

# RESUME BEST PRACTICES



Get tips for how to optimize your resume to grab potential employers' attention—along with insights into which sections to include.

SUCCESS®



## A successful job application has many components.

These include a strong interview presence, a versatile LinkedIn portfolio and a targeted cover letter. Without a doubt, though, one of the most important aspects is your resume. Even if it has a beautiful template and well-crafted bullet points about your achievements, it's worth reviewing your resume.

Read on for strategies to optimize your resume. Learn which skills to highlight and whether you should include volunteer experience or social media links. Plus, gain perspective from HR leaders on the merits and pitfalls of using ChatGPT to craft your resume.

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# HOW TO POLISH YOUR RESUME

When it comes to your resume, you can tinker for hours with fonts and the margin size. But at some point, these adjustments become far too tedious. If you're looking to polish your resume to grab an employer's attention, try following these tips:

## Prove it!

Data speaks louder than subjective summaries of your work. Try using numbers to quantify how well you did at something, recommends Tramelle D. Jones, a career coach with TDJ Consulting.

"A great example of this would be, instead of stating that you took calls at the front desk, explaining that you fielded 250 calls each week as the first point of contact for the organization," Jones says. This is more impressive and communicates how well-equipped you are to take on a task. It also helps future employers see how well you expect to be compensated.

## Pay attention to the top

Just as you skim and scan news stories, briefs and other documents, so do employers. Jones says make sure your best accomplishments are front and center—at the top of the resume. Don't send them on a "treasure hunt" to find the most important hidden gems about you, she says.

Don't forget to compile your best attributes or key takeaways in a summary section at the top.

## Reconsider what an employer (not you) cares about most

Sure, you won a company award that's been sitting on your shelf proudly—great job! But does that award align with the job you would be doing at the new company? If not, it's time to look at your resume with fresh eyes. It's as if you are that employer scanning for specifics that prove you are the best fit.

"Maybe it's too niche to the organization or an industry, but the item doesn't have broad significance. Instead, applicants should make sure that every point on their resume directly aligns with the needs of the employer," says Cristin Downs, a New York City-based executive coach who specializes in career pivots.

Research 10-12 job postings in your preferred role to see what matters, Downs says. Focus on job duties, skills, qualifications, personal qualities and necessary software. "Include what they care about and remove everything else. You want them to scan your resume and say, 'Yes, yes, yes, OK, bring her in,'" she says.

## Convince them you are results oriented

Answer these three questions in your resume to substantiate that being on their team will mean results, Downs says:

- 1. Did you increase something positive?**  
This might be the number of leads or applications, calls returned in a day or a week, client upsells, etc.
- 2. Did you decrease something negative?**  
Examples of this include missed appointments, negative Google reviews, client cancellations, etc.
- 3. Did you improve a process that resulted in a clear desired outcome?** An example would be adjusting a communication plan that resulted in increased participation or engagement.



# HARD AND SOFT SKILLS ON YOUR RESUME

## (AND WHY THEY BOTH MATTER)

For nearly every job, employers are looking for candidates with both hard and soft skills. To step back, let's define these two types of skills:



### HARD SKILLS ARE MEASURABLE.

They're the specific, technical abilities that empower workers to perform their job duties effectively. You'll acquire these skills through education, training and experience. You can even quantify these job-specific competencies using test scores, certifications and project outcomes. Some examples of hard skills include: SEO/SEM, hazardous waste disposal and aviation mechanics.

### SOFT SKILLS ARE FUNDAMENTALLY SOCIAL.

They include aspects of emotional intelligence that apply across various fields or professions. Soft skills foster positive relationships and enhance group dynamics in both the workplace and in personal life. The universal nature of soft skills means they are as important to a cybersecurity team as they are to a marketing or PR department. Examples of soft skills are time management, empathy and listening.

As you can see, employers will look for candidates who have an array of skills, including both hard and soft ones. But depending on the role you're applying for, you may want to emphasize some skills more than others. For instance, if you're applying for a role in IT, you'll want to let employers know right away about your certifications. If you're applying for a role in communications, your listening skills may be more of a focus.

### Highlight Hard and Soft Skills on Your Resume

Including both hard and soft skills in your resume is crucial for presenting yourself as a well-rounded candidate. Listing hard skills shows that you are an experienced expert in your field. Including soft skills calls attention to your teamwork, people skills and potential as a leader.

The key is that you'll want to emphasize these skills in different spots.

For hard skills, list specific technical abilities and certifications relevant to the job. Think software proficiency, languages or technical capabilities. Do this within your job experience description or in a dedicated skills section.

