a volunteer can be used if it fits into the description of the job you seek. This section should be composed of bullet points no longer than a line or two and no more than four or five in total.

There are two ways to write the qualifications section. One is to call the section "Qualifications" and give a general overview of your skills and career. You might mention you are an experienced presenter, the number of years you have had in a field, your ability to work with others, and any positions you had in which you demonstrated leadership.

A more focused qualifications section might have headlines such as Accounting Qualifications, Consulting Qualifications, Teaching Qualifications. Under these headings, you would directly relate your work within that profession, with perhaps a nod to a general skill or two.

In the qualifications section, use bullet points—no more than five—and keep the entries to a line or two, at most.

Using an "Achievements" section is a relatively new idea in resume writing. It probably works better for people in fields like sales, where "achievements" can be more readily quantified. The section can stand on its own or can be added to the "Qualifications" section as in "Qualifications and Achievements."

So what goes here? Your ability to grow sales. Your ability to manage people and budgets. Your ability to handle a variety of assignments in your profession. Your experience with software or machines.

Mark Zappa, who works in the Minnesota WorkForce Center in North St. Paul, Minn., calls these "impact statements." They can be located within each job description after you have described your responsibilities. "It can be a summary of your legacy, your best project, your innovations, your work ethic, a huge problem you solved—just about any strength you were known for," he writes in Career Connection, a publication of the West Metro WorkForce Centers in the Minneapolis region.

It can be an actual testimonial from a supervisor, which he suggests is a nice break from the usual standard resume information. Most jobs can be described to reflect how your talents made for a sparkling performance. In a "non-team" department where everybody took care of themselves, Zappa suggests the impact statement might read: "Identified learning resources and developed productive partnerships within a closed, individual-driven department."

Employment History
List your most recent employment first. A general standard is to list the last three to four jobs or those you have had over the past 10 years, whichever comes first. Focus on recent

jobs and your achievements in those positions. Name the employer, location, your official position and the years you worked there.

A constant question is how much information to give about your past jobs. Generally, focus on what you did and your accomplishments during your time in various positions.

Use action words to help make give your employment history more impact. Words such as "maintained, led, worked, performed, developed, directed, established, functioned, monitored and trained" are all examples of action words.

Use bullet points and make your sentences one line. Sentence fragments like "specialized in training new recruits" work fine. Again, list no more than four to six bullet points in describing your last job and then reduce them to two to three points for subsequent positions.

Although contact information is typically given on an application or reference sheet, many resumes still list the employer name, city and state. Other job seekers might limit this information to keep the resume focused on qualifications. The choice is yours. There is no single standard that fits all situations.

Education
If more of your skills and experience come from employment, list employment first and education last. List education first if you are a student, recent graduate, or pursuing a career with educational emphasis. Include the name of the institution, location (city and state), graduation date or projected graduation date, degree(s) earned, field of study and GPA (if over 3.0).

If you haven't been to school in years, you can list education after your professional experience and skip the year you graduated. The reason? You avoid potential and sometimes unconscious age discrimination. Under the education section, you also can have relevant training or certifications that might impress employers or relate specifically to the position you're applying for.

For job seekers who did not graduate from undergraduate or graduate programs a simple disclosure is best: "Attended the University of Minnesota, 1990-1993, Institute of Technology." It shows you have ambition even though you didn't graduate. There may be any number of good reasons why you didn't graduate, so be sure to answer truthfully if an employer asks why a diploma is missing from your wall.

If you never made it to college or finished high school you can list yourself as a high school graduate as long as you have a GED. List the name of the school where you received the GED, or the school district. Do not include an education section if you did not finish high school and had no formal training either in school or from an employer.

Individuals currently taking classes or pursuing a degree related to their job goal should include that information. List the skills acquired, academic accomplishments and the projected date of completion.

Memberships
List organizational memberships related to your job goal. Avoid using non-employment related or controversial organizations. Stay away from mentioning specific religious or political affiliations or other potentially controversial groups unless they directly relate to the job you want.

Military Experience
Include military experience on your resume as part of your work history. If you are targeting a job within the defense industry, feel free to use military jargon. The defense industry likes candidates who understand the lingo. If you are targeting a job outside of the defense arena, you will need to 'civilianize" your military language to show that your skills and experience match the employer's needs.

Volunteer Experience
Highlighting volunteer experience can fill in any gaps in employment on a resume. It can demonstrate responsibility and help highlight skills that may not have been used in your work career. Served as an officer of the PTA? Or a coach at your children's school? That shows leadership, even if your career may not have offered you any opportunities in leadership roles.

Hobbies and Personal Interests
Include hobbies and personal interests if they're employment-related, not controversial, and show skills and experience.

References
Do not include your references or the phrase "references available on request" on the actual resume. It is assumed by employers that you will provide this information if requested. Once an employer asks for your references, provide the names of three to five people who can speak favorably about your attributes as an employee and a human being.

Awards and Recognition
Let the employer know of any internal and external awards or recognition you have received (employee of the month, industry awards, and so forth). Those are accomplishments worthy of mention.

Resume Strategies

Once it's done, a resume is like any other product. If it sits on a shelf, no one will buy it. Promote yourself by putting your resume into circulation. Make sure it gets into the hands of:

- Employers with advertised job openings
- Employment agencies
- Vocational and college placement offices
- Personal and professional networking contacts
- Your personal references
- Executive recruiters
- Employment counselors and instructors
- General and niche-based job boards.

Finally, follow-up, follow-up, follow-up. It's no use mailing resumes if you don't take the time to try to speak to companies directly. The true test of an effective resume is that you're offered interviews. If you aren't getting responses or interviews from your resume, you may want to re-evaluate it.