**What is a Resume?**

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What is a resume, and why do you need one when you are job searching? A resume is a written compilation of your [education](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/what-to-include-in-the-education-section-of-a-resume-4169507), work experience, credentials, and accomplishments. Most professional positions require applicants to submit a resume and [cover letter](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/cover-letters-4161919) as part of the [application process](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/job-application-process-2061600).

In many cases, your resume is the first document a hiring manager will look at when reviewing your application, and therefore is a true “first impression.” Accordingly, it’s important to put time and effort into developing and maintaining an updated, accurate resume.

Whether you are writing your first resume, or you haven’t updated yours in a while and it needs refreshing, here is a step-by-step guide to writing a resume that will help you get the job you want.

**Review the Purpose of a Resume**

Think of a resume as “self-advertisement” that sums up your experience on one page. Your resume is one of the most important pieces of your job application. It gives the hiring manager an overview of the qualifications you have for the job for which you’re applying.

You should also familiarize yourself with the [difference between a resume and a cover letter](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/resume-vs-cover-letter-2060116):

* A resume is typically sent with a cover letter, which is a document that provides additional information on your skills and experience in letter form.
* A resume is a concise, often [bulleted summary](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-include-bullet-points-in-a-resume-2063124), while a cover letter highlights and expands on certain traits or accomplishments that would be unique or ideal assets for the particular job.

**Start by Doing a Brain Dump of Your Experience**

An effective resume lays out a summary of qualifications that will push the hiring manager or employer to move forward and invite you to interview for the position.

As well as details on skills, education, and work history, resumes can also have optional sections, such as an [objective](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/resume-objective-examples-and-writing-tips-2063595), [summary statement](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-write-a-resume-summary-statement-2061034), [skills](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/what-to-include-in-a-resume-skills-section-2063321), or [career highlights](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/resume-career-highlights-section-2062083). Those sections can be added after you’ve compiled all the factual information you need to list on your resume.

For many people, it can be helpful to sit down with a pen and paper, or a blank Word document, and jot down their [work history](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/work-history-definition-with-examples-2060468) from start to finish. Of course, if you have been in the workforce for many years, this is not going to be time-efficient, so you may choose to focus on your most prominent and relevant positions.

**Make a List of Your Work Experience**

No matter your approach, your goal will be to produce a chronological list of experience that is relevant to the jobs you’re applying to. Although this should focus on professional work experience, you can also include awards or accolades, [volunteer or community experience](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-include-volunteer-work-on-your-resume-2063297), post-grad coursework, and [skills](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/list-of-the-best-skills-for-resumes-2062422), as well as your [college education](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/when-to-include-your-gpa-on-your-resume-2059859), which can move to the bottom of your resume once you get your first job after college.

When you’re working on your brain dump, make sure to include the name of the company, its location, dates of employment, and several bullet points describing your role and responsibilities for each position you list. Although you may need to expand on the bullet points later on, you’ll need this information at the minimum.

**Focus on Your Achievements**

When writing the descriptions for the jobs you’ve held, focus on [what you accomplished in each position](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/tips-for-including-accomplishments-on-a-resume-2061917) rather than what you did. Listing quantifiable achievements in a [numerical manner](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/why-and-how-to-include-numbers-on-your-resume-2063136) (increased sales 20%, reduced expenses by 10%, for example) will help your resume stand out.

Be sure to [match those accomplishments](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-match-your-qualifications-to-a-job-2060941) to the criteria the employer is seeking in the job posting.

If it’s challenging (and it can be!) to write resume descriptions that will catch the attention of the hiring manager, review these tips for [how to make your resume employment history sound better](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-make-your-resume-work-history-sound-better-4105677) – and get you picked for an interview.

**What to Leave Off Your Resume**

There are some things that don’t belong on a resume for a job. [What you exclude](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/what-not-to-include-in-your-resume-2063284)is just as important as what you include. Ideally, your resume should reflect experience that is relevant to the job you are applying to, and typically no more than ten to fifteen years in the past. Since your resume should, if possible, be no longer than [one or two pages](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-many-pages-should-a-resume-be-2063305), you may need to nix certain items.

For example, if you took a job and only stayed there for a month or so, you wouldn’t want to include that position. If you’ve been out of college for more than five years, it’s generally best to remove any internships you’ve had, assuming you have other professional work experience to fill the gap.