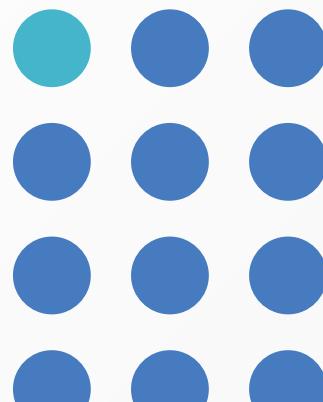
Soft skills, on the other hand, should be woven into your summary statement and within your experience bullet points. Use action verbs to describe how your communication, teamwork and leadership abilities positively impacted specific outcomes.

# 50 Examples of Soft Skills Employers Desire in Employees



1. **Emotional intelligence.** Growth in emotional intelligence, or EQ, helps individuals to recognize and manage their emotions effectively. This leads to better self-regulation and reduced stress.
2. **Empathy.** Empathy allows you to better understand and connect with others at a more personal level. It involves recognizing others' feelings, which can improve teamwork and streamline conflict resolution.
3. **Communication.** Effective communication is crucial for conveying ideas, resolving issues and building relationships. This holds true within a department, across teams and with clients. It requires both active listening and measured expression.
4. **Adaptability.** Adaptability aids in transitioning well amid change and embracing challenges as fresh opportunities. It's a crucial component in developing a growth mindset.
5. **Problem-solving.** Problem-solving skills help with analyzing complex issues, identifying solutions and making informed decisions. These skills ultimately lead to resolution.
6. **Creativity.** Creativity fosters innovation and novel ideas. These are essential to staying ahead as new technologies and markets emerge. As a creative thinker, you can resolve an issue through problem-solving. Not to mention you can also find more efficient means to that end.
7. **Stress management.** Managing stress is crucial for maintaining mental and physical well-being. It includes tactics to help you remain focused and motivated all while preventing burnout.
8. **Resilience.** Resilience helps people bounce back from setbacks and maintain a positive attitude. This skill is crucial for maintaining mental health and well-being.
9. **Conflict resolution.** Conflict resolution skills help you manage disagreements and reach mutually beneficial solutions. They enhance team cohesion, reduce workplace drama and assist with client disputes.
10. **Cultural sensitivity.** This skill is essential within any team or organization to respect diverse perspectives and foster inclusivity.
11. **Time management.** Efficiently managing time helps individuals prioritize tasks, meet deadlines and reduce stress.
12. **Leadership.** Effective communication, adaptability, problem-solving and other soft skills do not exist in isolation. They merge within you, making you a stronger, more influential leader.
13. **Teamwork.** Teamwork involves collaboration, respecting diverse opinions and working toward a common goal.
14. **Critical thinking.** Critical thinking involves analyzing information objectively and making reasoned judgments. It is essential for problem-solving and decision-making.
15. **Networking.** Effective networking requires good communication, empathy and social skills.
16. **Negotiation.** Negotiation skills are important for reaching agreements and resolving disputes. They involve communication, empathy and problem-solving.
17. **Work ethic.** Employees with a strong work ethic are seen as dependable and valuable. This skill calls for dedication, reliability and a commitment to quality. It also requires punctuality, time management and a proactive attitude.
18. **Patience.** Patience is the ability to stay calm and composed in stressful situations. It is crucial for conflict resolution and effective communication.
19. **Active listening.** Active listening involves fully concentrating, understanding, responding and remembering what is being said. It is essential for effective communication and building relationships.
20. **Persuasion.** This is the ability to convince others to see things your way. It requires good communication, empathy and emotional intelligence.
21. **Attention to detail.** This skill involves being thorough and accurate in your work. It is important for maximizing quality and preventing errors.
22. **Interpersonal skills.** Interpersonal skills involve interacting effectively with others. They include communication, empathy and conflict resolution.
23. **Open-mindedness.** Open-mindedness involves a willingness to consider new ideas or perspectives. It is crucial for creativity and problem-solving.
24. **Decision-making.** Decision-making skills involve evaluating information and making choices that lead to desired outcomes. They require critical thinking and problem-solving.

