



Tim's Tips on Résumés
Dr. Tim Bajkiewicz
School of Mass Communications
Virginia Commonwealth University

First thing about résumés: there's no one way, or one correct way, to create a résumé. There are, however, better ways and styles than others, and better content to include.

This handout is focused on résumés for those near the beginning of their careers. This is not meant to be comprehensive, but rather a collection of my thoughts and experiences based on 25 years of working professionally in media and education. Note: "résumé" has accents—the other spelling, resume, means to start doing something again.

In this handout I'll refer to the job you're applying for as the "potential job" and as anyone looking at your résumé as the "employer."

There are tons of résumé websites out there, with some better than others. Take advantage of all these examples for good and bad ideas.

Finally, give this enterprise the time it needs and deserves. Your résumé is very, very important for getting a job. Do you want to beat out everyone else for that job?

It's The Two-Dimensional You

Your résumé is your calling card. It represents you to someone you may never meet, but has the power to hire you; or someone you're hoping will call for an interview. It needs to put you and everything you've ever done in the best possible light, all while being accurate and transparent.

Impress the employer every chance you get, since you likely only get one chance.

Don't misrepresent yourself in your résumé. You take a tremendous risk if you lie or "pad" and you'd be foolish to think someone won't check on you, since it's very easy. You're risking your professional reputation. Credibility takes a long time to build, but only moments to destroy. Choose and work to keep yours intact.

It's All About Them (And Not About You)

While crafting your résumé and any other job materials (e.g., your cover letter), take the employer's perspective in every way. Look at and think about everything like he or she would. Target your résumé for the "intelligent non-specialist." Even if you're in a technical field or job, chances are your résumé may be read by a non-technical person.

- ✓ Use only jargon or abbreviations that are in everyday use.
- ✓ Watch your previous job titles that don't really explain anything or are not conventional. You may want to use the actual title and an everyday explanation in parentheses.

- ✓ If there's an unfamiliar concept that you *must* use, briefly explain it.
- ✓ Use specific information that describe places, events, etc.—don't mention that you worked for "Channel 8" since there are tons of stations that call themselves that; instead, use the exact call letters and city.

Don't make the employer work to understand your résumé, since there are plenty of others in the pile that are less work. Some employers are looking for excuses to thin out the pile—don't give them any. Create well-crafted content with an elegant design.

How Your Résumé Reads

This section focuses on your résumé's content, not how it looks. Both are important.

Short and sweet

Most people agree that a résumé for beginning and mid-career people should be no more than two pages. If you're just starting out, get it to one page unless you've done noteworthy things.

Spelling and grammar matter

Spelling and grammar mistakes scream, "Don't hire me. I don't pay attention to detail. Even if I'm not the best with spelling or grammar, I don't care enough to make sure they're correct." Don't trust spell or grammar checks—they only point out clear mistakes, not real words or constructions that are used incorrectly.

Break it down

Most résumés always include:

- ✓ Header with your name and contact information
- ✓ Experience
- ✓ Education

If possible, also include:

- ✓ Awards and honors
- ✓ Skills
- ✓ Community involvement

Don't include:

- ✓ Objective statement (These always tend to sound lame.)
- ✓ Slogans or mission statements (They say, "I'm desperately trying to sound hip.")
- ✓ Personal hobbies (Honestly, employers don't care.)

Header: Name, address, best telephone number, and e-mail. Think about how an employer will perceive any phone message and e-mail address.

Experience: Detailed below.

Education: Make the best of this. If you've attended college then don't list high school, unless you were valedictorian or something noteworthy. For college, list where attended, dates (month and year, starting and ending), and major/minor course of study. Only list GPA if it's noteworthy. Good place to quickly mention any education-specific awards or honors. (Also list them in that section, if included.) Include any special activities, such as study abroad.

Awards and honors: List name of award/honor (with brief explanation, if necessary to clarify importance), awarding organization, and date awarded. See "You've done more..." below.

Skills: For the most part keep specific to potential job, but mention other skills if they would be considered noteworthy to employer. Watch jargon and abbreviations. Don't list something that you only have passing familiarity with—it could be disastrous for you if they ask you to demonstrate that skill in the job interview or immediately after being hired.

Community involvement: This shows that you're well-rounded and a good citizen, but be careful that it says what you want said about you to an employer.

Get your facts straight

Before you start building your résumé, collect all the facts from your previous jobs and activities. These include:

- ✓ Employer name and location (city and state usually enough)
- ✓ Dates of employment (month and year, starting and ending)
- ✓ Job duties (see "You've done more..." below)
- ✓ Names/titles of anything you'll list as an accomplishment: project completed, story series produced, etc.
- ✓ Details about any of those accomplishments (see "Get specific" below)
- ✓ Web addresses for relevant content (may want to use <http://mytinyurl.net/> to shorten, although sometimes you want them to associate you with an organization through their URL)
- ✓ Don't list supervisor names or contact information in your job listings. However, you often need them for job applications, so it's a good idea to have them.

