Writing a résumé

"An 'ability to smell fear' is a quality I've never
seen listed on a resume before."

Contents

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Writing a résumé

A résumé (or sometimes less formally written as *resume*) should provide a clear one-page summary of your educational background, work experience, and other experiences and skills that would make you a marketable job candidate. A résumé should consist of only a single page, unless you have many years of experience and are applying for a mid-level or upper-level management position or other advanced positions.

1. Sections

Your contact information, education, and work experience, are required, and these should come first. Other sections may include other relevant qualifications. Make sure there are no significant time gaps in your résumé data, or otherwise mention explain it in your cover letter (e.g., the ten-month period on your résumé is because you were taking care of a sick parent, or were traveling the world, or spent the time aboard the International Space Station).

1.1. Heading and contact information

This should be at the top of the page, including phone and emails (include international phone codes for international applications). For the title, simply use your name as the title, in a clear, attractive font (but not overly large or bold). The title is usually centered, with some spacing before and after it. When applying to Western or international companies, do not include personal information (gender, religion, age, date of birth, marital status, family information) or photographs. Such companies want to evaluate candidates on strictly objective criteria, without the potential for bias (or being legally liable for potential bias).

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123 Oak Drive, Chicago IL 60647
+1 (312) 555-5555
johnsmith@example.com
www.myself.com

John Q. Smith, Ph.D.

Education

Jan. 2001 - May 2007	Ph.D., Educational Psychology, Purdue University. Advisor: Prof. Mortimer Snerd.

The contact information can be left or right aligned, centered, or in columns (e.g., using tables with invisible borders). If you have an informative and professional looking website, SNS site, or landing page (a site that serves as a portal to your other Internet sites and SNS links), then include those if they are relevant, i.e., if they provide useful information about your background or skills. If applying to non-academic positions where advanced degrees are not standard, you could put a title after your name if you like to emphasize the fact that you have an advanced degree; but that would be better for specialized degrees, e.g., "Martha Jones, M.D."

Use email addresses (and URLs) that look normal; avoid using emails like "jediknight@email.com" or "lovelykitty@email.com." You can certainly include your Linkedin.com site if it is up-to-date and in use, but leave it out if you do not really use it. You may include SNS sites and blogs if much of the content there pertain to academic or professional matters. If they are mostly personal postings, then you can leave that information out. Note, however, that potential employers will probably look for and find your SNS sites anyway, so clean those up first (or shut down those accounts and start over with new accounts), to remove anything potentially embarrassing, or that would reflect negatively on you.

1.2. Objectives

This is often a general statement about the kind of job you want, or your career objectives. It is often something general like "Applying my scientific training in a research institute" or "Applying my accounting skills in an entry-level position." However, since these are rather generic, leaving out this section is generally advised, unless it is actually informative and specific to the position that you are applying to, e.g.: "Applying my quantitative research skills in a consulting position at an educational research institute."

1.3. Education

List all relevant degrees, in reverse chronological order (starting with the most recent, if you have more than one), beginning with your college studies. Include post-graduate degrees or training programs. For this and other sections, do not include high school information. Be sure to include the subject area of the major and minor, each schools's location, and your GPA if it is not too low, and the GPA scale (e.g., "GPA: 3.8/4.0" indicates a 3.8 GPA on a 4.0 scale). GPAs for graduate degrees (master's and Ph.D.) are generally not included, but you may list your advisor and titles of your master's thesis and/or Ph.D. dissertation.

1.4. Experience (i.e., work experience)

Include all work experience (full-time, part-time, temporary), internships, and relevant private work experience (e.g., if you have done significant tutoring work), in reverse chronological order, since starting college. Stress your skills, expertise, personal accomplishments and contributions. Be sure to include sufficient information about employers, including location (city plus state, province, and/or country). Include a brief summary (say, 1-2 lines) of your job duties or job description, and key accomplishments, if relevant, particularly for permanent or longer-term jobs. More detailed descriptions might be appropriate for some jobs, e.g., if you worked there a long time and had many accomplishments and duties there. Temporary or part-time work can be listed if you have little full-time experience, but keep these entries brief.

Volunteer activities would often be listed in a separate section, e.g., "Other

experience," including organization names, your roles or duties, and locations. Normal military experience can be listed in another section such as "Other skills" or "Other experience." Work as a military officer with official pay and duties could be listed under regular employment. If desperate for jobs to list here, you can mention private tutoring experience, but otherwise it is best to put that in a section for other skills or experience.