- 25. Self-motivation.** Self-motivation is the ability to take initiative and drive yourself to achieve goals. It is important for productivity and career advancement.
- 26. Delegation.** Delegation involves assigning tasks to others and trusting them to complete them. It is important for leadership and time management.
- 27. Integrity.** Integrity involves being honest and having strong moral principles. It is essential for building trust and credibility.
- 28. Public speaking.** Public speaking involves presenting information clearly and confidently to an audience. It is important for leadership and communication.
- 29. Mentoring.** Mentoring involves guiding and supporting others in their personal and professional development. It requires empathy, communication and leadership.
- 30. Flexibility.** Flexibility involves being open to change and willing to adapt. It is important for managing unexpected challenges.
- 31. Customer service.** Customer service skills involve meeting the needs and expectations of customers. They require communication, empathy and problem-solving.
- 32. Collaboration.** Collaboration involves working together with others to achieve common goals. It requires teamwork, communication and conflict resolution.
- 33. Self-confidence.** Self-confidence requires believing in your abilities and decisions. It is essential for taking on new challenges and accepting leadership roles.
- 34. Conflict management.** Conflict management involves handling and resolving conflicts constructively. It requires communication, empathy and problem-solving.
- 35. Perseverance.** Perseverance involves continuing to work toward goals despite challenges and setbacks. It is crucial for achieving long-term success.
- 36. Positive attitude.** A positive attitude requires maintaining an optimistic outlook and focusing on solutions. It is important for motivation and team morale.
- 37. Work-life balance.** Work-life balance involves managing your professional and personal responsibilities effectively. It is important for well-being and productivity.
- 38. Initiative.** Initiative involves taking action without being prompted. It is important for productivity and career advancement.
- 39. Self-awareness.** Self-awareness involves understanding your strengths and weaknesses and how others perceive you. It is crucial for personal development and effective communication.
- 40. Humor.** Humor involves using comedy to build rapport and ease tension. It is important for building relationships and managing stress.
- 41. Trustworthiness.** Trustworthiness involves being reliable and dependable. It is essential for building trust and credibility.
- 42. Assertiveness.** Assertiveness involves expressing your needs and opinions confidently and respectfully. It is important for communication and conflict resolution.
- 43. Gratitude.** Gratitude involves appreciating and acknowledging others' contributions. It is important for building positive relationships and team morale.
- 44. Vision.** Vision involves seeing the big picture and planning for the future. It is crucial for leadership and strategic planning.
- 45. Mindfulness.** Mindfulness involves being fully present and engaged in the current moment. It is important for focus and stress management.
- 46. Self-discipline.** Self-discipline involves controlling your behavior and actions to achieve goals. It is crucial for productivity and personal development.
- 47. Risk management.** Risk management involves identifying, assessing and mitigating risks. It is important for decision-making and strategic planning.
- 48. Learning agility.** Learning agility involves being able to learn and adapt quickly. It is crucial for staying relevant in a rapidly changing world.
- 49. Optimism.** Optimism involves maintaining a hopeful and positive outlook. It is important for motivation and resilience.
- 50. Accountability.** Accountability involves taking responsibility for your actions and their outcomes. It is essential for building trust and credibility.



# WHAT ABOUT VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

There may be many reasons why you volunteer, from supporting a cause you believe in to giving back to your community. But since the space on your resume is quite limited, don't default to including it on the document. Only include volunteer experience if it'll help you stand out from other candidates or display distinct skills.

Follow these guidelines to determine if you should include volunteer experience.

## List volunteer work on your resume if:

- You have limited work experience.
- You have a mid-career gap, and your volunteer work is relevant to the job you're applying for.
- You want to switch careers and you gained relevant skills through volunteer work.
- The company you are applying for emphasizes giving back to the community as part of its corporate identity.
- The volunteer work is specifically related to the position you are applying for.
- You have a blank space on your resume and can fill it with achievements from your volunteer work.

## Hold off on including volunteer work on your resume if:

- You have more relevant paid experience that will fill your resume.
- The volunteering occurred over a decade ago.
- Your volunteer experience contradicts the employer's core values or culture.





# WEIGHING WHETHER TO ADD SOCIAL MEDIA LINKS TO YOUR RESUME

Today some Generation Zers are using social media to set them apart from other candidates. They're using it as a way to introduce themselves and their talents to future employers. Sometimes they even use social media to create their resumes. In fact, not having social media or lacking an online presence might hurt your chances of landing the position you're vying for.

Experts weigh in on the pros, cons, do's and don'ts of displaying social media more prominently on your resume:

## 'Carefully curated' narratives to show to future employers

According to Christy Pruitt-Haynes, founder and CEO of Christy Pruitt-Haynes Consulting, many employers prefer candidates who are readily visible online.

"Many talent acquisition professionals search for social media profiles of applicants. Sharing the links proactively lets them know that you are comfortable with them searching and, most importantly, gives the candidate a free and easy way to share carefully curated profiles that demonstrate their personality, skills and interests," Pruitt-Haynes says, with an emphasis on "carefully curated."

While you don't have to change who you are, be mindful that future employers might be looking through your public accounts. Ensure you understand the potential ramifications that your posts can have toward your career.

