



Graduate College Career Services Office

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RÉSUMÉ WRITING FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

What is a Résumé?

A résumé is a document that provides an overview of your education, experiences, skills and other relevant information to support an application to a specific job. It should be a self-promotional document that presents you in the best possible light, with the purpose of obtaining a job or job interview. Résumés have no set format, although general guidelines apply.

There are many different opinions about the best way to write a résumé. In reality, there is no single “best” way, and the information presented here is intended to reflect the guidelines that are most widely accepted. Ultimately, the organization and content of your résumé is a personal decision and should be presented in a manner that will best highlight your skills and abilities. When constructing your resume, be aware that there are three important components to keep in mind: relevance, self-promotion, and visual appeal. Each of these elements will be discussed later in further depth.

Purposes of a Résumé

The main purpose of a résumé is to help you demonstrate that you have the skills and experiences necessary to be successful in the job to which you are applying. A résumé is an advertisement for yourself, and hopefully it will convince the reader that they should invite you to interview for a particular position. A résumé also forces you to focus your job search and identify your targeted employers, as well as to review and prioritize your accomplishments and communicate them to potential employers.

The CV Versus the Résumé

Many graduate students have a *curriculum vitae* (CV) for use when applying for academic jobs or conferences. If you already have a CV, it can be helpful when creating a résumé. There are many differences between the two documents, however, so transforming a CV into a résumé can also be quite a challenge.

One of the biggest differences between a résumé and a CV is in the **audience**. The CV speaks largely to an academic audience and serves as a record of your academic and intellectual accomplishments. In contrast, a résumé is read by hiring managers in a non-academic organization, and should be tailored to this group. Managers often review hundreds of applicants, and each résumé is reviewed for an average of *fifteen seconds*. Your résumé must therefore be concise and clear enough to make an immediate impression. It must provide a persuasive account of your specific skills and experiences

as they relate to the job for which you have applied. A tabular comparison of the CV and résumé follows:

| | CV | Résumé |
|------------------------------|--|---|
| Audience | Fellow academics in your field of study. | A general audience of employers who hire for a wide variety of positions. |
| Goal | To present your full academic history – including teaching, research, awards, and service. | To demonstrate that you have the skills and experience necessary to succeed within the position you are seeking. |
| Length | As long as necessary. | One or two pages only. In general, you may add a second page if you have more than ten years of experience. |
| Focus | Demonstrating your academic achievements and scholarly potential. | Representing your experiences – job-related, extracurricular and volunteer, as well as the skills you’ve gained from these. |
| Essential Information | Lists of publications, presentations, teaching experiences, education, honors, and grants. | Skills and experiences you have gained as related to the job you are seeking. |
| References | Include. | Do not include. |

If you are applying for a non-academic research-oriented position, an administrative job at a university, or a community-college position, it is possible that you will want to use a hybrid document that is a cross between a résumé and a CV. In these instances, you may create a two-page document that provides more information than the typical résumé (such as research experience, recent publications, etc.) but is still much shorter than a CV.

Conduct a Thorough Self Assessment

Self assessment is a critical first step for anyone creating a résumé, and is especially important for those who may be exploring new or different career paths. In order to find an appropriate job and achieve your career goals, it is imperative that you first define your goals and develop a plan for reaching them. Without a thorough understanding of your goals, it is very difficult to determine what type of job you are seeking, and, consequently, what to include on your résumé. Take time to consider the following aspects before writing your résumé:

- **Goals:** Where do I want to be in five years? In ten years?
- **Personal Qualities:** What type of a person am I? What type of work environment is right for my personality? Where do I want to be located?
- **Interests:** What job-related activities do I find enjoyable?
- **Strengths:** At what do I excel? How do these strengths set me apart from others?
- **Values:** What is most important to me in a job? In my life?
- **Skills:** What technical and other important skills do I have?
- **Experiences:** What experiences have I enjoyed and want to build on?

Further information about self assessment is available on the GCCSO Web site.

