



Resume Writing 101

What is a resume?

A resume is a document that provides a summary of your education, experience, skills, and accomplishments, typically provided to an employer in application to a job posting. Sometimes, resumes may be distributed at networking opportunities such as job fairs or referrals. Each resume you send out should be targeted to the specific job posting you are applying for, to give you the best chance of being seen as a good match for that posting.

What sections should I include on my resume?

A resume technically only has 3 required sections: Name/Contact Information, Education, and Experience. Other sections, like Highlights of Qualifications or Volunteer Experience, are considered optional but can often help you stand out. Below are the individual sections most commonly included on a resume, in a typical order – feel free to adjust the order of sections as you deem most suitable for your purposes.

Contact Information Section

Include your full name, phone number (without international country code, i.e., +44), email address, and optionally your [LinkedIn profile URL](#). This information should be in the header of the first page, and your name should be the largest piece of text on the page. Make your name about 2-4 points larger than the rest of the text in the resume – it should stand out on the page.

(Optional) Summary/Highlights of Qualifications Section:

This should highlight your key skills and achievements, related to the job posting. Your highlights should speak back to as many of the job qualifications as you have, with some reference to the “proof” which hiring managers will read about later in the resume. A good highlights bullet point a) speaks to the qualifications in the job posting, b) shows proof you have the skill or qualification by providing an example (qualifying details) or numbers (qualifying details) and c) points to where the reader can go on your resume to learn more about your experience in this area.

Review [Appendix 1: Writing Highlights of Qualifications/Professional Profile](#) below.

Education Section

Start with your most recent degree or certification and work backwards, using reverse chronological order. You may include bullets describing your most significant learnings, achievements, and/or courses, whatever is most relevant to the job you are applying to. Ensure you indicate the date you started your degree and “to present” if you are still completing your degree.

Some tips for the education section include:

- If most of your related experience is from coursework or projects, you can highlight these key courses/projects in your education section (for example, create a “Relevant Coursework” or “Relevant Projects” subsection. See the sample resume in [Appendix 2](#) below for ideas.
- Bold the name of your degree, certificate, education, not the institution name.
- Format this section in the same manner as you are formatting your Experience and Volunteer sections. Formatting should be consistent and easy to understand throughout a resume.

Work Experience Section

Include job titles (in bold, before the company name), company names, dates of employment (separate, easy to find quickly), and bullets describing your achievements at each experience. Use reverse chronological order.

Some tips for the work experience section include:

- You may wish to create several Work Experience sections to best present yourself to the employer. For example, you could create a “Marketing Experience” section if you have marketing-related experience during sporadic years and that you perhaps gained through a combination of paid and unpaid positions (i.e., In 2015 and then in 2022, or through volunteer work and paid work).
- You can name your Experience section any title that best suits your purpose. For example, “Veterinary Experience,” “Relevant Experience” etc.

(Optional) Volunteer and/or Extracurricular Experience Section

Include volunteer titles (in bold, before the company name), company names, dates of volunteer work (separate, easy to find quickly), and, space permitting, bullets describing your main achievements at each experience. Use reverse chronological order. If you do not have an official title, you can give yourself one that is descriptive of the role you had.

Additional Optional Sections to Consider

Technical Skills - For applying to positions that require specific computer programs, applications, tools, languages, software, etc. you may choose to add this section and list the Technical Skills you have that match the position.

Certifications and/or Training and/or Licenses - Use this section to list any specific training/licenses/ or certifications you have relevant to the position. Format this section consistently with other sections of the resume.

Professional Development - Use this section to list professional development opportunities you have taken part in that show your dedication to increasing your knowledge and skills related to the position. Format this section consistently with other sections of the resume.

Note: If you are short on resume space and only have 1-2 items to list under one of the optional sections mentioned, consider combining one of the abovementioned optional sections with an already existing section on your resume, such as “Education and Professional Development.”

Interests/Hobbies - Include if you have space and keep this section very brief, and relevant to your candidacy. Include items if they are significant and show notable qualities such as perseverance and dedication (i.e. marathon running, black belt in karate, competitive swimming).

Languages - Use this section to list proficiency in languages other than English if beneficial to the position you are applying for.

Awards/Scholarships – List any awards/scholarships/funding received, with dollar values noted in brackets, if relevant to the position. You may also choose to add descriptive bullets explaining what you did/demonstrated to achieve the award.

How do I tailor my resume?

Below are some tips on how to tailor your resume.

