



# Career Preparation

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RESUME – THE CONTENTS

Conventional wisdom says it's deceptively simple to write your résumé:

- Figure out your objective,
- List your college degree,
- Jot down the jobs you've had,
- Put some bullet points with “action words” under each job,
- and slap “references available upon request” at the bottom.

Wrong, wrong, wrong!

Remember that you're selling yourself.  
Your résumé is your most important selling tool.

# Before You Write Your Résumé...

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## **Prepare to Write More Than One Résumé**

You're writing the base from which you'll create specialized résumés for each job you apply for.

If you're applying to more than one job, you need to have more than one résumé.

*Different jobs and different companies all have different requirements.*

A résumé must speak to its specific audience. tailored both for the company you're applying to and for the specific job you're looking to do.

# Before You Write Your Résumé...

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## **Prepare to Write More Than One Résumé**

The details of the position will also dictate how your résumé looks.

If the job ad states that you need to have a PhilNITS Fundamentals of IT Engineers Exam (PhilNITS Level 2) certification, then you'd better put the details of your PhilNITS near the top of the résumé.

# Before You Write Your Résumé...

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## **Don't Fear the Résumé Police**

*Resume Police do not exists.* There's no law that says you must have certain sections, in a certain order, although there are certain conventions followed and certain sorts of information that people will expect to be able to find on your résumé.

*There's no one right way to write a résumé.*

# Writing a Résumé Is Not Speedy

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Writing a resume is a long process.

- You're not going to write a good résumé in one sitting.
- You're not going to assemble a good portfolio of your work all at once.
- You're not going to make a list of what you're looking for in a job in one sitting.

They may take days, with an initial burst of activity, and a week or two of updates as you think more about it.

# Writing a Résumé Is Not Speedy

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Start writing your résumé immediately, if you don't have one already, but come back to it frequently.

Tend to your base résumé like a garden, planting new items and removing old items, as you think of them.

Take notes of what you see around you in your job search.

*Are certain buzzwords more popular in ads?*

# The Sections of Your Résumé

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Even though there's no one right way to do a résumé, the résumé reader will expect there to be certain information about you.

*Therefore, your résumé should contain, at minimum, the following sections:*

- *Contact block*
- *Professional summary*
- *Work experience*
- *Education*
- *Other achievements outside of work (optional, if your work experience is thin)*
- *List of buzzwords and skills*



# The Sections of Your Résumé

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The order of sections in your résumé should be determined by their relative importance.

The most important text in your résumé is your contact information, so that is always first.

After that, you'll have a professional summary that lets the reader see you in a nutshell.

Let's look at each of these sections in depth.

# The Sections of Your Résumé

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## The Contact Block

The contact block usually doesn't get much thought, but it's the most important part of the résumé.

At the very least, the top of your résumé needs to have your

- Name
- Email address
- Phone number
- Street address

If you want to list two phone numbers,

- One landline
- One cellphone

# The Sections of Your Résumé

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## The Professional Summary

An “elevator pitch” is a high-level overview of something such that you could explain it to someone during a ride in an elevator.

*I have twelve years of software development experience, eight of them in your industry. I’ve led teams before, from three to eight members. I’m an expert in Perl and have written seven modules for the CPAN. And, I’ve had a couple of articles published in magazines like Dr. Dobbs and The Perl Journal.*

Turn this scenario into printed words on a résumé, and you have your professional summary at the top of your résumé.

*No one will read your résumé word for word unless he’s given a reason to do so.*

# The Sections of Your Résumé

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## **The Professional Summary**

You may get only 20 seconds of skim time to make an impression on the person reading your résumé before she moves on to the next one.

*Time is critical*

Note how everything you said in your elevator pitch was a demonstrable and quantifiable achievement and entirely free of fluff.

At no point would you say, “I’m a hard worker, sir!”

# The Sections of Your Résumé

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## **The Professional Summary**

For a quick way to write your summary, start with three or four bullet points:

- Summary of experience
- Two or three different points of expertise
- College degrees and/or certifications, if they significantly add to your appeal

# The Sections of Your Résumé

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**Summary of Experience** Probably the most important item to get out in front of the hiring manager is your level of experience, expressed in years of work, or months if fewer than two years.

- 3 years of Solaris system administration for a Fortune 500 company
- 7 years software development in C/C++ writing library automation software
- 5 years of user interface design

The specific wording of these bullets may change depending on the target of your résumé.

# The Sections of Your Résumé

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Hiring managers will tend to hire people familiar with the specific situation being hired for. Here are some other examples of similarities you may be able to draw attention to:

- Tools used
- Industry worked in
- Types of users supported (Artists? Accountants? Executives?)
- Geographic area worked
- Size of company
- Size of department
- Size of team

# The Sections of Your Résumé

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**Main Expertise.** Your expertise is where you explain your top technical skills, quantifiably if possible.