1.5. Other skills or experience

Most college graduates have little work experience, so highlighting other skills will be helpful, e.g., highlighting involvement in campus clubs and activities, to show that you have developed leadership skills, relational skills, personal character, or community involvement. Such items, as well as military experience, volunteer work, involvement in campus organizations (particularly leadership roles in such groups), and other types of training and experience, could be listed in one or two separate sections called "Other experience," "Other qualifications," "Other training," "Other skills" or "Certifications," depending on the type and amount of information you have. If you have little or no job experience, be sure to list involvement in campus and community groups, especially leadership roles. However, do not indicate specific political or religious affiliations here, as that is overly personal and potentially biasing information; at most, you can indicate a leadership role in a "campus political organization / movement" or a "campus religious organization."

Under your section for other skills or information, list any worthwhile training programs and certifications (but probably not something minor like a two-day workshop you attended). If relevant, list foreign languages that you know, as well as some honest appraisal your level of expertise (i.e., don't exaggerate here); e.g.: "German: can speak and read fluently; Spanish: proficient in reading and speaking". Do not list mundane skills like the fact that you can drive or use MS Word / Office, unless you've had specialized training, say, in Excel programming (i.e., VBA script for Excel) or database management. Computer knowledge at at intermediate or expert level like programming, web page design, or graphics software is worth mentioning. Basic use of an operating system is not interesting (basic Windows, Linux or iOS), but more specialized IT skills can be listed, e.g., graphic design, Linux or Windows troubleshooting, or operating Linux servers. List other relevant skills that you can think of, be it statistical analysis, running laboratory experiments, professional writing, teaching, or anything else that you are proficient in. Awards and/or honors can be listed in a separate section, depending on how many you have.

Some applicants with many years of experience, when applying for more advanced positions, may also highlight key skills and expertise on the first page; such applicants might put the education section after their work experience section. For applying to academic and research jobs, a CV is generally used instead – see the the separate CV handout[1]

1.6. Optional personal sections

Some people like to add a section for hobbies and interests at the end, but only add those that say something interesting about your intellect, personality or character, and that reflect well on you. So you should probably avoid listing mundane or questionable activities like rock collecting, playing Starcraft, drinking, or illegal computer hacking, but you can include interesting or relevant activities like skydiving, jogging, bungee jumping, cooking, poetry, chess, playing jazz, world travel, learning languages, ice sculpting, or perhaps (for nerdy jobs), memorizing the value of pi to 10,000 decimal places.

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1 However, in some European countries, the term CV may sometimes be used for résumé

1.7. References

In a typical résumé, we don't actually include actual references – professors, supervisors, or others who could be contacted to vouch for your qualifications. A résumé should be kept to one page, and if an employer is really interested in you, they will contact you and ask for your references – so be sure to have a list ready if they ask for one, including anyone who might be writing recommendation letters on your behalf. In a résumé, it is standard to either [1] leave this section out entirely, which is the best and most concise thing to do; or [2] put in a *pro forma* References section that simply says, "References: Available upon request."

2. Layout and organization

There is not necessarily a single, standard format for a résumé. Basically, it should be clear, and in an easy to read and attractive format that draws attention to your most important and relevant qualifications. It should also be reasonably compact, but easy to find important information.

There are different types of layouts, some good and some not so good, which you can find if you search the Internet for résumé samples. Information should always be listed in reverse chronological order within each section, i.e., starting from most recent entries (items) and going back. Do not include anything before you started college, that is, nothing from high school. Section headers (e.g., "Education" and such) should be clearly marked. Single line spacing is generally used throughout the whole document. Some writers use lines to separate the contact information and header from the body, or to demarcate sections of the document. If doing so, then soft or thin lines should be used.

2.1. Section layout

Leave enough white space between sections for readability, especially at the top between the heading (contact information) and the title, and between the title and the body. Avoid excessive spacing and line breaks. Between section headers and entries, and between different entries, about ½ line spacing, or 0.5-1.5 mm looks comfortable. It should not look crowded; nor should it look like wasted space, since compactness also counts.