Audience

A résumé always needs to be tailored to its audience, so before you start to construct your résumé, it is imperative that you determine what types of skills and experiences are

required for the job you are seeking. If you are applying to a variety of different positions, it is advisable that you create several different versions of your résumé, each one tailored to the specific type of position you are seeking. You should eliminate any irrelevant information from your résumé.

If you are applying to a posted job, it is generally easy to know what skills the employer desires since this information is probably detailed in the job description. If you are sending out unsolicited résumés, however, you will have to do some research on your own to determine what skills are important to the job. A good place to start is by conducting [research](#) about the organization where you are seeking a job. Conducting [informational interviews](#) is also an excellent strategy, since this will provide you with the opportunity to learn more about the skills that are necessary in a particular field or at a particular organization. According to a study cited in Daniel Goleman's book *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, employers cited oral communication skills, interpersonal abilities, teamwork, and adaptability among the skills most valued in employees. Other valued skills include follow-through, common sense, integrity, dependability, initiative, good work habits, enthusiasm, motivation, intelligence, and problem solving abilities. Most graduate students possess many of these skills, and emphasizing some of these traits in your résumé can be effective.

Reevaluating Past Experiences

As you determine the type of job you are seeking and its requirements, you will want to match your experiences and qualifications to this position. If you are thinking, "I have *no* relevant experience," keep in mind that that is not really true. Consider the range of your academic and non-academic experiences, and be creative about how you translate these skills and experiences in a way that will help you attain the job you are seeking. For example:

- **Academic activities** such as teaching and research can be broken down into specific tasks such as planning lessons and synthesizing large quantities of data. In turn, these tasks demonstrate abilities such as organization, planning, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills.
- **Writing a thesis or dissertation** requires the ability to manage and complete a large project, skills that organizations value greatly. Additionally, think about the analytical and writing skills involved in producing this document.
- **Presenting a paper at a conference or publishing an article or book review** demonstrates your communication abilities, another highly valued skill.
- **Being a committee member** can demonstrate leadership, teamwork, and administrative skills.

Further information about [transferable skills](#) is available on the GCCSO website.

Look critically at the areas where you *lack* experience and be proactive. Try to use your time as a graduate student to develop skill sets and competencies that will support your goals. This can be done through internships, volunteer work, committee work, and other activities. More information about [gaining experience](#) can be found on the GCCSO Web site.

Types of Résumés

There are multiple formats used to present information on a résumé, and each format has its own strengths and weaknesses. Choose a format that best highlights your past experiences and relates them to the job to which you are applying.

Chronological résumés list all prior professional experiences in reverse chronological order. This is the most traditional type of résumé, and it highlights a progressive record of work experience. Chronological résumés are best for job seekers who have significant experience in the field where they are seeking a job. This format can be less effective if you are changing careers, have little work experience or need to draw a connection between an experience and a job that may seem unrelated. Chronological résumés can also cause an older but highly relevant experience to get buried at the end due to its format.

Modified chronological résumés utilize a format that can highlight the strengths of graduate students. In this format, experiences are grouped based on their function (technical experience, research experience, leadership experience, administrative experience, etc.), and are listed in reverse chronological order within these categories. The categories can then be prioritized based on what types of experiences are most important to a particular job. It can permit the emphasis of a less recent but highly relevant experience at the top of a résumé, unlike the strict chronological résumé. Also, the category titles may help the reader contextualize an experience that may at first seem irrelevant. The only real problem associated with this format is that it is sometimes difficult for the job seeker to categorize past experiences.

Functional résumés group the descriptions for several different experiences by skills used (such as communication skills, leadership skills, organizational skills, management skills, etc.) and the actual job titles and dates of the experiences are listed at the top or bottom of the résumé. This type of résumé is most useful for job changers and those with little experience because it emphasizes transferable skills and abilities, and minimizes gaps in employment. However, employers often don't like this format, as the relationship between an experience and a skill can be lost.

