Resume Writing Guide & Best Practices

Format and Sections:

1. In the majority of cases, a chronological or combination/hybrid (chronological and functional aspects) format should be used. Functional resumes are recommended when: 1) an individual is changing careers and they need to focus on strengths rather than their work history, 2) an individual has been in the same type of job their entire career (i.e. administrative assistant), or 3) an individual is a recently graduated student with no work experience; in this case, a functional resume will focus on the classes they’ve taken and what they have learned.
2. Two page resumes are fine, but do not go above three pages unless it is an Executive-level order; a good rule of thumb is 1 page per every 10 years of experience. While many try to condense 20+ years of experience into 1 page, you’ll need to use 2 pages to avoid cutting out important information. An entry-level resume should only be one page.
3. If it looks like the resume will be 2+ pages, you may need to add addendums for publications, speaking engagements, etc.
4. Color in the template is fine for certain industries, but if you are applying for a more traditional job, stick with black and white.
5. Fonts are, for the most part, pre-selected for you in Resume Editor. Do not use fonts that are difficult to read.
6. Font size should never be below 10pt.
7. Do not include your interests unless they are directly related to the job your customer is applying to. Other interests are fine to mention in a LinkedIn profile but not on a resume.
8. Volunteer work (in addition to current employment or between jobs) shows employers you are willing to learn new experiences, are involved in your community, or take initiative. Just because you are not paid to do it doesn’t mean it is not relevant. There are 2 ways to include volunteer work: 1) blended into the “Professional Experience” or “Relevant Experience,” or as a separate section altogether. Entry-level resumes can include volunteer work if there little to no employment to list.
9. Do not write “References available upon request.” This is a given and only wastes space. Do not include references on the resume.

Contact Information

1. Email address: Make sure your email address is professional; if a customer has an unprofessional sounding email address, ask if they have an alternate email address (if they don’t, you can gently recommend that they get a professional address). Do not use your current work email address, and certainly do not use something that might paint you in a negative way (ie. footballmaniac69@yahoo.com or the like).
2. Make sure your phone number is formatted in an easily readable manner, ie. (123) 456-7890 or 123-456-7890, not 1234567890. Make sure you do not repeat the same number for Home and Cell; if in doubt, use only Cell bubble in Resume Editor.
3. Many clients are hesitant to put their home address. In this day and age, a full address is not required, but at least include a city and state.
4. In a standard resume, personal details such as date of birth, marital status, children, and nationality are not included. Exceptions include international resumes; take a minute to look up the resume requirements for your clients’ country. Please NEVER include your clients’ social security number.
5. Do include relevant credentials after your name ONLY if they are professional designations. For instance, RN, BC-RN, or RN, BSN for nurses, PMP for Project Management Professionals, MD for doctors, LSW for Licensed Social Workers, etc. For the most part, the only academic designation that should be put after a name is PhD/Ph.D. MBA is not a professional designation and should NOT be put after a name.

Summary

1. The standalone objective statement is no longer recommended. The reader knows what your objective is: to get a job with their company! Instead, a summary statement should start out your document. Think of this as a 30-second elevator pitch you are making to the potential employer. The objective is useful for an entry-level position, if you are changing careers, or if you are looking to for a higher position (management, supervisor, director, etc.).
2. This section should be 4-6 lines and should address an overview of your experience, two or three major skill sets, and some valuable personality traits/soft skills.
3. If you want to include how many years of experience a client has in the summary section, make sure you write “years of experience” or “years’ experience.” Not “years experience.”
4. Do not use third-person writing anywhere on your resume (ie. “lead high-performing teams” vs. “leads high performing teams”). Think of this as a first person statement with the pronouns removed.
5. It is okay to use sentence fragments in the summary section.

Areas of Expertise

1. This section is a good opportunity to pack your resume with key words and phrases for your target industry. A table format is generally the best approach.
2. Use short phrases without periods at the end.
3. Keep this section relevant. If you are a good chef, that’s nice, but the hiring manager doesn’t care unless you are applying for a restaurant position.
4. This section should have at least 3-4 items per column in the table but no more than 7-8.

