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## Writing@CSU Writing Guide

### Resumés

Writing a resumé is more than just listing a set of credentials or special talents in reverse chronological order. It is very much like planning to write a persuasive essay. These documents begin with a rhetorical context. Every resumé has a target audience (the employer(s) who will use it to evaluate you as a job candidate) and a purpose (to convince an employer that you are worth interviewing for a specific job).

Before trying to organize this information into a logical format, it is useful to consider the purpose for writing the document in the first place. Depending on your purpose, the content and organization of the document may change. After determining the purpose, the second consideration is its audience. This too can effect the content and organization of the document.

### Purpose for Resumé Writing

Determining the writer's goal in a resumé seems relatively simply on the surface: to get a job. However, like any writing project, it is often more complicated than that. Many resumé writers begin with an advertisement for a job, fellowship or other employment opportunity. This advertisement may address the resumé writer's specific background and qualifications and it may not, depending on the field, the position, and the culture of the company or institution.

Sometimes, however, a resumé is required for other purposes. A teacher, for example, may need to include a resumé in her licensing portfolio. A student

applying to graduate school may need a Curriculum Vitae (a specialized resumé style used only in academia) for his application materials. Even scholarship applications sometimes require a resumé. A writer should consider other issues as well: what salary considerations are important; why does this particular job offer sound promising?; why work for this particular company or organization?

Why is purpose so important? Because it will determine how the resumé is written. A teacher that needs a resumé for her licensing portfolio, for example, will probably write a more comprehensive, general document focusing on education and teaching experience. A student applying for graduate school would probably avoid including every single part-time fast-food job he had as an undergraduate and instead focusing on the parts of his history that are important to a graduate entrance committee. In this case, the student may choose to write a Curriculum Vitae instead of a resumé, because it is the form the entrance committee knows best.

Purpose can also dictate the structure of a resumé. Depending on what qualifications an employer finds important, the career field the job falls into, and the applicants history the structure of the resumé will change.

## **Resumé Audiences**

The audience or audiences for the resumé mostly likely include the employer, but this is not quite specific enough for most resumé projects. It can only help the document if the writer does a little homework: Who is most likely to read the resumé? A store manager, a human resources executive, a head hunter, a hiring committee? Is the document likely to go through a hierarchy of readers, say from a floor manager to a general manager to a company owner? Perhaps from a hiring committee to a committee head?

Many experts warn that employers give each resumé about 15 seconds to determine if an applicant is right for a job. As much as possible, a resumé writer should try to tailor her document to each specific position, rather than writing one

general document that is sent to several different employers. This is important because different positions may require that the resumé writer highlight different skills and abilities.

### **Read Between the Lines**

For example a job advertisement for a manager at software store may state that a candidate must have a college degree and customer service experience. An applicant with a degree in business management may not be as qualified as say, someone with a degree in Anthropology, depending work history, experience, and special talents. Let's say both candidates have relatively equal amounts of customer service experience. The applicant with a business degree may not have much experience with computers or software. The applicant with the anthropology degree may have made computers her hobby. A retail management job probably also requires good organizational skills, a thorough understanding of the products sold, and leadership abilities.

In this instance, the Business major may highlight his or her management experience and training while simply omitting or downplaying her lack of experience with software. On the other hand, the Anthropology major may highlight his knowledge of computers and software while downplaying his lack of business training.

Read between the lines with considering job advertisements to determine what skills are most important to an individual employer, then spend time tailoring your resumé to match those skills. Use this information to determine the vocabulary used in the document, which skills to highlight in the document, and how to structure the document.

### **Tips for Researching Resumé Audiences**

- Do an Internet search to find out information on the company culture. Company rules, such as dress codes, openness to flex-time, benefits and other information can indicate whether the resumé should be highly traditional or if the document can be creative.

- Read the company's press releases, reviews of their products or services, and any other topical information to determine how the company officially presents itself.
- Talk to current or former employees.
- Talk to a counselor at a campus job center. Often counselors are familiar with company representatives who may have visited campus. Ask for the counselor's impressions and find out what worked for other applicants, if possible.
- Rely on knowledge of the field. Applicants interested in specific fields, such as business management, engineering, or social work should rely on what they know about the field already to determine the document's vocabulary, style and organization.

