

Q: What is a résumé?

A: In short, a résumé is an advertisement about yourself that you give to potential employers summarizing your life's accomplishments. Its purpose is to highlight your qualifications for employment, whether for a specific position or a general job category.

Q: If I'm only applying for a part-time job, do I still need a résumé?

A: Yes, for several reasons. First, a résumé makes you look good—potential employers will be impressed with your professionalism, no matter how menial the job is for which you are applying. It just might give you the extra edge to get that summer or part-time job you've always wanted. Second, preparing a résumé is a good way to practice for the future. Someday you will be applying for a full-time job and you will want to know how to write a good résumé, so writing one for a summer or part-time job will help acquaint you with what you do and do not want to include. Finally, a résumé is a simple, compact way to keep track of your accomplishments. You may need to list your accomplishments, awards, activities, and employment history on applications for college, scholarships, and even internships. Having a résumé on hand will mean you won't have to rack your brain to remember everything.

Q: I have little or no job experience. What should go on my résumé?

A: Take advantage of the experience you have had, no matter how little. Jobs like babysitting and lawn mowing show responsibility to potential employers, so don't be afraid to list them on your résumé. Volunteer experience, extra-curricular activities, and even courses you have taken that might help you in your job are also good things to list.

Q: How long should my résumé be?

A: The résumé serves one main purpose: to prompt an employer/recruiter to call you for an interview. Keep in mind, that most students and job seekers with less than five years of experience usually don't require a résumé longer than one page. In many cases, a one-page résumé would not fairly present a candidate's capabilities and value. Instead of worrying about exceeding one page, pay attention to the quality of the information and the effectiveness of the design.

Q: Should my résumé be fancy?

A: In general a simple résumé is always the best. Avoid fonts that are strange or difficult to read—Arial and Times New Roman usually work best—and don't use graphics. Make use of white space, however, to grab the attention of the reader: offset important qualifications in order to make them stand out. In general, avoid the résumé templates that may be available in your word processing program—they tend to use flashy graphics and text and are often difficult to read. Preparing your résumé from scratch is a good way to customize everything to your taste. Print on white or off-white paper, and if possible, use a laser printer for better text clarity.

Q: Should I include an objective?

A: A statement of your objective is a very good thing when applying for a specific job or a specific field of work. When applying for a part-time job, an objective statement is useful, but those who have been on a single career track should probably bypass the objective and instead include a summary of their past performance. This opening statement is likely the first thing the hiring manager will read, so be sure to think it through before writing anything.

Q: What is a cover letter?

A: A cover letter accompanies your résumé to explain it and highlight certain points. The two documents go hand-in-hand, with the cover letter emphasizing the best points made in the résumé.

Q: Do I need a cover letter?

A: A cover letter is optional, but highly recommended because it impresses employers and allows them to quickly read about your most distinguishing characteristics.

Resume Tips

1. Start out with your contact info at the top of the page. This includes your name address, phone number, and any other ways to reach you.
2. You must put your education and experience down. These are the most important parts of your resumé so employers will know what you know and what you can do.
3. Keep your resume to one page if at all possible. You don't have to cram in every single club you paid your dues in if that's, say, ten, or list any awards the reviewer won't understand. Often your resume will need a one-page cover letter
4. Use action words to describe what you did for any jobs or other activities. See some examples. To see how this works, check out our sample resume.
5. Find a way to work in anything that's really impressive, whether it's a course in public speaking, a computer skill you've picked up, or something you've done in volunteer work. Courses can be listed under Education, computer skills in a special section, volunteer work under "Leadership Experience" or something similar.
6. Let your resume make a good first impression. Use heavy, high-quality white or off-white paper and a laser printer. Find an attractive format, with white space in between each section and each activity or job.
7. Don't lie. You'll get caught. If you say you know Microsoft Excel and you really don't, what will you do when your boss asks you to prepare a spreadsheet? If you lie about a job, what will you do when the interviewer wants to call your supervisor? This is not to say that you don't cast yourself in the best possible light, but there's a fine line you shouldn't cross.
8. Don't end it with "references available upon request." They know you'll give them your references if they ask. Have at least three references ready, and make sure you ask people you'd like to list for their permission.
9. Have other people review your resume for you, preferably including a professional like a Career Services counselor.
10. Proofread! If your resume has a typo, it's going straight into the trash bin (and there are companies involved with detail work like editing that tack up resumes with typos on a bulletin board so they can laugh at them). The reviewer will think if you make a mistake in something so important (and fairly short), you probably make a whole lot of mistakes with ordinary things. Have the people who read your resume for you check as well-some typos are easy to miss.
11. Put your most important points forward. Chances are your resume will not be read in its entirety before being thrown into one of two piles. Make sure what's most impressive comes first in each section, so that it's more likely to be read.
12. Don't use pronouns. Make your sentences short and punchy and start them with action words. Instead of, "I researched possible locations for an annual trip," say, "Researched locations for annual trip."
13. Use normal size and type fonts. Some of the fancier fonts are harder for computers (and some people) to read.