

## Writing Your Resume

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The Cover letter for a resume is often regarded as a mere formality and is not given the importance it deserves. Most job seekers would prefer to skip it and just send their resume alone to prospective employer. Others would invariably send an announcement cover letter stating the obvious i.e. “ Please find enclosed my resume...” Such cover letters would definitely be a waste. Is a cover letter then, really necessary?

Writing your resume is an essential aspect of applying for a job, as it requires a lot of effort and planning on your behalf. A badly worded and poorly presented resume can put off a potential employer totally!

We intend to provide some broad guidelines to help you write a resume that could work for you. Work for you to achieve what it is meant to i.e. to get you an interview call for a job.

At the outset, it is necessary to clarify that you could use the term “resume” or “curriculum vitae” (CV), even though technically a CV is primarily meant for job positions within the academic environment and is supposed to be a lengthy document. The difference is not strictly followed and it is safe to use these two terms interchangeably, but remember that whatever word you use, be sure that you know how to pronounce it accurately!

### **Your resume should be about two pages long**

A resume should be about two pages long. It is supposed to be a brief presentation of your skills, work experience, achievements and education. Anything too long runs the risk of being skimmed over and not read properly. Long and detailed does not necessarily imply better! What your resume has to get across to the potential employer is just this – you have the required skills, experience and education to handle the job!

Appropriately focusing on the key aspects unique to your experience, and leaving out the standard repetitive details, which would be similar to those of your competitors applying for the same job/position, can do this. So, try and stick to 2 pages!

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### Start off by identifying your job objective

The job objective is an excellent area to include in your resume and is usually omitted. It puts your resume in the right perspective for the reader and clearly shows where you are headed in your career plans. If you are applying for an entry-level position in the marketing, your job objective could be something like this:

**Objective:** Interested in an entry-level position in marketing in a multi-national corporation.

The 'multi-national corporation' phrase makes your objective generic regarding company choice. It would be advisable to modify each resume to suit specific companies that you apply to. Then the job objective would read like this:

**Objective:** Interested in an entry-level position in marketing.

Provide a summary of your experience and skills

The next section that your resume should contain is a 5-6 point summary of your skills and experience. That includes:

- No. Of years of past and relevant work experience.
- A brief description of the work done.
- Specific skills acquired.
- Significant achievements.
- Educational qualifications.

This section is very useful, in providing a snapshot view of what your resume contains for situations where yours is one resume in a pile of fifty others. It allows minimal information loss in case the resume is quickly skimmed over and not given a detailed reading. In this section, the skills that you present should help in answering the question- "How can you contribute to the organization?"

In case of IT/Software professionals, the skill set could be added to the summary. But be sure, that all the skills mentioned are truly areas you have worked in or are comfortable working in.

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### **Use language and content that communicate a proactive style**

The style of writing that you use and the particular words or phrases can make a significant difference to your resume. It affects the impression created about you regarding your past work experience and your skills. For example, you might say in your past work experience that you “maintained records and accounts”. A better way of expressing the same thing could be “Reported directly to the VP-Finance and managed over 1500 accounts....”

“Your language and content should focus on what you achieved e.g. saving so many lakh rupees for the organization, rather than a standard listing of responsibilities which sounds like a job profile common to anyone in a similar position to yours. If you have been a brand manager in the past, do not just list your job responsibilities like “responsible for sales, profits, advertising related to the brand...” Instead highlight things like “Implemented change in product formulation that saved Rs 50 lakhs per year for the brand...” Quantifiable parameters have a better impact than just saying, “Implemented change in product formulation.”

### **Priorities details of your past work experience**

After the summary section, you can go on to providing details of your past work experience. Leave aside the job objective and summary and that gives you just one and a half pages to cover the details of your work experience as well as your educational qualifications. You need to priorities. Decide what weight age to give to different organizations/positions. You should not skip any place worked at, but you obviously cannot give all details of each position. A few points to note while preparing this section:

### **You could present the work experience in reverse chronological order**

Start with the most recent work experience at the beginning of this section and the rest later on. That is the organization where you are currently working first and the earlier ones worked in, later in the resume. This should highlight your relevant work experience at the outset.