Experience Section

1. Start with your current or most recent position and go backwards chronologically from there.
2. Typically, you will not list employment more than 15-20 years ago. Exceptions are if you’ve been with the same company for your whole career or if there is something highly relevant from your past positions that you want to stand out.
3. With the exception of federal or military resumes, do not include hours per week, salary, or name and contact of supervisor.
4. Include the location of each position.
5. Always list dates of employment. You can include month/year or just year, but be consistent throughout.
6. Highlight positions of increasing responsibility within an organization.
7. Make sure to use present tense if you are currently in a position and past tense if you have left a position.
8. Do not use paragraphs; rather, list your experience in bullet points.
9. Each position should contain a mix of duties/responsibilities and specific achievements, contributions, and accomplishments. Remember, a resume needs to highlight what you did, how you did it, and the task objective and/or results.
10. Only use abbreviations if they are very commonly known. If you want to use abbreviations, list out the full name the first time followed by the abbreviation then use only the abbreviation subsequently.
11. You do not want your experience to read like a job description. Include specifics on projects, process improvements, leadership, management, etc. If necessary, you can create an Accomplishments/Career Highlights section and place it before the Experience Section.
12. Include quantifiable metrics whenever possible.
13. Aim for 5-8 bullet points per position. You can make a separate accomplishments section for each of these if it helps the section read better.
14. Try to not use the same words over and over. Break out your thesaurus!
15. Start each bullet with a strong action word. Do not use “responsible for” or “accountable for.”
16. Do use periods at the end of the bullets.

Education Section

1. Start with the most recent entry and go backwards from there.
2. It is okay to not include the date of graduation if it is quite a few years ago or if putting the date would cause a gap on the resume.
3. If you are in progress with a degree or class, write “in progress” or “anticipated graduation 20XX).
4. Do not include your GPA unless you are a recent graduate. Feel free to list summa cum laude, magna cum laude, etc.
5. DO include relevant internships, campus organizations, and/or coursework, especially if the education is in progress or very recent.
6. Certifications and licenses can go under the education section, or they can be listed in their own section.
7. If you completed coursework towards a degree at ABC University but graduated from XYZ University, just list the degree with XYZ University and the date of graduation (if the date is recent).
8. Include relevant ongoing professional development courses, trainings, and seminars.
9. Do not include high school/GED unless this is your only education. If you went to college, it is assumed you completed your HS diploma.
10. If you took coursework but did not obtain a degree, list “Coursework in XX, Name of School.”

Professional Memberships and Affiliations:

1. These are great to list if they are relevant to your industry, especially if you held a board position.
2. You should not list affiliations to which you no longer belong unless you held a leadership position.

General:

1. Do not include anything that could be viewed as political, religious, or controversial.
2. Do not include why you left prior positions. If they want to know, they will ask. One exception is previous contract work, which can look like job hopping if not explained.
3. Double and triple check to make sure that your grammar and spelling are correct. Do not rely on spellcheck! It is a helpful tool but will not catch homonyms (here/hear, they’re/their/there, etc.) or words that are spelled correctly but used incorrectly (trial/trail, coma/comma, etc.).
4. Write out numbers below 10; exception: when there is a mix of numbers below and above 10, then you can just use numerals.
5. If you are writing a resume/cover letter for a non-US client, make sure to follow their writing and grammar rules. If you are creating content in MS Word beforehand and copy/pasting to Resume Editor, adjust your Language settings under Tools to the appropriate version of English (UK, CAN, AUS, US).
6. Download document into a PDF and read for widows and orphans: Documents don’t appear in Expert in the same way they do in a PDF. The customer receives a PDF with a delivery email, so the PDF must be clean and free of odd line and sentence breaks.
7. Edit in Resume Expert to eliminate for widows and orphans. If you’ve made more changes to document in Resume Expert download and review PDF again. Repeat until document is clean. It should be ready to deliver to client BEFORE you submit to Staff Editor.