Share your experience

To list or not to list...

The first question many first-time résumé builders ask is, "Do I list all the jobs I've ever had?" There's not an easy answer, but there are some guidelines. You want to usually list jobs and activities that a) demonstrate you can keep a job for a while; b) show a continuity of employment; and c) show some responsibility.

Show you can keep a job: When you're just starting out you may not have much to go on, so make the most of it. But, if you've had a few decent-lasting jobs (at least 6 months), then you could drop that three-day job at the county fair (I had one).

Show continuity of employment: The first thing many employers do is look at dates to see if there are any huge gaps of employment. List yours so an employer can immediately see no large gap in dates. Such a gap may just be oversight on your part for not listing a job you had during that time. However, if you have any time gaps be prepared to answer questions about them.

Show some responsibility: Employers aren't looking to hire you because you're a Fortune 500 CEO—but if you've carried responsibility in your jobs then let this shine. Responsibility includes things like handling money, being a key holder, etc.

You've done more than you think

Your résumé needs to reflect the best about you—especially that you've done some important and responsible things through jobs, community service, volunteering, etc. Think about *everything you've ever done or been a part of* and ask yourself what about those experiences reflects positively about you. Dig deep.

Focus the employer's attention on what's important and responsible about any activity. At the beginning of your career it may not be obvious. If you worked in retail and worked at the cash register, this means you handled money—an important task that requires someone trusted you. Mention something like “Responsible for cash register duties averaging \$2000 in daily business transactions.”

In general, important and responsible tasks include managing money, personnel, and/or projects. Focus on scope and results.

List any awards, honors, or recognitions. When just starting out, include awards even if they don't sound all that important. These show that someone else thinks highly of you and your contributions.

Getting it in order

My preference: dates (month and year, beginning and end) – job title – employer – location. This focuses on the “when” and the “what” of your experience.

Get specific

Specific information adds powerful context. Don't just say you managed an office—say you managed an office responsible for an \$80,000 annual budget. Consider what details you can add to what you've done.

Use active, action verbs

When listing your job duties these focus the employer's attention on you as a positive, contributing employee. Good verbs include "Responsible for...;" "Managed...;" "Organized...;" "Led...;" "Directed...;" "Produced..." Lots of these lists online.

Focus toward the job

Include anything that uniquely positions you for this specific job. You may need to alter how you list the job. If you have a chronological résumé, but the job in your previous experience was a few jobs ago, then you may want to break up and list "Media Experience" and then "Other Experience." If you want to keep it in chronological order, make sure that the immediate previous job includes what the potential job is looking for, and list any other attributes from other jobs that may apply to the potential job.

How Your Résumé Looks

I'm not a graphic designer, so this has always been a challenge for me. My advice: look at a lot of different résumés and don't be afraid to experiment with your design and layout. (But make sure to save multiple file versions with filenames that make sense.)

Step back

The overall look of your résumé gives a first impression—what does it say? Look at your résumé only in terms of content and white space. Is it too blocky? Too much white space in a particular spot? How is your eye led down the page? Is your eye drawn to the most important aspects first, such as job titles?

Look professional

This means conventional type fonts, sizes, spacing, and margins. Don't go crazy. Graphics/visual employers may expect to see something flashier, but it would still be in the realm of what they consider professional.

Stay consistent

Whatever you do, do it consistently throughout your résumé: fonts, spacing, how you list previous experience, etc. Speaking of fonts, consistently use one, two tops. (It's amazing what you can do with font spacing, italics, bold, styles, etc. to mix up the look.)

Don't shoot it up

- Bulleted lists are good for many things, but résumés aren't among them.
- Everyone puts bullet points, like this. Do you want yours looking like everyone else's?

Instead, try listing your job duties as a well-written, short paragraph that includes lots of action verbs. Using bulleted lists tends to eat up lots of usable space and makes the overall design look repetitious.

Keep it copy- and file-friendly

Your résumé may be copied to be distributed to a hiring committee: does it copy well? Test it and actually make a copy. Items like thin lines, watermarked copy, and the like may not look so great on a copy.

Many jobs now require sending an electronic version of your résumé. While convenient, format issues could mean your résumé may not look so great on the receiving end.

I recommend keeping it in two formats: Microsoft Word and Adobe PDF. Most people have Word on their computer, and if they don't their word processing software can open a Word document. Creating a PDF usually requires Adobe's Acrobat software (pretty expensive), but cheaper options for creating a PDF exists. A PDF is nice because a) everyone has Adobe Acrobat Reader on their computer, and b) if you use conventional fonts and such, it should open to look exactly as you want it to.

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