- Extensive work with Ruby, including two years of Rails
- Expert Solaris sysadmin, supporting more than 200 workstations
- Managed work teams of 3 to 8 developers and testers
- 3 years experience writing 100-to-300-page manuals with FrameMaker
- Tested software on platforms from Red Hat Linux to Mac OS X to Windows XP
- Taught more than 10 different training classes to groups of up to 100 students



# The Sections of Your Résumé

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**Other Expertise.** You may have other areas of expertise that are worth mentioning, maybe only for a specific target.

- Fluent in Spanish, including some error message translation
- Active in open source development, including acting as Perl 6 project manager
- Extensive experience with gravel pit management software

# The Sections of Your Résumé

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What if you're fresh out of school and don't have professional experience?

Turn your school or hobby experience into summary bullet points, and add one bullet for the direction you'd like to go.

- Recent graduate of Harvard University, computer science major, with 3.43 GPA
- 2 years of work on open source projects, including Perl 6 and Ruby on Rails
- Frequent leader of class projects, from 2 to 6 students
- Looking to work for a small startup or with music and audio recording

# The Sections of Your Résumé

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## **Work Experience**

The work experience should be the largest part of your résumé, unless you've never had a relevant job before.

Here's the rough outline form of your work experience section.

# The Sections of Your Résumé

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## **Conglomerated Frobbitz, Inc., Lincoln, NE (2005-present)**

CFI is a leading distributor of replacement parts for widgetrons.

### *Lead software architect (2007-present)*

- Led team of five creating framework for testing of software.

This framework became the standard testing tool for CFI, testing more than 6M lines of code daily.

- Established requirements for...

...

### *Programmer (2005-2007)*

- Coded and testing widgetron design software in Java as part of team of 7.
- Built command-line tools to....

# The Sections of Your Résumé

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## **Feed Lot Solutions, Milford, NE (2004-2005)**

FLS produces farm management software for feed lots in the US, Canada, and Australia.

### *Programmer*

- Designed forms and coded business in Visual Basic for core product, CowTracker Plus
- Instituted bug tracking software to replace ad hoc Excel spreadsheets that FLS had been using

....

# The Sections of Your Résumé

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## **Southeast Community College, Milford, NE (2002-2004)**

### *Computer lab assistant*

- Answered technical questions about...
- Helped first-year programming students with...

# The Sections of Your Résumé

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**Company Name.** If the company is a large one, specify a branch or division to let the reader have some idea of what your work group did.

If the company is unlikely to be familiar with the reader, then it's nice to include a short description of the company to give a flavor to your background.

**Employment Date.** List the dates of employment for the position, but don't waste space by including the months.

Certainly don't say why you left the position on the résumé.

# The Sections of Your Résumé

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**Accomplishments.** The bullets underneath each company tell what you accomplished at the company. Start by explaining what position you held at the company.

If you've held two radically different positions at a company, don't try to combine them into one section. Repeat this section for each position.

*Highlight advancement by listing different positions.*



# The Sections of Your Résumé

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Your bullet list for the position should give interesting, useful information about the work you performed and benefits that you brought to the company.

Don't say "I did this, I did that," because the reader knows who the subject of the sentence is.

Note how the bullets in the example go from the general to the specific, from the most important to the least important.

Each bullet uses an active verb to describe what was done. You say you "provided support," not "was the help desk guy."

# The Sections of Your Résumé

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Coming up with your bullets is the toughest part of the entire résumé process. We recommend that you start it early; just scribble ideas on a sheet of paper that you carry with you.

Focus on the details of the work, getting as specific as possible. Details include numbers. If you can quantify some value that comes from the work you did, it gives weight to the value that provided.

# The Sections of Your Résumé

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Here are some examples:

- Increased traffic to website 50% over six months by (and list the actions you took to make it happen)
- Led teams of four to six programmers
- Created new task tracking system that reduced schedule creep by 40%
- Installed new routers that increased throughput 25%, virtually eliminating the 20% of help desk calls related to network responsiveness
- Reduced open ticket backlog from 500 to 20 in three months.
- Refactored codebase to take advantage of standard C++ libraries, reducing total LOC from 100,000 to 70,000

# The Sections of Your Résumé

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*Quantifiable claims are powerful.*

Quantifiable claims are of particular interest to an interviewer and will likely be discussed in the interview.

But what if you don't know the numbers? Then you'll have to do without but with much less impact. Take this opportunity now to remember to update your résumé with metrics like this as often as possible.

# The Sections of Your Résumé

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## Education

The basics of the “Education” section are to show the names of the institutions of higher education you’ve attended and the degrees received at each.

Employers assume you’ve completed high school, so you need not specify that you have, or have not, done so.

Other forms of education may be relevant as well. Perhaps you took a weeklong training class in systems administration.

However, if it was part of your certification process, put it in your “Certifications” section

# The Sections of Your Résumé

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## Certifications

Certifications can be an efficient, accepted way of showing that you've achieved a level of proficiency in your chosen area, or they can be useless noise.

The key is for you to know the difference.

In some areas, like Microsoft-heavy shops, having certification as a Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer (MCSE), carries a lot of weight, if not actually being a hiring requirement.