## It takes into account recruiters' habits

Recruiters are naturally apt to scroll social media like the rest of us, Pruitt-Haynes says. So why not capitalize on that tendency?

"Most of us are used to spending hours on social media, going down a rabbit hole to learn more about a person. That natural curiosity creates the perfect opportunity for a candidate to share additional information with potential employers and craft the story that is most advantageous to them," she says.

## But it's OK to keep some accounts to yourself

Maybe Instagram is your own space to be yourself. Perhaps Facebook has too many personal and family pictures to share with your employer. That's OK, says Kristy McCann Flynn, the co-founder and CEO of SkillCycle, who has decades of experience as an HR leader.

"LinkedIn is expected. It's essentially a digital supplement to a resume and helps companies and hiring managers get to know candidates as people and potential co-workers in a professional setting," she says. "Everything else? No. A healthy work-life balance is essential to a positive work environment, so it's good to establish boundaries between your personal and professional life."

McCann Flynn finds scrolling through candidates' social media to be a "waste of time" compared to targeted questions on competencies and goals, with examples and storytelling.

### **It depends on your industry and the potential job opportunity**

Not all fields lend themselves to dedicating a whole section of a resume to social media accounts, according to Kathryn Boudreau, digital product and human resources manager at Caller Smart. "Apart from including your LinkedIn profile in your resume, which is a bare necessity these days, sharing any other links... truly depends on the type of position and the industry you are applying for," she says.

For example, David Matheny, a brand and digital media manager, includes "professional facing" social media accounts on resumes and cover letters. He's not sure if it's helped or hurt his chances during his time as a job-seeker.

"I have professional-facing social media accounts that I use for professional networking, development, applying, etc.... and then I have separate personal accounts that I use a private email for and don't publish anything that anyone could connect back to me personally," he adds.

In quite the opposite field, Imani Maatuka, a commercial litigation managing associate at Sidley Austin LLP, also has used social media to prove competency in her field too. "An attorney's ability to use LinkedIn effectively is indicative of their ability to strengthen connections and stay engaged with clients. Social media has always been a powerful business development tool, and the pandemic has only driven more of our professional activities and communications online."

### **Deciding whether to include social media on your resume**

Boudreau suggests the following guidelines:

- If you are active on X or LinkedIn and engaged with content related to your industry, share your social media.
- Personal Facebook profile links or X links that don't align with your relevant professional content are a "strict no-no."
- Instagram or YouTube links that show your professional work, work samples, personal websites or blogs are helpful.

She warns not to overwhelm your resume—and, therefore, recruiters—with too many links. "This can cause a negative impression, so limiting your resume to a maximum of 1-2 social media profiles and a maximum of 2-3 links is optimal."

### **The social media presence that moved a candidate from the 'no' to 'yes' pile**

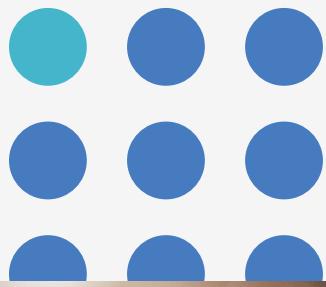
Jessica Munday, co-founder and head of HR at Custom Neon, recalls a junior position candidate whose resume "wasn't very comprehensive." But, when Munday checked out the candidate's Facebook profile included on her resume, she changed her mind. Munday moved her from the "no" to the "yes" pile based on what she found.

"She had shared some great posts of things that she had done and projects she was involved in. I could see from her posts that she actually had some great experiences in her previous role, which hadn't been so apparent on her resume. That was enough to invite her for an interview," she says. "People aren't always great at selling themselves, but with a little extra digging you may just find a diamond in the rough."

# How to Overhaul Your LinkedIn Profile

Try these strategies to optimize your LinkedIn profile so it's set to impress potential employers.

- **Tell the same story on your profile and your resume.** Make sure your education, credentials, organizations and more match with your resume.
- **Change the narrative if you are changing industries.** If you are seeking a different type of job or switching industries, your LinkedIn page shouldn't reflect your former industry.
- **Integrate visuals.** There's a reason employers might head to LinkedIn when they've already seen your resume: They want more proof that you are a fit. Visuals are the perfect way to give them this. Instead of reading about you leading a team or presentation, maybe they see a picture or video of this. Perhaps there's even a testimonial from someone in a visually appealing format.
- **Use AI as a starting point, but not in place of your own ideas.** It's tempting to just drop a job description into ChatGPT and let it do the work for you when you are working on your LinkedIn profile. But make this only as a first draft, and make sure that what's displayed on your profile is in your own voice.
- **Jump into industry conversation around innovation.** It's time to get chatty with other industry members in the field you want to pursue. If you are sharing and commenting on the newest innovations in that field, you will look more involved and valuable to employers.
- **Say cheese.** It's probably time for a new headshot. You can access free headshots at some college career centers or ask a friend who has some photography experience. Alternatively, you can pay for a professional photoshoot.
- **Fill out every section.** This isn't the time to skimp on completing each section. Use each section available to showcase your professional experience, and also humanize yourself.