## Audience Appeal

The resumé is a kind of advertisement for an applicant's future abilities based on past experience. Advertising writers spend thousands of hours and dollars determining how best to present their information to a specific audience in order to sell a product. The desired outcome of any advertisement is to get the viewer /reader to go out and take a risk by spending money on something. The desired outcome of a resumé is to convince an employer to take a risk and grant an interview. Don't forget, employers often have many more applicants than positions available. Those who make their own document stand out by determining why it needs to be written and tailoring it to the needs and priorities of the people reading it are more likely to receive an interview.

Also like an advertisement, a resumé offers the writer a finite amount of space to accomplish its goal. Most resúmes are no longer than a page to a page and half. In such a small space, language and form are amplified, making them the two most important tools for appealing to its audience.

It pays to spend time considering the layout and design of the resumé as well, to insure its readability.

## Purpose and Audience Checklist

- If you are using an advertisement for a specific position, read between the lines to determine which skills to highlight.
- If you are writing a resumé for another purpose (graduate school, portfolios, fellowship applications, scholarship applications) also read between the lines on the application instructions. Use this information to determine which skills are most important to the document's audience.
- Do some homework! To the best of your ability, try to determine who will be reading your resumé and the hierarchy of readers that it might go through.
- Remember that your resumé is like an advertisement for your future abilities based on passed experience - how can you "sell" yourself to your audience while still being honest about your experience and education?

## Organizing Your Resumé

There is no "correct" way to organize your resumé, so be sure to choose the style that will most effectively highlight your skills and abilities. Don't forget, this is *your* advertisement!

### Chronological Resumé

The Chronological Resumé lists employment history in reverse chronological order - beginning with the most recent and ending with the first relevant position you may have held. This form is generally the easiest to write because the structure is dictated by your own history, emphasizing dates, times and specific locations. Many interviewers are most familiar with this type of resumé, which allows them a guideline for discussing work experience. However, it tends to emphasize the most recent employment and de-emphasize earlier experience. It also emphasizes any gaps in work history, which can be a disadvantage. This style is best suited to people who have work experience closely related to their desired job and do not have large gaps in their work history.

### Functional Resumé

This type of resumé highlights skills and abilities with little emphasis on a dateline. This form can often downplay employment history not relevant to a specific position

and allows the writer to highlight professional development, specific skills and more marketable abilities. The downside to this format is that many employers may want to see more detailed work histories from applicants.

### **Combinational Resumé**

This form combines features from the chronological and functional formats. It is similar to a functional resumé in format, but lists specific employment dates and positions as well. This form can draw attention away from gaps in employment while at the same time allowing the writer to emphasize specialized skills and experience. The downside to this type of resumé is that it takes longer to read.

### **Skills Resumé**

The Skills Resumé is useful for people who have varied experience or background and want to organize that information into a coherent whole, or for someone who is changing careers. It emphasizes abilities over work experience. Skills can be established through various means - courses, volunteer work, personal experiences (such as skills learned through participation in a specific hobby), travel, etc. The resumé writer should do his or her best to match skills to the specific position or company.

### **Creative Resumé**

The Creative Resumé is used in fields that require creative ability - writing, graphic design, landscape architecture, advertising, etc. It's important to know whether or not a specific company prefers creative or more traditional resumé formats, so make sure to research the company thoroughly before submitting a creative resumé. Often, this resumé style uses color graphics and puts emphasis on layout and design, thus doing double-duty as both a resumé and sample of the applicant's creative work. The creative resumé includes much of the same information included in traditional resumé formats.

### **Electronic Resumé**

Many job applicants use internet job search engines or sources such as Monsterboard or Jobs.com. These services, and many employers, accept

electronic resumés which are kept as part of an internet database which employers can search. Sometimes employers accept resumés via e-mail as well. All of these sources call for special consideration when organizing a resumé. There are many considerations with electronic resumés.

