

Refreshing Your Résumé

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There are many ways to create a résumé, but you need to find the best way to display your skills and experience. Every person's career history is different, and you will want to use the résumé style that puts your career history in the most attractive light. Think carefully about which style to use.

Your job search and career goals are also unique to you. You need to take into account the stage your career is at. Do you plan to stay in your field, or do you want to change careers? Has your career development followed a traditional path? Are you looking for your first job? Perhaps you are aiming for a specific job or company. Match your job search goals to the formats described below to find the one that will get you on the road to landing your perfect job.

What You Need to Know

Are there many different résumé styles?

Yes. But here we will focus on four of the most common types:

- A *chronological résumé* is a good choice when you are staying in the same field or if your career has followed a steady and traditional trajectory. For example, if you were hired at entry level and have progressed through the ranks to management level in the same field or specialty, this is the right résumé for you. You would also use this kind of résumé if you have worked for the same company for most of your career, even if you have had different types of job within that company. Finally, this résumé style is a good choice for those just starting their careers who are looking for their first or second job.
- A *functional résumé* is a sensible choice when you're hunting for your first job, as it emphasizes your skills rather than your experience. If you are making a marked change in your career, this style will serve you well for the same reasons. And, if your career has followed the less common pathway, or you have changed employers frequently, then you may be better off with a functional résumé.
- Use a *targeted résumé* when you have a specific job in mind and need to make an impressive case for yourself. Writing this kind of customized résumé is a challenge, especially if you're applying for several jobs, but when done well it can make you and your abilities stand out.
- If your objective is to be hired for a specific job or assignment within your current organization, your best choice is the *capabilities résumé*. As with the targeted résumé, the capabilities résumé requires you to customize your résumé for the situation.

Should I have one of each type of résumé to hand?

Typically, no. However, if you have created one kind of résumé, say a standard résumé (chronological or functional), and an opportunity arises for which one of the other résumés is better, then you should create a second résumé

What's a "job search objective?"

Just a few years ago every résumé had to start off with an objective, a short paragraph explaining exactly what type of job being sought. These days objectives are not always appropriate, so think carefully about whether you need to include one or not. They are useful when you are sending your résumé speculatively. If you decide to include an objective on your résumé, it should be concise, specific, and forthright. An objective that is too general, such as "Seeking position in graphic design," is not worth the bother of including. Try something like "An experienced graphic designer is seeking a position to make full use of comprehensive background in web design and graphic arts. I am looking for a challenging Senior Designer position that will enable me to use and expand my creative skills in the graphic design industry."

What to Do

Decide Which Type of Résumé to Use

As we have mentioned, there are four main types:

- chronological
- functional
- targeted
- capabilities

A chronological résumé has, for a long time, been the most popular type of résumé by far, and it still is. But the other three types have their strengths as well, and there may be times in your career when one of these will suit your purposes better. In the modern marketplace, it is common for people to change careers several times in the course of their working lives. If you are thinking about a dramatic change, a nontraditional résumé may be right for you. Read the sections below for more targeted advice.

Chronological Résumé

- Include your name and contact details at the top. Use your personal e-mail address, not your work e-mail address as it will look like you are taking advantage of your current employer.
- Consider including a job search “objective” if you are applying speculatively.
- Starting with your present or most recent position and working backward, summarize your employment history.
- Describe your responsibilities and accomplishments. Be concise, using action verbs to make a powerful impression.
- Remember your career goals, and emphasize the accomplishments and skills that are most related to the job you are seeking.
- Your education history and professional training should be shown in separate sections at the bottom of your résumé. List multiple degrees in reverse chronological order.

If you’ve been working for some time, summarize the early part of your career history. You only need to be detailed in your descriptions of your last four or five positions.

Functional Résumé

- Include your name and contact details at the top.
- If you are embarking on your first job hunt, you may choose to include a job search “objective.” Be sure to state it clearly.
- Your résumé should include three to five separate paragraphs. Focus each paragraph on a skill or accomplishment that you want to stress and that is related to the job you seek.
- Your “functional” paragraph most related to your career goal should come first. List the rest in descending order of importance.
- Head each paragraph with a brief descriptive title
- Emphasize your skills and accomplishments that are the most relevant to your career goal.
- Briefly summarize your actual work experience after the last functional area, listing dates (years), employer, and job titles only.
- At the bottom of the résumé, list your education in a separate section, with multiple degrees in reverse chronological order.

