

The Resume and Cover Letter

Landing a job without a resume is not impossible, but next to it. Resumes are required for almost every job—even when “you know someone”—a resume is generally still necessary.

Contact can be made by simply walking into an office—but generally the first question is, “Do you have a resume?” Even if the potential employers talk to you, they still want you to leave or send a resume.

Maintaining a current resume is generally a good practice even after you’ve found a job. You never know when one may be needed. So—prepare a resume.

A resume should be prepared at least one year prior to graduation. Many of you already have one. If so update it, let an objective person critique it for content, grammar, typos, etc.

There are several styles of resumes:

Functional—a description of qualifications and accomplishments without detailing specific jobs. This style is generally used by a person out of college for 10-15 years who has sufficient experience to allow a delineation of skills and accomplishments.

Chronological—an outline of jobs beginning with latest job and brief descriptions of responsibilities and/or duties. This is the preferred style for most college graduates.

Combination functional and chronological—obviously this style is a mixture. You may want to use this style if you are slightly older than the average recent graduate. This is a good style if you have had eight or ten different jobs and are able to define specific skills.

A resume is a 30-second commercial about yourself. There is no absolute right or wrong way to lay it out. It must look good and convey sufficient information about you to pique the reader’s interest and generate an interview. **The purpose of a resume is to obtain an interview.** Some general rules:

- No typos-resume must be perfect
- One page-8 ½” X 11”
- White, buff, or cream high-quality bond paper
- No photographs, no social security numbers
- Generally, personal information not needed
- Use concise phrases—not complete sentences
- Don’t exaggerate your accomplishments
- Print on laser or other high-quality printer
- Resume must look good
- Do not include salary information
- Follow the KISS principle:
Keep It Short and Sweet.
Keep It Simple, Stupid.
Keep It Super Simple.

Resumes generally consist of:

- A. Heading
- B. Objective (optional)
- C. Education
- D. Work Experience
- E. Honors and activities (optional)
- F. Special skills (optional)
- G. Statement that references are available upon request.

Remember

Your resume gets 15-20 seconds of attention. Resumes are designed to get you an interview. One is rarely hired based on a resume alone. Write and rewrite your resume until you are satisfied that it paints an accurate picture of your ability and potential.

Some thoughts about the parts of the resume:

Heading

Essential information such as name, address, phone number. If you have a work phone and a home phone, distinguish between the two. If your address will be changing, indicate a school address and a permanent address.

Some possible styles:

Robert A. Jones 1211 Noble Road Lake Charles, LA 70609 (337) 555-1234 rjones@student.mcneese.edu	OR	Robert A. Jones 1211 Noble Road Lake Charles, LA 70609	(337) 555-1234 rjones@student.mcneese.edu
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Note: If you have a home phone and a business or alternate phone number, you should indicate that on the resume.

Objective

Be as specific as possible, for example:

- Entry level accounting position
- Management trainee position

If you know the specific job title, use it in your resume. There is no requirement to put an objective. If you don't have one, don't put one.

Education

Do not list your high school diploma unless you are very early in your college career, i.e., freshman or sophomore. Put your highest degree first.

Examples:

McNeese State University, Lake Charles, LA
MBA, concentration in Accounting
May 2009

McNeese State University, Lake Charles, LA
BS Accounting
December 2006

There is generally no need to list other schools attended unless they are pertinent to the job you are seeking. Put GPA only if 3.0 or higher. If you need additional information to complete a one-page resume, this is a good place to list selected or significant course work.

Work Experience

List job title first—then place of employment. Focus on what you did, not where you did it. Then briefly describe duties and responsibilities using action words. Description must be sufficient to inform the reader about your responsibilities and experience. Generally you should list jobs for the past five years or so. Do not be shy about listing work experience outside your academic area—some work experience is better than no work experience. Use action verbs throughout this section. Create the impression you are a doer.

Honors and Activities

Generally this section is useful particularly if you have held a leadership position, e.g., president, vice president, treasurer, etc. These jobs show leadership experience, and the information should be included. If your work experience is extensive, it is generally better to use the space detailing your experience. If your work experience is not extensive, this section should be used. Participation in clubs and activities shows sociability.

Special Skills

This section is optional and can be used to highlight any special skills. This is a good place to put computer skills and can be titled computer skills rather than special skills. If you are computer literate, it is generally a good idea to note the systems/software with which you are familiar. Foreign language skills should be indicated here.

References

The last statement of your resume should be a statement that references are available upon request. It is advised to list your references (3 to 5) on separate sheet of paper just in preparation of prospective employer's request. Use the same kind of paper that your resume is printed on, but do not send the references with the resume unless specifically requested to do so. Be sure you have your references with you when going to interview.

GENERAL OUTLINE FOR A COVER LETTER

Your Address
Your Phone Number
Date of Letter

Use complete title and address. If possible, address it to a particular person by name.

Employer's Name, Title and Address

Salutation:

Opening Paragraph: State why you are writing, name the position or type of work for which you are applying and mention how you heard of the opening or organization.

Make the addressee want to read your resume. Be personable and enthusiastic.

Middle Paragraph(s): Explain why you are interested in working for this employer and specify your reasons for desiring this type of work. If you have had relevant work experience or related education, be sure to point it out, but do not reiterate your entire resume.

Emphasize skills or abilities you have that relate to the job for which you are applying. Be sure to do this in a confident manner and remember that the reader will view your letter of application as an example of your writing skills. Mention that you have enclosed a resume.

Closing Paragraph: You may refer the reader to your enclosed resume (which gives a summary of your qualifications) or whatever media you are using to illustrate your training, interests, and experience. **Have an appropriate closing to pave the way for the interview by indicating the action or steps you will take to initiate an interview date.**

Always sign letters.

Sincerely yours,

Your Name Typed

If a resume or other enclosure is used, note enclosure in letter.

Enclosure

(Top and bottom margins should be equal)