

Résumé Dos & Don'ts

Adapted from dailywritingtips.com

Dos

Know your purpose: Some people write a résumé as if the purpose of the document was to land a job. As a result they end up with a really long and boring piece that makes them look like desperate job hunters. The objective of your résumé is to land an interview, and the interview will land you the job (hopefully!).

Back up your qualities and strengths: Instead of creating a long (and boring) list with all your qualities (e.g., disciplined, creative, problem solver) try to connect them with real life and work experiences. In other words, you need to back these qualities and strengths up, else it will appear that you are just trying to inflate things.

Make sure to use the right keywords: Most companies (even smaller ones) are already using digital databases to search for candidates. This means that the HR department will run search queries based on specific keywords. Guess what, if your résumé doesn't have the keywords related to the job you are applying for, you will be out even before the game starts. These keywords will usually be nouns. Check the job description and related job ads for a clue on what the employer might be looking for.

Use effective titles: Like it or not, employers will usually make a judgment about your résumé in 5 seconds. Under this time frame the most important aspect will be the titles that you listed on the résumé, so make sure they grab the attention. Try to be as descriptive as possible, giving the employer a good idea about the nature of your past work experiences. For example: Bad title: Accounting Good title: Management of A/R and A/P and Recordkeeping

Proofread it twice: It would be difficult to emphasize the importance of proofreading your résumé. One small typo and your chances of getting hired could slip. Proofreading it once is not enough, so do it twice, three times or as many as necessary.

Use bullet points: No employer will have the time (or patience) to read long paragraphs of text. Make sure, therefore, to use bullet points and short sentences to describe your experiences, educational background and professional objectives.

State your goals: Including professional goals can help you by giving employers an idea of where you are going, and how you want to arrive there. You don't need to have a special section devoted to your professional objectives, but overall the résumé must communicate it. The question of whether or not to highlight your career objectives on the résumé is a polemic one among HR managers, so go with your feeling. If you decide to list them, make sure they are not generic.

Put the most important information first: This point is valid both to the overall order of your résumé, as well as to the individual sections. Most of the times your previous work experience will be the most important part of the résumé, so put it at the top. When describing your experiences or skills, list the most important ones first.

Pay attention to the typography: First of all make sure that your fonts are big enough. The smaller you should go is 11 points, but 12 is probably safer. Do not use capital letters all over the place, remember that your goal is to communicate a message as fast and as clearly as possible. Arial and Times are good choices.

Explain the benefits of your skills: Merely stating that you can do something will not catch the attention of the employer. If you manage to explain how it will benefit his company, and to connect it to tangible results, then you will greatly improve your chances.

State achievements instead of responsibilities: Résumés that include a long list of "responsibilities included..." are plain boring, and not efficient in selling yourself. Instead of listing responsibilities, therefore, describe your professional achievements.

Use numbers: This tip is a complement to the 13th one. If you are going to describe your past professional achievements, it would be a good idea to make them as solid as possible. Numbers are your friends here. Don't merely mention that you increased the annual revenues of your division, say that you increased them by \$100,000, by 78%, and so on.

Identify the problems of the employer: A good starting point to tailor your résumé for a specific employer is to identify what possible problems he might have at hand. Try to understand the market of the company you are applying for a job, and identify what kind of difficulties they might be going through. After that illustrate on your résumé how you and your skills would help to solve those problems.

Go with what you got: If you never had any real working experience, just include your summer jobs or volunteer work. If you don't have a degree yet, mention the title and the estimated date for completion. As long as those points are relevant to the job in question, it does not matter if they are official or not.

Sell your fish: Remember that you are trying to sell yourself. As long as you don't go over the edge, all the marketing efforts that you can put in your résumé (in its content, design, delivery method and so on) will give you an advantage over the other candidates.

Use Mr. and Ms. if appropriate: If you have a gender neutral name like Alex or Ryan make sure to include the Mr. or Ms. prefix, so that employers will not get confused about your gender.

Keep the salary in mind: The image you will create with your résumé must match the salary and responsibility level that you are aiming for.

Analyze job ads: You will find plenty of useful information on job ads. Analyze not only the ad that you will be applying for, but also those from companies on the same segment or offering related positions. You should be able to identify what profile they are looking for and how the information should be presented.

Get someone else to review your résumé: Even if you think your résumé is looking kinky, it would be a good idea to get a second and third opinion about it. We usually become blind to our own mistakes or way of reasoning, so another person will be in a good position to evaluate the overall quality of your résumé and make appropriate suggestions.

Use action verbs: A very common piece of advice to job seekers is to use action verbs. But what are they? Action verbs are basically verbs that will get noticed more easily, and that will clearly communicate what your experience or achievement were. Examples include managed, coached, enforced and planned. Remember, when referring to a current job, use the present tense and use past tense for previous jobs.

Use a good printer: If you are going to use a paper version of your résumé, make sure to use a decent printer. Laser printers usually get the job done. 8 1/2 X 11-inch paper — in white, buff or beige, is appropriate. Also, be sure to use a good quality paper.

