

Sell Yourself: Quick Tips for Resume Writing

There's no 100% standard format or template for a professional resume, which is both good and bad news. At a basic level, your resume is an opportunity to tell a potential employer everything you've done in the past. Less obviously, and just as importantly, it's a chance to tell that employer why your experience matters and how it has directly prepared you for the specific job for which you are applying. This is why it's important to revise your resume every time you apply to a new position. Be sure to thoroughly read the posting for every job to which you apply. Many will provide specific guidelines for resume formats and contents. A potential employer's clear instructions always supersede any other advice.

Know your type:

- The *Chronological* resume is best for people with significant, continuous work experience who have grown professionally within a single field. The most common resume form, it can pose problems for new graduates who lack significant work experience.
- The *Functional* resume privileges skill acquisition over job titles and employment history by grouping related skills and abilities in sections with discrete headlines (e.g. Leadership Skills, Communication Skills). It is very rarely recommended for students or new graduates.
- The *Combined* resume is generally the best choice for our purposes. It can emphasize skills and experiences accrued in the classroom or through extracurricular activities and volunteer positions while still including a chronological employment history.
- *For detailed examples of your options – and everything else discussed in this resource – please consult Career and Employment Services' other resume-related resources.*

Format functionally:

- Use a simple mainstream typeface between 10 and 12pt. Headings may be 14pt.
- Do not exceed two pages (of plain white 8.5x11" stock) unless you have explicit permission to do so.
- For emailed and uploaded resumes, send a .pdf file as it will preserve your typeface and formatting.

Make the MOST of your competencies:

When detailing your skills and abilities, it pays to be specific. The skills your focus on should be **Measurable, Observable, Selective, and Transferable**. Provide qualitative and quantitative support for the claims you make about yourself, choose only skills that are related to the field in which you are applying, and be sure to consider how skills you acquired during your education can translate to the working world. Describe what you've done, not what you're like. How many clients did you manage? How much money did you raise? How much web traffic did your blog generate?

Potential Resume Headings

The following headings articulate a strong spine for most resumes. Note that section headings are guidelines. You may title the sections of your resume slightly differently, and you should only include the sections that apply to your situation.

Header/Contact Information

List your first and last name, full mailing address (permanent or long-term, if possible), a telephone number at which you can be reached during the day, and an *appropriate* e-mail address. Include your LinkedIn URL.

Objective (Optional)

Begin your resume with an Objective section if you have a very clear, appropriate short-term goal. In one or two sentences, summarize the career direction you envision, making reference to your ideal job description, location, and level of employment. In most cases, a good cover letter removes the need for this section.

Profile of Skills/Summary of Qualifications

In most cases, you should begin your resume with a succinct summary of your most impressive selling points, as relevant to your field. Try to pique the reader's interest. Be as specific as possible, avoid generalities, and tailor your points to the position and organization to which you apply. Aim for five or six total points.

- Be **RAD**: Highlight your **Responsibilities**, **Accomplishments**, and the **Duration** for which you demonstrated the skills you are describing. Note that you *must* be truthful.

Related/Technical Skills

Specify any computer and language skills – both common and uncommon. Research, technical, and report-writing skills are also valuable. You may include completed health and safety training in this section.

Education

As a full-time student or recent graduate, this section should come near the top. For each degree or diploma you've earned, include its full name (no abbreviations), the institution that granted it, that location's city and province (and country, if not Canada), and a graduation date. Use reverse chronological order. Also include relevant professional certifications. Use bullet points to list your major and/or minor. Consider including "career-related" courses. Your GPA may be helpful if it is particularly strong, but it is not required.

Scholarships and Awards

If you've won many honours, include only the most appropriate; you don't want to bombard a recruiter with a long list of minor awards. Clarify *why* you earned an award when its criteria might not be obvious to a recruiter. Avoid awards based solely on financial need.

Academic Projects

You don't want to list everything you did in university, but some major academic projects may be relevant to the job for which you are applying. Highlight these projects when they emphasize skills and experiences you're unable to relate through employment or volunteer experience.

Employment Experience

State your experience in reverse chronological order (start with your most recent job). Describe your duties in the past tense, using **action verbs** to stress skills used on the job. Begin every sentence with a verb. Avoid personal pronouns ("I") and do not refer to yourself in the third person in this section. Use a bulleted format for readability. Use standard bullet points rather than dashes, arrows, or other icons.

Volunteer Experience and Community Involvement

This section is particularly important for students who lack significant work experience. Use the same format as you did for Employment Experience. Specify which duties you performed and your level of responsibility, accomplishments, and skills gained. Focus on leadership, initiative, and energy (your "star quality").

Activities and Accomplishments

Include *relevant* professional development courses, additional training certificates, workshops, and conferences, plus affiliations and memberships with/in clubs, societies, and career-related associations.

Remember, your resume is not a dating site profile!

References

Unless you are specifically asked to provide a reference, note that your references are available upon request. If you are called for an interview, be expect to need between three and five total professional, academic, and/or character references.