For the body sections that are chronologically ordered (education and experience), the details should be layed out such that the dates and key information (company, institution, job title, major, degree) can be clearly seen by someone skimming the résumé. An ideal way to do this is to use columns with invisible borders, which allows for appropriate line spacing between entries. Other common methods include hanging indents to distinguish entries, and/or right-aligning the dates.

2.2. Item descriptions

The most important information in the entries for education and work experience, in addtion to the dates, are the school or company, degree, and job title. Some may highlight these with font decoration, but this should not be overdone.

Avoid excessive line breaks within entries, as this creates an ocean of white space and takes more paper. Likewise, avoid excessive use of bullets or long bulleted lists; keep these lists concise, e.g., concise lists of job duties or accomplishments under an entry. Bulleted lists are better for providing details for more important jobs that you want to emphasize, and are not needed for all entries. Use small bullets and appropriate bullet symbols – small circles,

maybe dashes, but not asterisks [*], colons [:] or other symbols. MS Word by default may use large bullets, which you may need to change to more understated symbols. Hanging indents can also be effective.

Poor format

Jan. 2001–May 2004
Research Assistant and Lab Manager
Dept. of Educational Psychology
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; Advisor: Prof. Romulus Remus
: Developed reading span tests for different languages that use other writing systems, which offers potential to investigate reading psychology of other languages in labs around the world
: Trained other research assistants in lab procedures
: Trained RAs in NIS/NIH research ethics and procedures
: Ran experiments for fellow RAs

Jan. 1998–Dec. 2000
Research Assistant
Dept. of Educational Psychology at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign;
Advisor: Prof. Gaius Graccus
● Worked as an effective team player and collaborator
● Ran experiments for my advisor
● Analyzed research data for my advisor

The above is poorly layed out, wordy, and inconsistent. The number of line breaks is excessive (unless the writer needs to fill up a single page with a very limited amount of work experience). The following would be better, as it is more concise and compact, with the most important information being easy to find. See the section on language and style below.

Better form

Research Assistant and Lab Manager, Dept. of Educational Psychology, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign; Advisor: Prof. Romulus Remus
 • Developed reading span tests for various non-Western languages
 • Trained other research assistants in lab procedures and NIS/NIH guidelines
 • Helped other RAs in running their experiments
Jan. 2001–May 2004

Research Assistant, Dept. of Educational Psychology, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign; Advisor: Prof. Gaius Graccus
 • Ran experiments and analyzed research data for my advisor
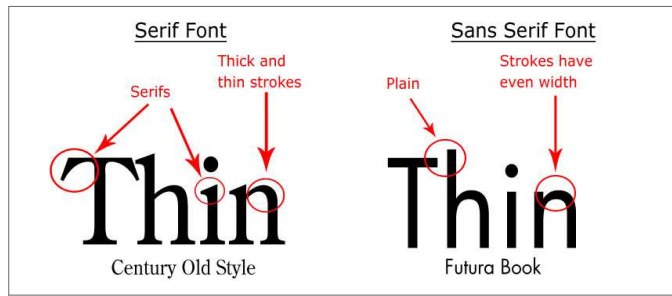Jan. 1998–Dec. 2000

When using columns, bullets (which are indented) or hanging indents in some sections, make sure that the alignment is consistent within sections and between sections (check this with a ruler).

2.3. Fonts

The main font should be a professional looking font that looks like standard 12 point font size. However, some fonts scale differently, so to get a 12 point appearance you may have to use a different size, such as Calibre 10-10.5 point or Garamond 13 point. Your font can be a serif font or a sans serif (without serifs, or tapered strokes at the end of letters)[2].

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2 Image from http://www.gngcreative.com/newsletters/nl9.html.

Serif fonts tend to be easier to read easily and comfortable, so these tend to be better. Sans serif fonts might offer more contrast or artistic effect, and some prefer these for headings or smaller text such as the contact information. Overall, though, a serif font will be more readable and professional looking. In general, a consistent font style throughout the document looks better. All body text should be in the same font. One might like to use a slightly different font for headers, titles and contact information, but it is better if they are similar, e.g., Garamond in the text and Adobe Garamond for headers. This document uses Garamond 13 pt for the body text, Garamond 14 pt and 13 pt bold for headers and subheaders, and Georgia 14-15 pt for the title. Here are some popular and nice looking fonts. Some of these, however, may appear slightly heavy; these heavier fonts, the sans serif fonts (and Serifa) are good web fonts, and in a smaller size might be better for the contact information or title, while the others (which look more like fonts used in book and magazine publishing) would be better for the body text.