- Customize your resume for each job application: Mention the skills (including **transferrable skills**) and experiences that are most relevant to the specific job you're applying for.
- Use **keywords** from the job posting: Many employers use **applicant tracking systems** (ATS) to scan resumes for specific keywords, so make sure to include them in your resume. You could assume the company is likely using one if you are completing an online application form. However, companies may use ATS software behind the scenes to scan resumes after they receive them. Ensure your resume will get noticed by ATS by following these practices:
 - Tense and format matter when software or eyes are quickly scanning your resume. For example, if the ad asks for marketing skills, use marketing in your resume, not market, marketed, or marketer. If the job posting asks for collaboration don't say teamwork, even though it means the same thing.
 - This also applies to technical skills: if the posting says MS Word and Excel, use those terms instead of MS Office.
 - Use keywords directly from the job posting as often as possible.
- When writing your descriptive bullets, start with **strong action verbs**, and write **accomplishment statements** as often as possible.

The STAR Formula

A helpful formula for writing accomplishment statements is the **STAR formula**:

- **S** = Situation / **T** = Task: What was the situation, task, problem, challenge, etc. you worked on?
- **A** = Action: What actions did you take to accomplish the job?
- **R** = Result: What was the outcome and impact of your efforts?

To get started using the STAR formula, complete the following activity.

- On a rough draft, write down the Situation (S) and/or Task (T). Under each Situation (S)/Task (T), write down the actions (A) you took to complete the assignment. Next, write the result (R) and impact of those action steps. Quantify whenever possible with numbers and percentages, and qualify, if possible, naming the skills/tools/techniques/legislation/ knowledge etc. used to complete the action (A). Once completed, develop an accomplishment statement from the results of your actions

For example:

S/T: Business was experiencing low profitability and sales.

A: Created innovative marketing posts using social media to re-generate interest in our products and services.

R: Product sales increased from \$30,000 to \$60,000 in just 5 months.

Power Bullet: Grew product sales by 100% in 5 months by developing innovative social media posts using Instagram and Facebook.

What about language and tone?

Use clear and professional language: Avoid slang or jargon, and make sure your writing is grammatically correct.

Be concise: Use bullet points to make your information easy and quick to read. Hiring managers often have hundreds of resumes and cover letters to review. The quicker and easier your resume is to read, the better.

Write strong resume bullets: start each bullet with a strong action verb, use third person rather than first person, and remember to include accomplishment/STAR bullets often.

How can I try to ensure perfection?

Before submitting your resume, carefully proofread it for any spelling or grammatical errors.

- [Writing Services at the U of G Library](#) can be helpful for reviewing materials for spelling/grammar and sentence structure.
- Consider having a friend, mentor, EL Hub Peer Helper, or Career Advisor review your resume to provide feedback.

How do I professionally format my resume?

To develop a resume that is easy to read and professional, follow these guidelines:

- Font is simple, easy to read and consistent (maximum of 2 font types).
 - Body of resume should be between 10 – 12 in font size.
 - Sans Serif fonts are ideal (i.e., Arial, Calibri, Times New Roman, etc.)
 - The font used for your name is not 'too large' in comparison with the rest of the text (2-4 pts larger is fine).

- Headings and names stand out (use bolding, CAPS, and underlining, as preferred)
- Margins at left, right, top and bottom are even. Side margins are no larger than 1.5" and no smaller than 0.5".
- Bolding, italics, underlining, or CAPS are not being overused.
- White space is used well to make the layout appealing.
- Resume is **1-2 pages in length, maximum**. If more than one page in length, the name and page number should be at the top of the second page.
- Text fills at least half of the second page to substantiate its use (e.g., If you only have 3 lines on your second page, change margins to reduce the length to one page).
- Dates, titles, and employers are easy to find quickly. Ideally, dates are right justified for easy scanning. To ensure dates are perfectly lined up and don't move around, use the Tab Stops function in MS Word. Learn how to use tab stops using the following links:
 - [How to right align dates in Word video \(for Mac users\)](#)
 - [How to perfectly align dates on your resume video \(for PC users\)](#)
- Heading titles are meaningful and sections are placed consistently on the page (i.e., lined up in the same margins).
- Items in all sections are listed in reverse chronological order (most recent first).
- Most important information is on the first page of resume.
- Sections are listed in order of importance and relevance.
- All information is relevant to your current job search.
- Acronyms or abbreviations are spelled out at first use.
- Graphics, clip art, or photos are not used.
- Consistent formatting is used throughout the resume (i.e., periods at the end of each bullet (or not), and brackets are used for telephone area codes (or not)).
- Resume looks good printed and in digital form as a PDF file.
- See Appendix #2, below, for a sample resume.

What should I *not* include on a resume?

Below are some things that you should *not* include on a resume.