### [Advanced Resumé Concepts: Electronic Resumés](#)

## Drafting Your Resumé

Once you have identified your audience and chosen an organizational style, it is time to start putting your information into the resumé. The following are some tips for constructing your resumé.

### What to Include

**Objective Statement:** While you see objective statements on many sample resumés, they are not required. Objective statements should be clear, precise and succinct. They should make use of specific job titles and specific phrases describing the applicants preferred working environment.

**Profile:** Many people replace the objective statement with a profile or qualification highlights section that highlights the "soft skills" that do not always make it into resumé databases. The profile is a sort of summary of the resumé itself, highlighting the applicant's most impressive skills, abilities and accomplishments.

**Education:** Name and location of institution, dates of attendance, type of degree, area of study, and special awards. You may include GPA information if important to the specific position.

**Work Experience:** Name and location of company, dates of employment, major accomplishments on the job, major responsibilities, name and contact information of direct supervisor, skills acquired. Include paid and volunteer positions (if necessary).

**Additional Training or Workshops:** if you've attended specialized training courses, seminars or workshops, be sure to list these as well (depending upon

relevancy).

**Skills:** Things you can actually do (as opposed to generalized skills - better to let an employer know you have leadership skills from reading your work or training history rather than telling them you have "leadership skills"). For example, software you may know well, systems you may understand, etc.

### What not to Include

**References:** There's no need to list references on the resumé, as the goal is to get an interview and most employers will not check references until after you've been interviewed. Instead, take a list of references to the interview itself. Personal Information: Marital status, gender, religion, lists of hobbies, etc.

### Tips for Appealing Language

- Know the jargon. Every occupational field has its own set of words, phrases and even verbs to describe what its work. Understanding and using this language shows a familiarity with the field.
- Use keywords - short phrases, nouns and adjectives that describe abilities, experience and education that can be used to find your resumé in a database. Find out which keywords are specific for the industry in which you want to work by using The Dictionary of Occupational Titles or the Occupational Outlook Handbook (available in a library or online at <http://stats.bls.gov/oco/oco1002.htm>.) to research standard occupational descriptions. Other sources for keywords include job advertisements, recruiters, and job counselors.
- Focus on "hard skills." Descriptors like "strong communicator" and "team-oriented" are considered "soft skills" by human resources professionals. They are often not included in resumé database keyword searches. Focus instead on specific abilities or knowledge.
- Point of View. Resumés generally avoid using the first person "I." The most traditional way to accomplish this is to start sentences with verbs. Instead of "I managed, organized and planned . . ." use "Managed, organized and planned . . ."
- Avoid generalities. Use nouns and verbs that are as specific as possible, cite specifics when listing accomplishments. "Reorganized sales floor resulting in fifty-percent increase in store revenues over two years," is more effective than, "Reorganized sales floor resulting in increased sales."



## Tips for Appealing Designs

- Make sure your name is legible and set above the rest of the text.
- The address should be set apart from the text but not detract from the other information on the page. Place the address either at the top or bottom of the page.
- In order to make the resumé easier to read, keep lines of text under seven inches in length. Limit paragraphs to under seven lines.
- Be consistent with section headings, punctuation and use of italics. There is no "right" style for this, but once you choose a style, stick with it.
- Choose fonts carefully and avoid flashy or wild fonts, even in headers or footers. If you think your resumé will be scanned, use an easily readable font like Times New Roman or Arial.

## Editing Your Resumé

### Editing Checklist

- Proofread, proofread, and proofread!
- Be consistent with the document's organization - capitalizing, italicizing, bulleting, etc.
- Make sure your margins are even.
- Make sure to use the correct verb tense when discussing past activities.
- Make sure the document is easy to read, fast.
- Use specific language - concrete nouns and "action" verbs, avoid passive voice!
- Be careful about the length, one page is usually sufficient.

One of the best things a resumé writer can do before sending his or her work to an employer is to ask someone else to take a look at the document. If you are a student, many universities have job placement services that include resumé critiquing and workshops.

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