Combination résumés combine the strengths of the chronological and functional résumés by listing one's past experiences chronologically but classifying the descriptions used within these experiences by sets of skills (leadership skills, analytical skills, communication skills, technical skills, etc.). This format is excellent for job seekers with one to three extensive experiences that used multiple skills. It can successfully highlight connections between experiences that don't appear relevant to a particular job, and it often helps graduate students underscore the relevance of teaching and research assistantships, and the transferable skills they require. As with the modified chronological résumé, the only real problem with this format is that it is sometimes difficult to classify the skills used within a particular experience.

Sections of a Résumé

Since résumés are highly individualistic documents and should be structured to emphasize strengths, choosing the sections to include depends upon the goals of the résumé and the audience. The order of the sections of a résumé may also vary to represent one's strengths and experiences in the best possible light.

Mandatory Sections

Contact information including name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address, should always be placed at the top of a résumé. Make sure that your e-mail address is professional and that all information is current. Never include information about age, sex, race, marital status, or citizenship status on a résumé unless it is an important component of the job for which you are applying. One exception to this might be if you are a citizen/permanent resident with a name or background information that might lead employers to question your status. If this is the case, you may want to state on your résumé that you are a U.S. citizen or that you have permanent residence status.

Education immediately follows the contact information on most résumés of current students or recent graduates. If you have several years of work experience or are concerned about drawing too much attention to your education, you may consider placing this section further down on your résumé. Include the institution name, city/state, degree, and graduation (or anticipated) date. Cumulative GPA's are often not listed on graduate student résumés, although it is fine to include this information if you wish. Including significant honors such as *Phi Beta Kappa* or *magna/summa cum laude* under education is appropriate. If you are working on a thesis or dissertation or have published articles that are *relevant* to the job you are applying to, you may consider also including this information within the education section.

Experience should be the largest component of your résumé, where you describe your relevant experiences since entering college and/or graduate school. Internships, volunteer work, leadership positions, and other professional experiences should also be included in this section. The first line of each experience should consistently detail your position, organization, location and dates. Relevant tasks should be described in concise bullet points. Avoid long phrases and blocks of text that will be difficult for employers to read quickly. Be certain to keep your audience in mind: the experiences listed should relate in some way to the job for which you are applying. Describe your experience in language that the employer will recognize and be certain to choose a format to present this information that will connect these experiences to the job requirements.

Optional Sections

Objective. About ten years ago, everyone had an objective statement on his or her résumé; however, these are seen much less frequently now. Objective statements are useful primarily when distributing unsolicited résumés, particularly if you are unable to include a cover letter or if you fear that your résumé may become separated from your cover letter. When responding to a specific job posting, an objective statement is generally unnecessary as long as you have included a cover letter. These statements could potentially work to your detriment since their specific language could possibly exclude

you from other opportunities available within the organization. They also tend to take up space that could be better used to demonstrate skills and experiences. Consider carefully whether to include an objective statement; if you do decide to include one, be careful to use correct terms and phrases and keep it simple (i.e., To obtain a ____ position in a _____ which uses my ____ and _____).

Qualifications Summary or Profile. Many employers like these brief statements, since they tell the employer a little more about *you* than a simple objective statement. This summary can clarify the skills and abilities you will bring to an organization, especially if your background is not an obvious match to the position. Sample qualifications summary: *“Excellent verbal and written communication skills, honed from several years of teaching undergraduate students. Proficient using software packages such as Microsoft Access, FrontPage, SPSS, and SASS. Strong organizational, marketing and leadership qualities, as demonstrated by previous teamwork experiences.”*

Activities may be included as a separate section on your résumé, or these activities may be incorporated into other sections of the résumé. If you have an extracurricular or volunteer experience where in which you utilized skills relevant to the position for which you are applying, such as management or leadership experience, consider including it under your experience section. If you participated in an activity but were not highly involved, you may consider listing it as a bullet point under education or not including it at all. Remember to keep your audience in mind when deciding which activities to include. If you were part of an organization whose name would reveal personal affiliations (such as religion, ethnicity, political affiliation, or sexual orientation) you will have to decide for yourself whether presenting this information will be helpful to your résumé. If you feel that the skills you gained from these activities will make you a better candidate, then including this information may be important. Except in situations where advocacy work and personal information have a direct bearing on a particular job, however, it is usually best to avoid direct mention of your age, marital status, sexual preference, health information, race, religion, and ethnicity within your résumé.