However, this is a case where you’ll want to use your common sense. If you went to college for marketing and had a marketing internship your senior year, then worked as a server for the next several years, you would want to include your marketing internship.

Ultimately, you want to try to strike a balance between including experience that is both timely and relevant.

**Choose a Resume Style**

There are [several basic types of resumes used to apply for job openings](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/resume-types-chronological-functional-combination-2063235). Before you spend time writing up all the details around each position you’ve had, you should decide what style of resume to use, as that can affect how you describe, organize, and list your experience, education, skills, qualifications, and other credentials for employment.

**Your options include:**

* [Chronological](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/what-is-a-chronological-resume-2061944) - The most common resume type, in which you list your work experience in reverse chronological order, from the most to the least recent.
* [Functional](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/what-is-a-functional-resume-2061997) – A functional resume focuses on your skills and abilities rather than your work history.
* [Combination](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/combination-resume-example-and-writing-tips-2061951) – This type of resume lists your skills and experience before your employment history.

Which Resume Type is Right for You?

Which resume type should you use for your job search? That depends on what you're trying to accomplish. The goal of any resume is to show a hiring manager the applicant's strengths, skills, and experience in as short a time as possible. According to one study, recruiters spend as little as six seconds reviewing a resume before moving on to the next, so it's in your best interests to put your finest qualities and accomplishments in a prominent position on the page.

In addition, functional or combination resumes may also be useful if you're trying to draw the reader's attention away from something – namely, [large gaps in your work history](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-explain-a-gap-on-your-resume-2063188) or detours into unrelated fields.

**Format Your Resume**

Once you have written and organized your information according to the type of resume you have chosen, be sure to format it according to [typical professional standards](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-create-a-professional-resume-2063237). You should use consistent spacing throughout, and evenly sized margins on all sides if possible. It’s generally best to stick to your word processor’s default settings, but in some cases, if you shrink the margins on the left, right, top and bottom, this can help buy more space to [fit your resume on one page](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-write-a-one-page-resume-2063117).

Although visual or infographic resumes have become trendy in some industries, it is always a safe bet to stick with traditional formatting: white page, black text, readable font. Choose a [basic font](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/best-resume-font-size-and-type-2063125) such as Arial, Times New Roman, Calibri, Helvetica, or Georgia. Ideally, your font size should be no larger than 12 and no smaller than 10.5.

Even if you are only sending in copies digitally, it is a good idea to print your resume (as it’s possible that hiring managers may be doing so) to be sure it prints on a single page, and is easy to read in printed form. Reading over a printed copy of your resume will also help you ensure that there is plenty of white space on the page and it looks professional.

**Proofread, Proofread, and Proofread Again**

Not even professional proofreaders can easily proofread their own work. Once you've made a typo, it's hard to catch it yourself. For that reason, it's a good idea to have one or two trusted friends take a look at your resume before you send it in for consideration. Use this [resume proofreading checklist](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/resume-proofreading-checklist-2063191) first, then ask someone else to give it a final review to be sure it’s perfect before you click send or upload to apply for a job.

**Think of Your Resume as a Living Document**

In the short term, you should [tweak your resume based on each job you apply to](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-tailor-your-resume-for-jobs-2063133). For example, if one position you’re applying to seems to weigh a certain responsibility or focus over another, you should be sure your resume conveys your expertise in this area.

At the same time, you should be updating your resume with your experience as it develops, adding any new skills you’ve learned, courses you’ve taken or awards you won.

It is much easier to update your resume periodically than all at once, so even when you’re employed, set a reminder to refresh your resume every three months, while the information is still fresh in your head. This will make your next job search much easier, should you decide to switch companies or careers in the future.

**20 tips to dress appropriately for work**

**Vivian Giang**

Whether you like it or not, the way you look plays a role in your success in the modern workplace.

“The problem with appearance is that it translates to performance,” says Nicole Williams, a career expert at LinkedIn. “Even if your boss doesn't think that they're thinking any less of you, they will subconsciously think it.

“When you don't fit in, you're not as accepted and welcomed.”

And at some point, this could hurt your chances of getting a promotion.

In today's workplace, where casual wear is becoming increasingly popular, it can be tricky to understand the rules of appearance. We talked to career and etiquette experts to get a better idea.

Below are 20 rules every professional should follow:

* **GENERAL TIPS**

**1. Understand what's appropriate in your industry**

“Everyone draws their lines differently,” says etiquette coach Barbara Pachter. “For example, you may be able to wear shorts, but not cut-offs. If your company has a dress code, follow it.”