# HOW TO USE AI TO IMPROVE YOUR RESUME (AND WHAT NOT TO DO)

ChatGPT and other AI-based software are now part of many people's everyday lives, helping people make menus, craft presentations and do many other tasks. During the job hunt, applicants use AI tools to create cover letters, resumes and even entire applications.

These efforts may be successful too.

A February 2023 survey from Resume Builder showed that 78% of participants "got an interview after applying for a job using a resume and/or cover letter written by ChatGPT," and 59% of participants got the job. In addition, 7 in 10 reported a higher response rate from companies than usual.

However, not all HR teams are pro-ChatGPT. Of those 1,000 participants, 11% reported being denied a job when the interviewer "was aware they used ChatGPT to write their application materials."

So the question of whether to use ChatGPT—or similar AI tools—is complex. Here's what to keep in mind:

## HR leaders have different perspectives

While some think using ChatGPT is working smarter, not harder, not everyone would agree. In fact, some leaders use software to flag applicants who have created application materials with ChatGPT.

"ChatGPT and similar tools are for the most part, at best, a reflection of its users. If you don't trust yourself enough to do the work, then you shouldn't trust a machine either. It is a reflection of us," says McCann Flynn. "If we as humans do not have the skill base, nor will the technology. Our job is constant skilling, and when this occurs, AI and things like this are an enablement instead of a replacement." Therefore, applicants should be aware that the act of using ChatGPT could make HR leaders and future employers wary of their ability to complete a strong resume on their own, a basic skill for employment.

But some leaders see it as unethical to flag ChatGPT-generated resumes, such as Shayna Royal, director of recruiting and recruiting operations at Paycor. "I don't think we have the ability to, nor should we, ban any kind of resume. If someone wishes to apply, that's their choice and it's up to us as subject matter experts to determine whether an interview should happen," she says. "If a

candidate wants to leverage AI to improve their application, the process itself will ultimately show whether it was worth it. That candidate has to choose whether that's a risk they want to take or not."

## Tips on using ChatGPT for resumes and cover letters

Have you decided using ChatGPT for your resume and cover letter is worth risking your application being flagged? Here's what experts say to keep in mind:

**Give your ChatGPT resume a personal touch.** Provide work history, accomplishments and more so that it gives a template that works best for your needs, suggests Logan Mallory, VP of marketing at Plooto. "Then, read it. Edit it. Make personalized adjustments. Don't just take it fresh off the press and hand it to the nearest hiring manager. Make sure that the content you're handing out is accurate, personal and uniquely yours," he says.

**Use it for your cover letter instead of your resume.** Matthew Warzel, chief resume writer at MJW Careers, LLC, writes in his blog that ChatGPT is more suited to cover letter writing than resumes. "Your resume is like a Lego set. Every build is different from the other sets. You are using the same blocks and colors as other sets, but each set comes with its own instructions, amounts of Lego block types and free rein as to how you want to tackle the build," he writes. Instead, try it first with your cover letter. "I can see ChatGPT taking that over unless of course, you want to invest in having a more in-depth cover letter that maybe shows why you are a pain point resolver." Overall, the cover letter is a bit lower stakes than the resume.

**Your resume might look like others.** Finally, keep in mind that 2,000 other applicants might be looking to ChatGPT too, making your resume less likely to stand out, Royal says.

**ChatGPT doubts its own abilities with resumes.** Warzel jokes in his blog that when he asked ChatGPT, "Why won't ChatGPT take over resume writing?" the program itself doubted its abilities for three reasons, the first being: "Creating a good resume is not just about following a set of rules or templates. It requires understanding the job seeker's specific skills, experience and career objectives and presenting that information in a way that effectively highlights their strengths and accomplishments. This requires a level of personalization and nuance that an AI may not be able to fully capture."



# BOTTOM LINE

Your resume plays a big role in helping you land a job interview. And recruiters and hiring managers will refer to it during interviews and conversations about your candidacy. So it's worth spending the time to develop and refine a resume that reflects your experience, skills and what makes you a standout candidate.

With the guidelines from this e-book, you can spruce up and optimize your resume, including impactful information (and leaving off anything extraneous) that can impress hiring managers and recruiters.