Honors and awards may be included on a résumé, but they do not generally require their own section. As a graduate student, you have probably received a multitude of awards, and you do not need to list all of them to prove that you are an intelligent and hard-working applicant. You may consider choosing your top few honors and including them in your education section, listed as bullets under the degree in which you received them. Unless you are listing an extremely prestigious and widely known honor, be certain that you provide a context (e.g.: awarded to the top graduate English student in a department of seventy-five students) since most employers will otherwise not know what this award represents.

Computer/ Technical Skills should be included as a separate section on your résumé if you are applying for a technical position. If you are not applying for a technical position, you may also consider incorporating these skills into the bullets of your experience section. Since most graduate students are familiar with standard word processing programs and Internet browsers, it is generally not necessary to list these unless they are

specifically indicated in the job requirements. Computer languages such as SAS and C++ often have great value in the workplace, so highlighting proficiency with these makes sense unless you prefer not to use them in your next position. Familiarity with programs such as Excel, PowerPoint, and Access should be mentioned, as should skills with HTML, Dreamweaver, and similar programs.

Language skills may be included on your résumé, particularly if they are relevant to the job to which you are applying. Proficiency in foreign languages does impress employers. Be certain to designate your level of skill (e.g.,: fluent in Spanish, reading proficiency in German and Latin, basic skills in reading and speaking French). International travel (such as study-abroad programs) might also be mentioned in this section, if pertinent to the position sought. These items might also be listed in your education section if they do not warrant their own separate section.

Unnecessary Sections

References should not be included in your résumé. If the job listing asks for your references, put them on a separate sheet of paper with your name and the title “References.” Avoid adding the line that states “References are available upon request” to your résumé. It only takes up space, and if an employer wants references, he or she will ask you for them later.

Publications and Dissertation information. On a résumé, list only those publications, dissertation topics, posters, and presentations that are directly relevant to the position you are seeking. However, you can include a phrase under your teaching or research experience indicating your publication experience, such as “Co-authored and published three articles in professional journals.” “Conducted independent research leading to publication,” or indicate at the bottom of your résumé that a list of publications is available upon request.

Other extraneous information should be excluded from your résumé. This might include very old information, jobs that are irrelevant (such as waiting tables or bartending), and salary history. Hobbies and interests are generally not included on résumés since they can be construed as unprofessional; however, if you have an interesting and audience-appropriate hobby, it can sometimes be a good icebreaker. Use your best judgment to determine what skills the employer is seeking and what is appropriate to include, and make decisions accordingly.

Self-promotion

Your résumé is an advertisement for yourself, and should therefore be presented in a convincing manner that will most effectively “sell” your past experiences. Each bullet in your experience section should start with an **action verb** (using past tense for previous jobs and present tense for current jobs) to make it powerful and descriptive. Avoid the very bland phrase “responsibilities included.” Wherever possible, use concrete numbers and examples to highlight accomplishments (such as the amount of money you managed as a treasurer or the ratings you received as a teaching assistant). When describing an

experience, highlight what **you** did and how your approach may have been unique and effective. Try not to just reiterate the job description, especially if it is a well-know job.

It is important to emphasize the importance of honesty. Although you do want to “sell” yourself, never misrepresent or exaggerate any information on your résumé.

Visual Appeal

In the corporate world, résumés are scanned for only about fifteen seconds. As a result, you have an extremely short amount of time to convey information and to sell your skills and experiences. Your résumé must be very organized, concise, and easy to read; if it is not, it may be discarded.

Most documents are scanned from top to bottom and from left to right; therefore, design your résumé strategically to physically emphasize the most important information. List positions and titles first, then list the corresponding dates. Choose an effective format for each of your sections and be certain to be consistent within these sections. Strategically use bolds, italics, underlines, and capitalization to draw attention to aspects you wish to emphasize.