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**2. Make sure your clothes fit**

It may sound obvious, but many get it wrong. “If your clothes are too big or too small, they are not going to look good. Ensuring a proper fit applies to everything you are wearing,” says Pachter. “One interviewer said he was distracted by a man's short tie.”

**3. Wear glasses that fit**

Make sure your glasses fit properly and aren't sliding down your nose. You don't want to be playing with them all the time, says Pachter. “This becomes distracting.”

**4. Dry your hair**

Never leave your house with wet hair, warns Williams. It makes you look like you don't have your life together, which translates to not having your career together.

**5. Pay attention to your bag**

You don't want your personal things jutting out of your purse or briefcase. Keep your bag clean on the inside, especially if it doesn't have a zipper, which allows others to catch a glimpse inside from time to time. Williams also advises professionals not to wear knapsacks because it looks “too collegiate”.

**6. Don't wear strong perfume or cologne**

“Anything that anyone else can smell is not good,” says Williams. To get an idea of whether someone can smell you or not, ask someone you trust.

**7. Wear well-kept, polished shoes**

“One recruiter told me the first thing he notices about a candidate is his or her shoes,” says Pachter. “Make sure your shoes are polished and in good condition.”

**8. Pay attention to your watch**

“When I ask the participants in my etiquette classes to name the one accessory that they notice most on both men and women, the watch is the most common answer,” Pachter says.

**9. Wear rich colors to portray authority**

“Pay attention to your color choices,” Pachter says. “Darker colors usually convey a stronger impression than lighter ones.” If you're giving a presentation, make sure the color you're wearing doesn't blend in with the background behind you.

**10. Avoid neon colors and overly flashy clothes**

“Both men and women have to be cautious with bright colors,” Patcher says. Clothes that are too flashy can be distracting and the visual equivalent of shouting.

**FOR WOMEN**

**11. Don't be too sexy**

Not only is wearing inappropriate clothing distracting, it can also give off an inaccurate impression. Avoid too-short hemlines, too-tall heels, plunging necklines, and exposed under garments. “A lot of women are oversexualized in the office,” says Williams. “You can wear a V-neck shirt, but make sure you keep your legs covered. People end up discrediting themselves by looking too provocative.” Pachter agrees: “What do you want to be remembered for? What you wore or what you said?”

**12. Wearing nude pantyhose is hip**

Ever since Kate Middleton started wearing pantyhose in public, it quickly became stylish again. “It gives you a more finished look,” Pachter says.

**13. Get regular pedicures**

Williams tells us one of her biggest pet peeves is when women wear open-toed shoes without getting pedicures. “If you're going to show your toes, make sure your toes are well-groomed,” she says.

**14. Don't over-accessorise**

Accessories are meant to complement your outfit, not overpower it. “I once met a woman who had a ring on every finger,” Pachter says. “You couldn't look at anything else.”

**15. Your jewellery shouldn't make noise**

It's really distracting when someone's dangly bangles make noises when they move their arms, says Williams.

**FOR MEN**

**16. Avoid ankle socks with slacks**

When you cross your legs and the pants slightly lift up, no skin should be showing, says Pachter. Your socks need to be an appropriate length.

**17. Facial hair shouldn't overwhelm your face**

No matter how much you want to grow a full, bushy beard, it just might not work for you. Think about it like a haircut — not every cut is going to look good on every person, says Adam P. Causgrove, CEO of The American Moustache Institute. How do you know what style will look good on you? Determine what kind of face shape and features you have. Then find others with similar features who are already sporting moustaches and beards, and experiment with their cut and style.

**18. Grow facial hair on a weekend or vacation**

You want to look like you've grown hair on purpose instead of just being lazy and not shaving, says Causgrove. Williams advises using a weekend or vacation time to grow beards out, because “spotty beards make men look like 18-year-olds.”

**19. Trim your beard**

Facial hair needs to be kept trim and tidy to maintain a professional look. Causgrove advises doing some research on the proper device. Electric razors can be good for short, trimmed beards, and scissors are better for moustaches, he says.

**20. A goatee is rarely a good idea**

Any hair that's under your lower lip that isn't a beard is not a good idea, says Pachter. “Do you want to be the only person [with it]? It may work for you, it may work against you, but you need to make that decision for yourself,” she warns.