Serif fonts

		Sans serif fonts	
Bitstream	Garamond	Calibre	Helvetica
Book Antiqua	Georgia	F	Lucida Sans
Cardo	Nimbus	Fr	Trebuchet
Century fonts	Palatino	Century Gothic	Verdana
	Serifa		

Avoid fonts that appear too dark or heavy, or too light, in the body text. Some fonts like Times New Roman, Arial and Tahoma may seem old, overused or cliché, so it is better to use others like those above. Again, serif fonts tend to look better. If you need special symbols (non-alphabetic or non-Western symbols), a Unicode font such as Cardo or Gentium may be better. Be sure to avoid the following anywhere in the document. If your document has a company letterhead or logo on the top, you may want to select a matching font for the document.

`Teletype or plain text fonts like Courier`

Script or handwriting fonts

Decorative, fun, or otherwise unprofessional fonts like Comic Sans MS

Emoticons, dingbats, non-standard bullet symbols, or other decorations, e.g., ✂ ✰ ☺

Section headers should be clearly visible, but not overdone with font decoration. The following are forms of text decoration, which people tend to overuse in their headers, subheaders and body text. Be careful not to overuse these for emphasis or headings. Light or bright font colors and double underlining should generally be avoided.

<u>Underlining</u>
<u>Double underline</u>
Boldface
Font shadow
Italics

Larger font
ALL CAPITALS
SMALL CAPITALS
Colored font

One should not overuse these by combining multiple text decorations at once. Headers, for example, can use slighly larger text and/or boldface, or all capitals, but writers should avoid gaudy and excessive text decoration like this.

<u>EXPERIENCE</u>

2002–2006   *Software Engineer,* Borg Division, Texas Instruments, Dallas TX

A better presentation would look like this, with only slightly larger font in the header. Alternatively, one could use all capitals, perhaps with one other decoration (slightly larger font or boldface).

Experience

2002–2006   **Software Engineer,** Borg Division, Texas Instruments, Dallas TX

2.4. Page layout

Microsoft Word makes formating unnecessarily cumbersome. LibreOffice is a free word processor that makes formating much easier to control. You can assign text styles to different parts of the document, and make global changes to all instances of the text style by modifying the style properties. For example, you can designate different parts of your document as Body text, (bulleted) List, Heading 1, Heading 2, and your own custom styles. From the style editor, right click on the name of the style to modify the font, font effects, line spacing, and many other features, and the changes apply automatically to all instances of that style throughout the whole document. LibreOffice also makes it easy to adjust table and page layout properties.

Those in science and math fields who use Latex can find Latex templates on the web for résumés and CVs, as long as they are professional looking formats. Latex is in fact probably the best software for producing professional looking documents. For convenience, one can use a latex editor, such as the Kile program for Linux.

If submitting your materials to a company or institution in the US, it is better to change your document settings to American letter size, which differs from the international A4 standard (it is slightly wider and shorter than A4). If you submit a hard copy, print it out on high quality, thick paper.

3. Language and style

In your item descriptions, avoid flowery or clichés to describe your accomplishments. Provide specific, informative information. Keep these descriptions as concise as possible. In your cover letter or other documents, you can provide more detailed explanations. Common business writing clichés like these should be avoided in describing yourself (unless you can provide a specific example, in which case that might be better in the cover letter).

> problem solving skills, teamwork skills, self-motivated, energetic, ambition, proactive, multitasking, motivating

As above, descriptions of your job duties should be concise and objective, not flowery or pretentious.

Wordy or pretentious	*Better*
Developed reading span tests for different languages that use other writing systems, which offers potential to investigate reading psychology of other languages in labs around the world	Developed reading span tests for various non–Western languages
Was proactive in managing a work team of 20 employees in marketing analysis projects.	Managed a team of 20 employees in conducting marketing analysis projects.
Introduced positive changes to the teaching environment, motivating students to improve test scores.	Introduced affective improvements to the teaching environment, leading to improved test scores.

When possible, avoid common verbs or so-called "light" verbs, which are general in meaning (*be, have, make, do, come, go, get, take, set, give*), and find more specific verbs from a thesaurus (see www.thesaurus.com). Likewise, avoid common nouns (*people, things*) and indefinite pronouns (*anything, someone, everywhere*), and find more specific words. When possible, replace phrasal verbs (*take out, bring in*) with more formal Latinate verbs (*extract, remove, introduce, include*).