One of the features of the functional résumé is that it allows you to describe your skills and accomplishments without identifying the relevant employer. This is essential when you have signed a nondisclosure agreement with your current or previous employer, which prevents you from revealing specific information about a job or project to potential competitors. Nondisclosure agreements aren’t appropriate for every industry, but are crop up regularly in high-tech or research companies.

Targeted Résumé

- Brainstorm a list of skills and accomplishments that are relevant to your job target. Ask yourself, what achievements are you most proud of? Do you have achievements in another field that are relevant to your job target? What demonstrates your ability to work with people?
- Include your name and contact details at the top.
- A job “objective” may not be necessary, as this type of résumé is most appropriate for an application for a specific job.
- Select the top five to eight most relevant skills or accomplishments from your brainstorming list. Use action words and powerful descriptions to focus on action and results.
- Summarize your actual work experience beneath each item, giving dates (years), employer, and job titles only.
- List your education in a separate section at the bottom of the résumé, in reverse chronological order.

Capabilities Résumé

- First of all, find out all as much as possible about the internal job you are seeking.
- Include your name and contact details at the top. (Since this type of résumé is most appropriate for an application for a specific job, there’s probably no need to include a job search “objective.”)
- List your five top accomplishments that are most relevant to your job target.
- Describe your relevant work experience from your current position in a brief paragraph. If your history with the company has been limited, follow the steps for a targeted résumé to provide a complete synopsis of your work experience.
- List your education in a separate section at the bottom of the résumé in reverse chronological order.

Make a Visual Impression

With all the effort you are putting into the content of your résumé, spend some time on how the résumé looks and feels as well. You want to present all the information to its best advantage.

- If you are not submitting your résumé via e-mail, as most are these days, use high-quality white or cream paper. Paper made specifically for printing résumés on can easily be read, photocopied, or scanned.
- Buy your own stationery. Using headed notepaper or address labels from your current place of work for your job search shows that you will take advantage of your employer and his or her facilities.
- Pay attention to the formatting of your résumé. A clean-looking font is easier to read than something fancy. (Some people prefer a sans serif, such as Arial.) Use a readable type size, not

one that is too small. Highlight your achievements and qualifications with a bold face, but beware of overuse of bold as it can make your résumé look like it is “shouting.” Emphasize key points in lists with bullets.

- Spelling or grammatical errors will send your résumé straight to the bin rather than on the right person’s desk. Proofread your résumé closely to avoid such mistakes. Ask a friend or career coach to read over your finished résumé. A fresh eye will spot errors you have overlooked.
- Beware of computer spellcheckers. They will correct many mistakes in spelling and usage, but they are no substitute for the human eye. They will always miss words spelled correctly but used in the wrong way or the wrong place. For example, if you write “there” instead of “their,” or “it’s” instead of “its.”
- Hand-written résumés or cover letters are rarely preferred, If you are asked for one, provide it. The default, however, is to use a computer to give a more professional finish.
- Seek advice and help from friends or family members, but in the end you must abide by your own instincts. It is your résumé, your career, and your life.

What to Avoid

You Include Too Much

It may be tempting to write everything you can think of in an attempt to impress your reader. But recruiters and employers are looking for candidates who can get right to the point and communicate clearly and effectively. Focus on the key points you have identified that are most likely to get you an interview.

You Allow Sloppy Formatting

If you lack résumé-writing experience, yours may end up a mixture of job listings, skills, and accomplishments, which will only confuse your reader. To avoid this, start by determining which type of résumé is best suited to your objective.

A career adviser can help if you are struggling with the different résumé styles. Researching libraries and telephone directories can help you find a list of career advisers to choose from. Bear in mind that rates can vary significantly for this service. If you are a student, there may be a career adviser who can help you for free at a local continuing education college.

You Fail to Follow Through

Do not make this common mistake. If you wrote in your cover letter that you would telephone to arrange an interview, make a note of the date and follow up. It may be difficult to make the call, knowing you may get rejected, but neglecting to call will guarantee you never get the job!

You Let Yourself Become Dejected

In any competitive endeavor, a certain amount of rejection is guaranteed, and job hunting is no different. When—not if—you receive rejections, remind yourself that it is part of the process. Every “No” puts you that much closer to a “Yes.”

Where to Learn More

Book:

Bolles, Richard. *What Color is Your Parachute? A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers*. Ten Speed Press, 2007.