- **Personal information that could lead to discrimination, such as** your age, gender identity/expression, creed (religion), marital or family status. Under the [Ontario Human Rights Code](#), you have the right to freedom from discrimination on these and other protected grounds.
- **Photos/headshots of you.** This could also lead to discrimination based on some of the grounds mentioned above.
- **Social Insurance or bank account numbers.**

- **References, unless specifically asked for by the employer.** Writing “References Available Upon Request” is optional, but not required, at the end of your resume. References should typically be provided to the employer at the interview.

What else should I know?

When putting together your resume, make sure to consider the following.

- **Be honest:** Never lie or exaggerate on your resume, as this can be grounds for dismissal if discovered later.
- **Keep your resume up to date:** Update it regularly with any new skills, experiences, or achievements.
- **Consider whether you will use a template:** Resume templates may be tempting to use but can often be a pain when editing your resume. Consider creating your own resume template using MS Word for ease of use. For tips on using MS Word for creating a resume, click [here](#). Remember, your resume is your opportunity to make a strong impression on potential employers, so take the time to make it the best it can be. Good luck!
- **Consider using AI to get started but don’t stop there:** AI Programs like [Chat GPT](#) can be helpful and time-saving tools to help you develop a draft resume, but the AI-developed resume should not be your final product. Ensure you revise and rewrite any AI-generated content in your own words, following the resume advice mentioned in this resource.

Appendix 1: Writing Highlights of Qualifications/ Professional Profile

Considered an optional resume section, a Highlights of Qualifications (also known as a Professional Profile, Summary of Qualifications, or Skills Summary) can greatly enhance the effectiveness of your resume. This section offers a quick overview of your most relevant and impressive qualifications for the role, and when done well, entices the employer to read your entire resume.

How do you get started writing?

- Read the job posting. What skills/experiences/qualifications seem to be emphasized most? Decide which ones match your experience, skills and qualifications.
- Choose approximately 5-7 qualifications you want to speak to and begin writing them down.

What is the best format to use?

- Stick to bullet points – they are quicker and easier to read for busy hiring managers.
- The bullets most relevant to the job, and that differentiate you from other applicants, should appear first.
- Try to make your first bullet about the amount and/or type of experience you have relevant to the role.
- Avoid using “I” or “my” pronouns.

How can I ensure my qualifications stand out?

- Use as many keywords from the job posting as possible to effectively connect your background to the job.
- Ensure any qualifications in this section are evidenced in your resume sections below. A common error is mentioning MS Word, PowerPoint & Excel here, yet nowhere else in the resume.
- Use terminology like “enhanced through” “demonstrated through” “proven through” and “illustrated by” to write your Highlights of Qualifications bullets, and signal to the reader which experience(s) provided you with the qualifications you are listing.
 - For example, “Strong presentation and analytical skills enhanced through scientific report writing regarding avian diversity, climate change and air, water, and land pollution.”
- Quantify your qualifications to indicate the extent of your impact at your previous workplace.
 - For example, “Experienced in aseptic lab environments with 1400+ hours of lab work experience.”
- Additional Examples of Strong Highlights of Qualifications Bullets:

- Thorough competence regarding environmental research and data collection, demonstrated through lab and fieldwork activities such as GPS mapping, soil moisture analysis, bird surveys, and yield sampling.
- Supervised 12 direct reports across bakery, front line and food prep areas.
- 4 years of experience in research-based roles, including 2 years specific to climate change.

Additional Resources

Visit the following websites for more information on this topic.

- [What Is a Summary of Qualifications \(With Examples\)](#)
- [What sections are the highlights in your resume?](#)

Appendix 2: Sample Resume

Enviro Student

5 Guelph Street
Guelph, Ontario, N1G 2W1
(123) 456-7891

UofGstudent@hotmail.ca linkedin.com/in/uofgstudent

Summary of Qualifications

- Thorough competence regarding environmental research and data collection, demonstrated through lab and field work activities such as GPS mapping, soil moisture analysis, bird surveys, and yield sampling
- Work proficiently in aseptic lab environments with 1400+ hours of lab work experience
- Attained programming experience in R and Python, as well as GIS experience in ArcGIS
- Strong presentation and analytical skills enhanced through scientific report writing regarding avian diversity, climate change and air, water, and land pollution
- Knowledgeable using the internet, computer spreadsheets, statistical analysis software, and word processing software such as Office, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Access, and Teams
- Valid class “G” Ontario driver’s licence and pleasure craft operator card as of 2017

Education

Bachelor of Science in Environmental Sciences

Sept. 2016 – Dec. 2020

Environmental Sciences major (Co-op)