Update your résumé regularly: It is a good idea to update your résumé on a regular basis. Add all the new information that you think is relevant, as well as courses, training programs and other academic qualifications that you might receive along the way. This is the best way to keep track of everything and to make sure that you will not end up sending an obsolete document to the employer.

Mention who you worked with: If you have reported or worked with someone that is well known in your industry, it could be a good idea to mention it on the résumé. The same thing applies to presidents and CEOs. If you reported to or worked directly with highly ranked executives, add it to the résumé.

List all your positions: If you have worked a long time for the same company (over 10 years) it could be a good idea to list all the different positions and roles that you had during this time separately. You probably had different responsibilities and developed different skills on each role, so the employer will like to know it.

Make the design flow with white space: Do not jam your résumé with text. Sure we said that you should make your résumé as short and concise as possible, but that refers to the overall amount of information and not to how much text you can pack in a single sheet of paper. White space between the words, lines and paragraphs can improve the legibility of your résumé.

Create an email proof formatting: It is very likely that you will end up sending your résumé via email to most companies. Apart from having a Word document ready to go as an attachment, you should also have a text version of your résumé that does not look disfigured in the body of the email or in online forms. Attachments might get blocked by spam filters, and many people just prefer having the résumé on the body of the email itself.

Remove your older work experiences: If you have been working for 20 years or more, there is no need to have 2 pages of your résumé listing all your work experiences, starting with the job at the local coffee shop at the age of 17! Most experts agree that the last 15 years of your career are enough.

Don'ts

Do not include “no kidding” information: There are many people that like to include statements like “Available for interview” or “References available upon request.” If you are sending a résumé to a company, it should be a given that you are available for an interview and that you will provide references if requested. Just avoid items that will make the employer think “no kidding!”

Don't include references: A potential employer is interested in references only if he or she is seriously considering hiring you. At that time, you may be asked to provide reference information.

Don't be negative: Do not include information that might sound negative in the eyes of the employer. This is valid both to your résumé and to interviews. You don't need to include, for instance, things that you hated about your last company.

Don't include pictures: Sure, we know that you are good looking, but unless you are applying for a job where the physical traits are very important (e.g., modeling, acting and so on), and unless the employer specifically requested it, you should avoid attaching your picture to the résumé.

Don't use the same résumé for multiple employers: One of the most common mistakes that people make is to create a standard résumé and send it to all the job openings that they can find. Sure it will save you time, but it will also greatly decrease the chances of landing an interview (so in reality it could even represent a waste of time). Tailor your résumé for each employer. The same point applies to your cover letters.

Don't include your age: It is illegal to discriminate people because of their age, but some employers do these considerations nonetheless. Why risk the trouble? Unless specifically requested, do not include your age on your résumé. Also, don't mention sexual harassment issues, lawsuits, workers' compensation claims, or say, “they fired me for no good reason.”

Don't list all your work experiences: If you have job experiences that you are not proud of, or that are not relevant to the current opportunity, you should just omit them. Mentioning that you used to sell hamburgers when you were 17 is probably not going to help you land that executive position.

Don't include irrelevant information: Irrelevant information such as political affiliation, religion and sexual preference will not help you. In fact it might even hurt your chances of landing an interview. Just skip it.

Don't lie: Seems like a no brainer, but you would be amused to discover the amount of people that lie in their résumés. Even small lies should be avoided. Apart from being wrong, most HR departments do background checks these days, and if you are busted it might ruin your credibility for good.

Don't submit more than one or two pages: The ideal length for a résumé is a polemic subject. Most employers and recruiting specialists, however, say that it should contain one or two pages at maximum. Just keep in mind that, provided all the necessary information is there, the shorter your résumé, the better.

Don't include hobbies: Unless you are 100% sure that some of your hobbies will support your candidacy, avoid mentioning them. I know you are proud of your swimming team, but share it with your friends and not with potential employers.

Don't include scattered information: Your résumé must have a clear focus. It would cause a negative impression if you mentioned that one year you were studying drama, and the next you were working as an accountant. Make sure that all the information you will include will work towards a unified image. Employers like decided people.

Don't use jargon or slang: It should be common sense, but believe me, it is not. Slang should never be present in a résumé. As for technical jargon, do not assume that the employer will know what you are talking about. Even if you are sending your résumé to a company in the same segment, the person who will read it for the first time might not have any technical expertise.

Don't rely on sample résumé templates: There are many websites that offer free résumé templates. While they can help you to get an idea of what you are looking for, do not just copy and paste one of the most used ones. You certainly don't want to look just like any other candidate, do you?

Don't use fancy design details: Do not use a colored background, fancy fonts or images on your résumé. Sure, you might think that the little flowers will cheer up the document, but other people might just throw it away at the sight.

Don't use pronouns: Your résumé should not contain the pronouns “I” or “me.” That is how we normally structure sentences, but since your résumé is a document about your person, using these pronouns is actually redundant.

Don't forget the basics: The first thing on your résumé should be your name. It should be bold and with a larger font than the rest of the text. Make sure that your contact details are clearly listed. Secondly, both the name and contact details should be included on all the pages of the résumé (if you have more than one).