If you're hiring for a sysadmin in a Windows shop, it probably makes sense to put a "Certifications" section above your "Education" section and maybe even your "Professional Experience" section.

# The Sections of Your Résumé

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Finally, some certifications don't carry much weight at all.

For example, there are no generally accepted certifications for Perl programmers. Nonetheless, I'll see people cite having been certified as *scoring 92 percent in Perl at SomeTestingSite.com*

Make sure you can back up your certifications and education. If you're going to make claims about yourself with certifications, make sure you understand what you're claiming. If not, leave it out

# The Sections of Your Résumé

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## Honors, Awards, Activities, and Memberships

A section on awards and honors can be a great way to highlight some of your achievements.

Professional awards may include an honor bestowed by an organization, such as the *SourceForge Community Choice Awards* for outstanding open source software or one given by your company.

Don't list an award unless it is special and meaningful. If the Leadership in Action award is given to only three people in the 10,000-person corporation, then it's quite an honor.



# The Sections of Your Résumé

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Academic examples include making the dean's list or being awarded a scholarship. List the year or years in which the honor was awarded.

## *Example:*

### *Awards*

- *Dean's List, 2002–2003*
- *Microracle Technical Scholarship, 2005*

### *Honors*

- *White Camel award, The Perl Foundation, 2005 One of 3 given for outstanding service to the Perl community*

# The Sections of Your Résumé

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## Other Achievements

*List outside achievements only if your work experience is weak.*

If you do decide to list achievements, then remember that you are showing “achievements,” not “things I like to do.”

# The Sections of Your Résumé

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Here are some ideas to get you thinking how to present them.

Instead of...	Say This...
I like painting.	Self-taught painter with oils and watercolors. My piece “Night In a Cave” won third place in the 2004 Boston Cavalcade of the Arts.
I like playing chess.	I’m an avid chess player. When I left Stanford in 2002, I was the fifth-ranked player in the All-Campus Chess League.
I like rock climbing.	Rock climbing is a passion. The group I helped organize, Flatlander Rock Climbers, is going on our first expedition to the Painted Desert in Arizona in March 2010.
I play banjo.	I’ve played banjo since I was eight. I play with the local Dixieland band Fireball Eight, where we play McHenry Fiesta Days each year.

# The Sections of Your Résumé

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## **Buzzwords and Skills**

Somewhere near the bottom of your résumé, include a section of a list of skills and buzzwords that you know.

This list exists only to appease automated keyword checkers and human résumé screeners unfamiliar with your area of expertise.

For example:

- Perl: CPAN modules, DBI, Mason
- Databases: Oracle, SQL

# The Sections of Your Résumé

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## Can You Have Other Sections?

Absolutely! The Résumé Police will not be knocking on the door if you add something outside the standard sections.

Andy Lester's resume contains additional sections like *Publishing*, *Open Source*, *Presentations & Papers*.

Give the reader something interesting to remember from your résumé.

Maybe about a section called “Why I Love Programming,” listing your top five bullets about what you love about your profession?

# The Sections of Your Résumé

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## What Order Should the Sections Go In?

Put the most important and impressive section as the first section after your summary.

Is your education the best part of your background? Put that up first. If instead your work experience is your strongest asset, then put that up first.

# What to Leave Out of Your Résumé

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Here's a partial list of what to leave out.

**Anything You Can't Be Asked in an Interview** There are topics that U.S. law prevents an employer from asking you about in an interview, such as religious affiliations and national origin.

**Photo** In many European countries, it's common to attach a small photo of yourself to your résumé. In the United States, don't do it. Unless you're applying to be a model, it's not a job qualification.

**An Objective** An objective is the worst thing to have at the top of your résumé. The objective belongs in your cover letter and is redundant to the rest of the résumé.

# What to Leave Out of Your Résumé

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Here's a sample objective from someone who thinks they need an objective but no idea why:

*OBJECTIVE: To acquire a challenging position in the field of information technology and to contribute my skills to business development.*

This objective says mostly nothing, and what it does say is self-serving.

The very word *objective* says, “This is what I want,” rather than how the applicant can help the company.

Everyone wants a “challenging position,” and it's obvious it's “in the field of information technology” if you're applying for an IT job.

It's so vague it sounds like the writer will take any job in IT.



# What to Leave Out of Your Résumé

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**Lists of Hobbies and Interests** If you feel that your hobbies are somehow related to the job then create a section on your résumé for non-work-related achievements. Simply listing your hobbies is not useful.

**“References Available Upon Request”** Every hiring manager assumes that you’ll have some references to provide when the time comes in the hiring process

**Irrelevant Work Experience** Listing your work experience in McDonalds doesn’t help you as a programmer, so leave it off your resume.

The only reason to put unrelated work experience on your résumé is if you’re just starting out and it’s your only work experience.

# Moving to Construction

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By now, you should have a good idea of what you'll be including in your base résumé. You've identified what you'll be listing in each of the major sections of your résumé, and you should have some idea of how they support each other.

With all the building blocks of your résumé at hand, move forward to résumé construction.