University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario

- Graduated with Distinction in Dec. 2020 for upholding a cumulative average of 80%+
- Relevant courses: Environmental Data Analysis (R and Python), Limnology of Natural and Polluted Waters, GIS and Spatial Analysis (Arc GIS), Pesticides and the Environment, Plants and Environmental Pollution, Introduction to Canadian Business Management

Work Experience

Agro-Ecosystems Research Assistant

Apr. 2019 – Aug. 2019

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Indian Head, Saskatchewan

- Worked cooperatively to complete many field work tasks efficiently such as GPS mapping, carabid and pollinator trap installation and collection, bird surveys, canola yield sampling, weed surveys, and soil/microbial sampling within a project focusing on canola field boundary habitats
- Processed soil samples within the lab, calculating both wet and dry weight to determine soil moisture while also maintaining a clean and productive work environment for coworkers
- Strengthened leadership and collaboration skills by taking initiative to contribute within work discussions and provide ideas that helped the team plan and execute field work tasks
- Aided field boundary habitat research to understand how they impact prairie agro-ecosystems
- Wrote a work term report regarding avian diversity and abundance within prairie agro-ecosystems and how those changes impact many environmental and economic variables, which included intensive data input (Excel) and statistical analysis (SigmaPlot)

Research Assistant – Doubled Haploid

Jan. 2018 – May 2018 / Sept. 2018 – Dec. 2018

DuPont Pioneer/Corteva Agriscience, Caledon, Ontario

- Aided supervisor in regenerating doubled haploid canola plants through embryo and seedling transfers in order to research various ways of improving canola plants, while maintaining the integrity of the aseptic environments to ensure low contamination rates
- Significantly developed fine motor skills by transferring over 125,000 canola embryos and seedlings via tweezer and hand transfer, requiring a very high attention to detail to ensure company quality and production goals were achieved
- Worked efficiently and cooperatively with coworkers to guarantee aseptic techniques were followed, while ensuring the lab was fully stocked with needed materials
- Fortified data collection and input skills by entering data into a Microsoft Access database daily, to guarantee accurate data traceability for DuPont Pioneer/Corteva Agriscience
- Wrote two work term reports regarding genetically modified organisms and their connection to differing greenhouse gas emissions and the environmental impacts of herbicide-resistant canola

Bakery Assistant/Front-end Attendant/Produce Clerk

Aug. 2014 – Sept. 2017

Neighbourhood Grocery, Cambridge, Ontario

- Packaged and prepared items for public display, while maintaining cleanliness and stock of the store's products to provide the best possible shopping experience for the customers
- Maintained avid knowledge about company/store to answer any guest questions
- Trained new employees on how to operate equipment throughout the department effectively
- Strengthened problem solving and time management proficiencies when faced with difficult decisions under strict time constraints

Volunteer Experience

Environmental Lab Volunteer

Sept. 2019 – Dec. 2019 / Sept. 2020 – Dec. 2020

University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario

- Assisted Master's students with lab tasks such as plant sample grinding, root washing, and identifying and sorting benthic invertebrates under a microscope
- Exemplified time management skills through independently managing workload to fulfill and exceed the deadlines assigned for the position
- Provided innovative ideas to improve the work plan and allow for faster sample processing

Environmental Stewardship Volunteer

Jul. 2014 – Aug. 2014

Riverwood Conservancy, Mississauga, Ontario

- Removed invasive species of plant-life to ensure native species could flourish while also developing an increased knowledge of healthy ecosystems
- Cared for saplings to improve growing conditions
- Shaped team working proficiency by collaborating with others to achieve the assigned duties within the team environment
- Thoroughly advanced leadership attributes by teaching/mentoring other group members on safe and effective practices such as proper form to prevent injury

Appendix 3: Sample Education Section with added Relevant Coursework and Research Experience section

EDUCATION

Honours Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, Minor in Sociology
University of Guelph, Guelph, ON

2017 - Present

Relevant Coursework and Research Experience

Teams, Leadership, and Professional Behaviour (PSYC*2070)

Present

- Led 3-member team in developing a structured interview protocol, designed project outline in Google Docs, delegated tasks and scheduled weekly phone meetings, increasing overall team efficiency and receiving excellent feedback from peers.
- Assisted team leader with organizational case analysis project; tracked team progress over a 4-week period and edited the paper, increasing overall paper quality and enhancing future team interactions.

Personality (PSYC*2740)

Fall 2018

- Led an online team of 10 in establishing achievable project goals, facilitating communication between team members and the successful attainment of 5 project deadlines.
- Methodically conducted extensive literature reviews on personality theories using PsycNet and Primo, summarizing findings in weekly discussion posts for debate and critical analysis.