Further reading:

- [Resumes, CV's & Letters \(Western University Student Success Centre\)](#)
- [Writing a Resume \(Government of Canada Services for Youth\)](#)
- [Yes, Your Resume Needs a Summary \(Harvard Business Review\)](#)
- [The Most Overused Words in Canadian Resumes \(Workopolis/The Toronto Star\)](#)



Recommended Resume Action Words

Use the following words to relate your accomplishments and experiences on both resumes and cover letters. Feel free to “borrow” words from any section, but be sure to use them correctly; double-check definitions to avoid “thesaurus syndrome,” and “mix up” various action words to avoid sounding repetitive. Remember to use past-tense conjugations, as below, to refer to previous experiences, and present-tense conjugations to describe your accomplishments at jobs you still hold.

Use these words to create value-added statements by using the “what” + “to what” + “so what?” model:

- Managed | six important client accounts | and maintained excellent customer relations.
- Developed | a benefits policy manual | which allowed for few benefit administration errors.
- Designed | a new promotional flyer | which increased store traffic by 15 percent.

You wrote, spoke, or otherwise communicated effectively:

Addressed	Contacted	Edited	Interviewed	Outlined	Responded
Advertised	Conveyed	Elicited	Involved	Participated	Rewrote
Annotated	Convinced	Enlisted	Joined	Persuaded	Solicited
Arranged	Corresponded	Exhibited	Judged	Presented	Specified
Articulated	Debated	Explained	Justified	Promoted	Spoke
Authored	Defined	Expressed	Lectured	Proposed	Suggested
Briefed	Delivered	Formulated	Listened	Publicized	Summarized
Campaigned	Developed	Furnished	Lobbied	Recruited	Synthesized
Composed	Directed	Incorporated	Marketed	Referred	Translated
Condensed	Discussed	Influenced	Moderated	Reinforced	Wrote
Conferred	Dispatched	Interacted	Negotiated	Reported	
Consulted	Drafted	Interpreted	Observed	Resolved	

You researched effectively:

Analyzed	Detected	Explored	Inspected	Pinpointed	Scrutinized
Anticipated	Diagrammed	Extracted	Investigated	Plotted	Summarized
Clarified	Diagnosed	Forecasted	Itemized	Predicted	Surveyed
Collected	Dissected	Formulated	Linked	Quantified	Systematized
Compared	Documented	Framed	Located	Questioned	Tracked
Conducted	Evaluated	Gathered	Measured	Researched	
Critiqued	Examined	Grouped	Organized	Reviewed	
Defined	Experimented	Identified	Perceived	Searched	

You led or managed a team of people and/or made valuable connections:

Administered	Channeled	Enhanced	Improved	Oriented	Restored
Aligned	Coached	Established	Incorporated	Overhauled	Reviewed
Appointed	Consolidated	Executed	Increased	Oversaw	Scheduled
Approved	Contracted	Forged	Initiated	Partnered	Selected
Assigned	Controlled	Fostered	Inspected	Planned	Staffed
Attained	Decided	Generated	Instituted	Presided	Supervised
Authorized	Delegated	Graded	Managed	Prioritized	Targeted
Bridged	Developed	Handled	Merged	Produced	
Broadened	Directed	Headed	Mobilized	Recommended	
Canvassed	Emphasized	Hired	Motivated	Reorganized	
Chaired	Enforced	Hosted	Navigated	Replaced	

You taught, educated, or instructed:

Advised	Conducted	Enabled	Focused	Instructed	Stimulated
Awarded	Coordinated	Encouraged	Guided	Mentored	Tested
Clarified	Critiqued	Evaluated	Informed	Moulded	Trained
Coached	Developed	Explained	Inspired	Motivated	Transmitted
Communicated	Educated	Facilitated	Instilled	Persuaded	Tutored



You added value to your employer in terms of partners, funds, or resources:

Achieved	Bought	Earned	Mastered	Projected	Sold
Acquired	Budgeted	Estimated	Maximized	Qualified	Strengthened
Adjusted	Calculated	Exceeded	Measured	Raised	Surpassed
Allocated	Capitalized	Expanded	Netted	Reduced	Sustained
Amplified	Completed	Financed	Outpaced	Researched	Won
Appraised	Conserved	Furthered	Outperformed	Retained	Yielded
Audited	Determined	Gained	Prepared	Retrieved	
Balanced	Drove	Marketed	Programmed	Secured	

You organized or arranged information efficiently:

Arranged	Distributed	Monitored	Provided	Restructured	Submitted
Catalogued	Elected	Obtained	Ranked	Revamped	Standardized
Categorized	Filed	Operated	Recorded	Reviewed	Systematized
Centralized	Formalized	Ordered	Redesigned	Routed	Unified
Charted	Incorporated	Organized	Refined	Scheduled	United
Classified	Inspected	Outsourced	Refocused	Screened	Updated
Compiled	Logged	Prepared	Registered	Streamlined	Validated
Corresponded	Maintained	Processed	Reserved	Structured	Verified

You worked creatively to develop or inaugurate a project:

Accelerated	Conceptualized	Devised	Formulated	Introduced	Pioneered
Acted	Condensed	Directed	Founded	Invented	Planned
Authored	Created	Discovered	Hypothesized	Launched	Planted
Began	Cultivated	Displayed	Illustrated	Modelled	Revised
Co-authored	Customized	Drew	Initiated	Modified	Revitalized
Combined	Designed	Established	Instituted	Originated	Shaped
Composed	Developed	Fashioned	Integrated	Performed	Tailored

You applied your technical skills:

Activated	Computed	Dissected	Installed	Rectified	Standardized
Adapted	Conserved	Engineered	Maintained	Regulated	Studied
Advanced	Constructed	Extrapolated	Mapped	Remodeled	Upgraded
Applied	Converted	Fabricated	Operated	Repaired	Utilized
Assembled	Debugged	Fielded	Orchestrated	Replaced	
Built	Derived	Formed	Overhauled	Restored	
Calculated	Designed	Fortified	Printed	Simulated	
Coded	Determined	Immunized	Programmed	Specialized	

You helped or served customers or staff:

Advocated	Attended	Counseled	Familiarized	Represented	Supported
Aided	Clarified	Demonstrated	Guided	Served	Volunteered
Answered	Collaborated	Diagnosed	Provided	Serviced	
Arranged	Contributed	Ensured	Reached	Simplified	
Assisted	Cooperated	Facilitated	Referred	Supplied	

You solved problems:

Amended	Changed	Corrected	Governed	Mediated	Resolved
Assessed	Cleared	Decreased	Implemented	Prevented	Settled
Arbitrated	Closed	Eliminated	Intervened	Protected	Solved
Cautioned	Continued	Finalized	Issued	Reconciled	Terminated
Challenged	Convened	Finished	Lessened	Rehabilitated	Transformed

Career and Employment Services Resume Checklist

Your resume should tell your potential employer who you are, how you can be contacted, and what you've accomplished to this point. It should showcase your academic credentials, accomplishments, and skills. If yours checks all the following boxes, you're off to a great start. (Note that all headings are guidelines. The number and titles of headings on your personal resume will vary.)

Appearance:

- ☐ Appears professional (clean, easy to read) and constitutes a strong first impression
- ☐ Keeps all formats and syntaxes consistent throughout (headers, spacing, fonts, bullets, punctuation)
- ☐ Uses standard, easy-to-read typeface in size 10 to 12 with emphasized headers
- ☐ Does not exceed two pages in length and includes name and page number on second page
- ☐ Proceeds in appropriate order (i.e.: Profile of Skills, Education, Experience, Activities)

Language:

- ☐ Avoids all spelling and grammar errors
- ☐ Uses industry-specific language appropriately
- ☐ Employs appropriate verb tenses (i.e. past tense for past experiences)
- ☐ Uses action words (i.e. verbs) and phrases to effectively describe accomplishments
- ☐ Is written in clear, concise, and consistent language that reads as sophisticated and professional

Header:

- ☐ Emphasizes your name by using the largest typeface anywhere on the resume
- ☐ Includes accurate, appropriate address, phone number, email, and LinkedIn URL (if you have one)

Profile of Skills/Related Skills/Technical Skills (or similar):

- ☐ Highlights your most marketable attributes; does not focus on common or vague skill sets
- ☐ Is industry/job specific and uses carefully chosen language to reflect the job posting
- ☐ Is outlined in bulleted format (up to six bullets)

Education:

- ☐ Indicates dates and outlines education in reverse chronological order
- ☐ Spells out accurate degree/diploma (i.e.: "Bachelor of Arts" instead of "BA")
- ☐ Indicates institution names and locations for all certificates
- ☐ Includes, if applicable, minors, concentrations, awards, and (strong) GPA as bullet points
- ☐ Does *not* include high school information (after third year)

Experience (e.g. Professional, Volunteer, or other):

- ☐ Indicates dates and experiences in reverse chronological order
- ☐ Includes, for each experience, appropriate job title, organization name, city, and province or country
- ☐ Uses bulleted format to outline description of experiences
- ☐ Uses appropriate action word phrases
- ☐ Describes accomplishments and related attributes with a focus on industry-specific skills
- ☐ Includes only current or recent experiences

Activities and Accomplishments:

- ☐ Includes only activities and accomplishments that are related/relevant to your degree or career
- ☐ Is organized in reverse chronological order and includes dates, titles, organization names, and locations

References, etc.:

- ☐ Indicates "References Available Upon Request" (be sure to bring a list of three to five professional/academic references with you to the interview)
- ☐ (If applicable) Indicates "References Attached" and includes them on a new page with your header
- ☐ (If applicable) Includes "Portfolio Available Upon Request" and/or "Transcripts Available Upon Request"



CAREER AND EMPLOYMENT SERVICES OFFERS A VARIETY OF RESOURCES TO HELP YOU LAUNCH YOUR CAREER:

Job searching • Career Planning • Work experience • Career preparation workshops
Personal appointments • Resume critiques • Mock interviews • Interest testing • Job fair
Networking opportunities • Volunteer Internship Program (VIP)