

The ultimate resume guide

Everybody, regardless of the stage of their career, needs a current resume close at hand, ready to respond to a great opportunity.

Your resume is a vital part of your job search toolbox. We can help you to cut through the confusion and get started on preparing the best resume you've ever had!

Resume content

A list of essential information can be a great starting point, a checklist to help you evaluate your skills and aspirations.

Personal details

Don't waste paper with a cover sheet. List your name and contact details at the top of the first page, including your postal address and a telephone contact number. Include your email address only if it is private and you can check for incoming messages at least once a day. As a general rule, don't include your work number unless you have a private office where you can take a phone call without being overheard. An alternative is to include your home phone number and check for messages at regular intervals during the day. If you don't have an answer phone, consider subscribing to voice mail while you are job-hunting. If you live in a share household, make sure your flatmates know you may be receiving calls from prospective employers.

It is no longer usual to include details under headings such as gender, age, marital status, religion, ethnicity or health. Some experts strongly counsel against including these details. It can make your resume look dated and this personal information is not relevant to your ability to do the job. If any of the factors are relevant and an employer has an exemption to discriminate on these grounds, mention the appropriate information in your cover letter.

Career objective

Differences of opinion exist about including a career objective. Some experts dislike them, viewing them as an Americanism, clichéd or adding no value. If you do use one, expect to rewrite it, even slightly, to match each job you apply for.

Three sample career objectives:

Accountant

An accounting position in a blue-chip media/entertainment company. Long-term plans are to advance into a management position with responsibility for financial functioning of the firm.

Graphic designer

To obtain an entry-level position as a graphic designer that will utilise my creative and organisational skills and will provide an intense learning experience.

Retail manager

To become a store manager in a national retail chain with opportunities to advance to state sales management.

Professional experience

The best resumes are brief and informative, so every word in this section must work hard for you. As a general rule, include the most detail about your current job. If you've been in the workforce for some period of time, simply list the position, company and dates of your earlier or least relevant jobs. You are not obliged to list every job you've ever had. A tactic for older job seekers is to only list jobs since, say, 1995. This only works if your most recent jobs are the most relevant to the position you are seeking.

Try to illustrate a logical pattern of career development in your account of your work experience. If you have "downsized" your career or moved sideways, you may wish to include a brief reference to the circumstances that motivated your move. For instance, "By accepting a less senior position, I was able to accommodate part-time graduate study. In this role, I..."

Company and title

Make a decision about whether the companies you have worked for are more important than your job titles. The most important information should go first, followed by the job title on a new line. Make sure you maintain a consistent style to allow for quick scanning and comprehension.

Job summary

Don't just describe your duties and responsibilities. Emphasise your achievements and show how you contributed to your employer's business. Carefully consider how you can **quantify** your goals and achievements.

As an example:

"Transformed an inefficient call centre with low morale into an organised, lean and quality focused organisation, increasing revenue by 12 per cent, decreasing costs by 20 per cent and decreasing staff turnover by 25 per cent."

In some cases there won't be a quantitative measure of your achievements. Find other ways to show your contribution. For example:

"Conducted a production inventory and calculated costs as a consultant to a national retailer; findings led to a shift in the purchasing strategy"

There may not have been a problem in the first place. You did however initiate an action and get a result.

"As a self-employed contractor, set up databases for organisations that led to increased productivity for account managers."

Education

The level of detail depends on the balance between your qualifications and your work experience. It may be suitable for graduates with little experience to list selected classes and to include results if these are better than average (or requested).

As a general guide, the less recent your qualification, the less information you provide. A typical format lists the name of the qualification, the date you *graduated*, the institution which granted it and your major. For example:

BA, 2001, Victoria University of Wellington

Major: History

Add the name of any scholarships or awards you have won to the second line.
If you are partway through a qualification, list it like this:

Graduate Diploma in Public Relations (RMIT) study commenced 2001

Begin with the highest level of educational achievement. You can leave out details about high school if you have a higher degree or qualification.

The education section usually follows the employment details *unless* you are recently graduated or you are pursuing an academic position where your educational achievements are more relevant.

References and referees

It is increasingly uncommon for past employers to provide written references. Instead, a new employer will want the names and contact details of referees — people who know you well and can be contacted to check the details in your resume.

Choose your referees carefully. You must gain someone's agreement before listing them as a referee. A new employer generally won't contact referees until they have selected a preferred candidate — or if they are trying to decide between two candidates.

Consider not including details of your referees on your resume. Instead, under a heading "Referees", note that referees are available on request. Once you have been interviewed you can offer details of referees. It is a courtesy to advise referees that they may be contacted. It is also a valuable opportunity to tell them briefly about the position, what it involves and to gently remind them of your relevant skills.

Sometimes a job advertisement or position description will specifically ask for the names of referees to be included with your application. In such cases, you have little choice but to include them.

Optional extras

A good resume is as brief as possible. Only include items listed below if they will truly strengthen your application. However if you are applying for a role as a Project Manager or QS/Estimator or similar then it is worthwhile including a list of projects and their construction value and achievements. This will allow the employer to gain a greater understanding of the roles, projects and project size.

- Professional training
- Professional affiliations and memberships
- Licences and accreditations
- Knowledge of foreign languages
- Publications
- Special accomplishments such as awards
- Interests

Tailoring your resume

Ideally, tailor your resume for each application you submit. Every job is unique and requires a different mix of skills and experience. Don't focus your resume on what you want. Instead, understand the needs and problems facing the employer. Research the company and industry to work out what problems and challenges the company faces. If you are responding to an advertised vacancy, read the ad closely to identify what issues or problems the successful candidate needs to solve. Alternatively contact the agency and ask specific questions to gain more knowledge of the role and company. (To find out more on questions to ask an agency [Click here](#))

Next, go through your work history, retrieving the skills and experience most relevant to this employer and position. Summarise or leave out those parts of your work history which won't help you get the job. Essentially, you are emphasising some skills and achievements and de-emphasising others. Don't lie.

As part of this process, give some thought to what tone to use in your application. For example, aggressively selling yourself may suit a high-powered sales role. A graphic artist might want to develop a resume that reflects their creativity.

Once you have written the resume be sure to get somebody whom you trust to read it. An objective opinion can help improve your resume, but keep in mind that there are many different ideas about the ideal presentation. Weigh advice carefully (including ours).

Original article by [Rachel Rose](#) with [Bernadette Schwerdt](#).

Updated by **Martin Jorgensen** March 2005