Use a simple, balanced layout with plenty of white space. A résumé should never look flashy or gimmicky; it should always be professional. Use fonts that are easy-to-read and print your résumé on high-quality (20-pound or greater) white or ivory paper.

Eliminate excess words from your résumé and minimize jargon and technical terms. Try to translate past experiences into language that can be understood by your audience.

Proofread your résumé carefully, and ask others to review it for you. Even one grammatical or spelling error will invalidate your résumé to most employers, so pay close attention to all details. Keep in mind that the spelling and grammar checking capabilities of your word-processing programs will not always catch words that are incorrect.

It is often best to try to keep your résumé to one page unless you have many years of full-time work experience. Non-academic employers may not have the time to read through multi-page résumés and will appreciate a concise, well-organized résumé. In some fields, two page résumés more commonly accepted, as long as the content is relevant.

Résumés and Modern Technology

Computers frequently replace people in the first round of the résumé review process. Many large corporations now scan résumés (particularly unsolicited résumés) into a centralized database, and categorize the résumé and application according to keywords. Online job boards such as Monster are also likely to use scanning technology to manage the high volume of résumés they receive. Additionally, companies often ask applicants to e-mail their résumés to a designated address, which can create formatting and compatibility issues. Computers read résumés differently than people do, and certain rules need to be heeded if your résumé is to make it past these first stages of review.

Scannable Résumés

The guidelines for résumés that will be scanned into a computer system differ from typical résumé-writing guidelines. Since it is often impossible to know if your résumé will be scanned, you may want to try to incorporate the following guidelines into your standard résumé. If this is impossible, consider contacting the organization to which you are applying and inquire if it scans résumés. Another alternative is to submit two, clearly labeled versions of your résumé (one to be read and one to be scanned).

- Keep it simple
 - Use white or light-colored 8.5" x 11" paper, printed on one side only.
 - Provide a high quality copy.
 - Do not fold or staple your résumé.
 - Use standard, non-decorative typefaces.
 - Use 10 to 14 point font sizes only.
 - Use boldface or all capital letters for section headings only if the letters do not touch each other.
 - Avoid decorative treatments such as italics, underline, or shadows.
 - Avoid vertical and horizontal lines, graphics, and boxes.
 - Avoid two-column format.
 - Your name should appear at the top of each page on its own line.
 - Use keywords to facilitate scanning.
 - Use nouns and phrases that succinctly detail your skills and competencies.
- Use buzzwords or jargon that pertain to the position or industry (but be sure to use them correctly!)
 - Use different forms of your keywords (such as coordination and coordinate) to increase your chances of the computer picking up your keywords and forwarding your résumé to a hiring manager.
 - If possible, try to use both complete-word keywords and acronyms (such as both Master of Business Administration and MBA).
 - Many recruiters search for résumés using the terms listed in their ads. Look at the ad, as well as major job boards and corporate Web sites to search for keywords associated with the jobs that interest you.
- Include a "skills" section
 - List all skills that you have, separated by commas and periods.
 - Nouns should dominate this section.
 - List all programs and software you know well, and highlight specific capabilities you have, such as communication skills, organizational skills, or management abilities.

E-mail Résumés

Many companies request that résumés be forwarded electronically rather than by traditional mail service. Although it is generally helpful to follow up an e-mailed résumé with a hard copy, some companies specifically instruct applicants only to e-mail their résumés. Often, however, an e-mailed résumé cannot even be read by an employer due to technical difficulties. If possible, transfer your résumé to a PDF format since most

anyone can download Adobe Acrobat Reader free of charge. If you are not able to do this, consider sending an additional version of your résumé in a text-based format:

- Compose your résumé in Word or WordPerfect, using one-inch margins and 12-point Courier font.
- Remove special characters like bullets and graphics.
- Save your résumé as a “text only” file with line breaks.
- Cut and paste this résumé into a text editor, such as SimpleText or Notepad and review it. Remove or replace characters that do not show up properly.
- Cut and paste this résumé into your e-mail program. You may want to send it to yourself first to proofread it.
- If your résumé looks good at this point, cut and paste it into the body of a message to send to your prospective employer.