

## CONCEPT

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# Résumés

## Choosing your structure and content

When you apply for a job, you will most likely submit a résumé along with your job letter. A résumé, sometimes called a curriculum vitae or CV, is a summary of your education, work experience, and accomplishments. Employers use résumés to decide whether to interview you for a job, and proposal reviewers use résumés to decide whether you are qualified to do the proposed work. Therefore, in your résumé, you should highlight those attributes most relevant to your particular audience.

Reviewers often read résumés in less than a minute; therefore, structure your résumé so that your outstanding characteristics are easy to see. Be sure to include specific phrases that match the terms listed in the job ad. Doing so shows the reader that you understand what the position involves and have tailored your application to meet its requirements.

If possible, keep your résumé to one page. If, however, you have several publications or a great deal of relevant work experience, you may have to use two pages. A standard résumé typically includes multiple sections, as illustrated in the example to the right.



## Writing a career objective

As illustrated on the previous screen, after your personal data, your career objective is the first section readers will see on your résumé. Your objective should offer a succinct, specific statement indicating what field of work you are seeking. Avoid clichés, wordiness, jargon, and inflated prose.

The following is an example of a poorly crafted career objective:

**Objective:** To use the impressive experimental and analytical skills I honed and developed through numerous courses in biochemistry and my own research to improve the water quality of our nation's system of lakes. To bring my proven team-building skills to bear in a competitive environment that will reward my leadership and vision.

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This example is problematic because it is full of redundant phrases like "honed and developed" and other boastful, broad statements about ability like "my leadership and vision." An objective statement should *not* brag about your skills: The recruiter will determine how valuable your skills are during the interview. Also, unlike the author of this statement, you should not include rewards as an objective, as that suggests overconfidence in your abilities. Instead, your objective line should stick to the facts: It should go directly to the type of position you seek.

Now, consider a second objective that is much more appropriate to the situation:

**Objective:** To apply my training in chemistry to maintain and improve water quality in the Great Lakes system.

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Note that this example is more succinct and specific than the weak example. Here, the author refers to his or her background without bragging about his or her abilities. The author also notes his or her interest in water quality, which shows the reader that the author's interests overlap with the organization's research.

In some cases, you might even tailor your objective statement to one particular job advertisement, as in the following example:

**Objective:** To work as a research chemist for Great Lakes Coastal Science Corporation.

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In this objective, the author has identified a very specific goal: to work in a certain capacity for a certain company. This shows that the author has taken the time to tailor his or her résumé to fit one particular job announcement.

Note that in the last two examples, the objective statements do not make any claims about the quality of the applicant's abilities. Instead, they simply help the recruiter decide if the applicant knows what he or she wants. Some recruiters skim the objective line to determine whether you have applied for the right job. These individuals look for specific information and key terms from the job ad as evidence that your résumé has come to the right place.

### Presenting your education

When drafting a résumé, most recent graduates place their education in a section before their employment history, especially if they are earning their degree from a prestigious university that carries weight with employers. Regardless of the exact placement of your educational information, you should present the schools you have attended in reverse chronological order, with your most recent degrees listed first. If you have attended four or more different universities, consider listing only the ones from which you have earned degrees. For instance, in the sample résumé shown earlier, Wei Li presents her education like this:

#### Education

University of Rochester, Department of Chemistry  
Master of Science

Rochester, NY  
Expected Graduation: May 2010

Nanjing University, School of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering  
Bachelor of Science

Nanjing, China  
May 2007

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Here, Wei lists each of the universities she attended, her area of study, and the degrees she received. Note that the location of these universities and the dates she received each degree are flush with the right margin so they stand out to the reader.

If you have very little relevant work experience, try to add substance to your résumé in the educational history section. Consider listing relevant courses, particularly those that relate to the job you are applying for. You might also provide details about specific projects you worked on during your undergraduate training. For example:

**EDUCATION**

University of Wisconsin-Madison, Department of Plant Pathology  
 Bachelor of Science, expected December 2010  
 GPA: 3.72/4.0

*Relevant coursework:* Plant Disease Control; Principles of Integrated Crop Pest Management; Comparative Ecology of Microorganisms and Macroorganisms; Biology of Plant Pathogens; Plant-Bacterial Interactions

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The format here is different than in the previous examples, but the important information is still clear. Note that the author has organized this list so that related courses are grouped; this approach can help you highlight areas in which you have special experience.

### Presenting your experience

As with your education, you should list your research and work experience in reverse chronological order, placing your most recent job first. If you have research experience that is directly relevant to the job you are applying for, place that information *before* your work experience. Include some detail about the project and your responsibilities, but leave longer discussion of the project for the job letter. If you have used specialized equipment or analytical methods as part of your research, mention those skills as well.

When describing your work experience, be sure to include your job title and place of employment. Follow the corporation or organization with the city and appropriate state, province, or country. Consider listing your supervisor's name (if possible and prudent). Then include a bulleted list of duties you performed at that job. For jobs you held in the past, use *active past tense* verbs at the beginning of each item in the list. For jobs you currently hold, use *active present tense*. Make sure that your lists are parallel — that is, if the first item of your list begins with a verb, then all the items in the list should begin with a verb. All the verbs within a single entry also should be the same tense.

In the example below, the author has not written a parallel list:

**Research Experience**

Postdoctoral Researcher, Lender Lab, Department of Chemistry  
 Brown University

Providence, RI  
 January 2008–Present

- Designed experiments to support lab research program on artificial photosynthesis
- Skill with computational data analysis
- Supervise and mentor first-year graduate students

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This list is not parallel because two of the items begin with verbs ("designed," "supervise") and one begins with a noun ("skill"). If the author used certain methods to perform certain kinds of data analysis, he or she should note this by a phrase that begins with a verb. Furthermore, the verbs are in two different tenses: "Designed" suggests that this is a responsibility the author held in the past, but "supervise and mentor" indicate that these are activities in which the author currently participates.

Consider organizing your employment history into two different categories — "Relevant Employment" and "Other Employment" — if you have numerous jobs that make your résumé longer than one page. Keep the "Relevant Employment" section on the first page. Keep in mind, of course, that too much detail can increase the length of a résumé. Employers do not always take time to read the second pages of résumés, so your first page should highlight your most important information. Also, be sure to put your most relevant experience and educational details as close to the top of the first page as possible.

For example, consider how Wei Li has presented her research experience before her work experience. This will help the reader see her skills and techniques that apply most directly to the organization's own research.

Note that all the items in Wei's lists are parallel — each item begins with a verb, and the verbs are all in the same tense.