Item descriptions are usually incomplete sentences, so periods are not necessary, but optional; but if using periods, use them consistently. Date ranges usually include months and years (not usually days)[3]. Be sure to avoid these punctuation errors.

	Incorrect	*Correct*
Parentheses: A space should be inserted before the opening parenthesis, unless it is math based or scientific notation.	Research assistant(lab assistant) Manager(2001–2003)	Research assistant (lab assistant) Manager (2001–2003) *cf. math functions:* f(x), x(a+b), ∀(x∧y)
Date ranges: Use a short dash ("en" dash) or a longer dash ("em" dash), not a tilde [~]. It is not necessary to abbreviate very short months, as this looks odd.	Jun. ~ Dec. 2001	June-Dec. 2001 June 2001 – Dec. 2002
Degree names: 'Ph.D.' requires two periods, since it abbreviates for the Latin *philosophiae doctor*; periods are also usually used for M.A., M.S., B.A., B.S., etc.	PhD	Ph.D.
Colons: No space before a colon or semi–colon, space afterwards. In titles, we often capitalize after a colon, but not if it is a list inside a complete sentence. Colons are not used for bullets – for bullets, use small disks (see above)	Duties : supervising research surveys	Duties: Supervising research surveys cf. Duties included: supervising surveys, and enforcing compliance criteria.
Bullets: Small disks look best for unordered lists. Not so professional are large disks, asterisks, or dashes. Non-standard symbols look especially non-professional.	Job duties include: ● Sloppy huge bullet – Plain hyphen bullet * Plain asterisk bullet ☆ Silly bullet symbol ⇨ Another silly bullet ➤ Yet another silly bullet	Job duties include: • Small to medium bullets • Item 2 • Item 3

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3 But note the different styles for dates, if you submit international job applications: [1] European: style 1 April 2012; [2] American style: April 1, 2012.

Avoid excessive use of bullet points, and make sure their alignment and spacing from the text look neat and consistent – avoid cramped spacing, or excessive spacing. Go into your paragraph settings and select and adjust the hanging indentation if necessary, so that the text aligns properly.

Finally, make sure your document has been properly proofread, as a single grammatical, typographical or spelling error may eliminate you from consideration[4].

4. Sample résumé

This is one sample that exemplifies a more professional style. Many samples can be found online.

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4   For more, see the guide from the University of Illinois, http://www.grad.uiuc.edu/careerservices; see also the Purdue English Owl website, http://owl.english.purdue.edu for guides on business and academic writing. You can also do a Google search for sample résumés, but keep in mind that some samples are better than others.

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Kent Lee

Education

Ph.D., Educational Psychology, Sept. 2002–May 2009. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; focus: psycholinguistics

M.A., TESOL, Sept. 1997–Oct. 2001. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

M.A., Linguistics, Sept. 1994–Dec. 1997. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

B.A., German, Sept. 1989–Dec. 1991. Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana (GPA: 3.9/4). Minor: English. Includes Purdue study abroad program at Universität Hamburg, Germany (8/90-6/91)

A.A., Modern Languages, Aug. 1987–May 1989. Amarillo College, Amarillo, Texas (GPA: 3.9/4)

Experience

Research Professor, Aug. 2010–present. Center for Teaching & Learning, Korea University.
- Educational consultant: instructional coaching & pedagogical workshops
- Taught undergraduate courses in English Dept.

Invited Asst. Professor, July 2008–July 2010. Hanyang TESOL Program, Hanyang University, Seoul, Korea.
- Taught second language acquisition, language research methods, phonology, writing, grammar, and teaching methods.

ESL instructor, Sept.–Dec. 2004. Parkland College, Champaign IL
- Taught reading, writing, grammar, pronunciation.

Visiting lecturer, Aug. 2001–July 2002. Institute of Foreign Language Studies, Korea University, Seoul, S. Korea.
- Taught freshman English (ESL) & academic writing.

Awards & professional activities

Teaching Award, 2011-2012. Korea University, Fall 2011 & Fall 2012, for ENGL 434: English Writing for English Teachers

Abstract reviewer, 2007-2009. Second Language Research Forum (L2 & acquisition conference), University of Illinois