Within an organization, present your career path in the correct chronological order while you may present the organizations you have worked in, in reverse chronological order, for a particular organization it is easier to follow your career path if the positions are given in the way they happened e.g. “joined ABC co. as management trainee in 1989 and was

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promoted to assistant manager (finance) in 1991..." You could then go on to elaborate your responsibilities and achievements at this position. Remember to highlight the more important designations with their accomplishments, as this will be more relevant than just focusing on your training period.

### **Mention responsibilities briefly, focus more on accomplishments**

If responsibilities are similar across positions in an organization, try to avoid repeating the same set of responsibilities with each position. That will unnecessarily increase the size of your resume without giving any additional value. Instead, try and include your different achievements at each position, or something that you introduced or did differently in your job.

This would also hold true for situations where responsibilities are similar across organizations. Avoid tautology and stick to the accomplishments.

If worked in many organizations, merge information to reduce chronological details. To avoid presenting a long, chronological detail of each organization worked in, try and merge information on similar positions/responsibilities across organizations into one category. This will be easier to read and will also avoid presenting a negative image of you being a job hopper.

### **If changing your area of specialization, classify the information by function**

If you are changing your field from finance to marketing, then instead of just presenting the details of your past work experience in reverse chronological order by organization, you could clarify the information into different functional areas e.g. your responsibilities and achievements in finance (even if across companies); similarly for marketing.

You should try and incorporate some marketing experience (and hopefully you will have some) if you intend to get into that area.

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### **Include other information only if significant**

You may like to mention your hobbies, interests or extra-curricular activities, under a separate heading, but it will really not add value to your resume unless you have made a significant achievement there. For example, mentioning mountaineering as a hobby is not relevant unless you have achieved something like taken a trip to Mount Everest or Kanchenjunga!

Such achievements, which are not directly related to your work experience, can be put under the heading "Other information".

### **Present education qualifications with the most recent one first**

When giving information on your educational qualifications in a separate section, it is advisable to begin by presenting the most recent degree/diploma achieved, as this is usually relevant to the work you are currently doing. For example, if you have acquired a post-graduate degree in management, give that information at the outset.

There is no need to go as far back as schooling, unless you are a fresh graduate with no work experience. Remember, the resume is just 2 pages and you need to give better reasons for being recruited than the school you studied in!

If you have acquired a degree in some other country, mention a degree that it is equivalent to which is internationally recognized, to put it in the right perspective for the reader. Avoid tables while presenting details of educational qualifications because they occupy more space and interfere with the smooth flow of sentences and points.

Provide information on training if it is at least 3 months or more. Short-term one-week courses do not really look good on your resume unless you do not have enough to stay in 2 pages!

Even if you are not a software/IT professional, today computer literacy is assumed for most positions. So don't list competencies in MS-Word and such like but do include any significant packages you may have learnt, helped develop or are in the process of learning.

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For a candidate applying for an entry level position in an organization, the educational qualifications will be more important as there is no significant work experience other than training. This section could therefore, come before work experience, in your resume.

### References should be provided on request

Though it is useful to have names and contact numbers of people to give as references, it makes sense to provide them only on request. You should not give the details on your resume but provide the information later on, when asked for, or further on in the selection process.

The reason for this is that at the outset you do not know how long your resume will be with a company before you get an interview call. By then the persons you mention as references may have moved or their contact numbers could have changed.

Also you can tailor your list of references based on the company you are applying to. So there is not need to provide the same information to all the places you send your resume to.

It is also a good idea to inform your references that you have given their names before they receive a call out of the blue. This way when the employers who have included you in the short-list for recruitment, contact your references to check you out, there are no hitches or surprises.

Try and follow these guidelines and you will be surprised at the improvements you can make to your resume!

Remember the resume format is flexible depending on the specifics of your background and experience.