

RESUME PREPARATION GUIDE



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Getting started

Before you begin to create your resume, it's important to know what a resume is, why you need one, and how you can create a document that is best for you.

What is a resume?

A resume is an essential job-searching document that summarizes your relevant education, experience, skills, and activities. It is a marketing tool that allows you to showcase your best, most qualified self to an employer.

Are there different types of resumes?

There are two main types of resumes: chronological and functional. Most college students benefit most from using the chronological style resume. This resume style focuses on your education and experience in reverse chronological order—with your current or most recent experiences listed first. If you are a post-traditional student who is changing careers, or if you have significant gaps in your employment history, a functional resume may be a better option for you. The functional style resume focuses on your skill sets and de-emphasizes your chronological work history. If you have questions about which format may be the most effective choice for you, speak to a career advisor in our office.

Is there a perfect resume?

Yes and no! We want you to strive for perfection with your own resume. You should take the time to create a resume that includes relevant and appropriate information in a succinct, visually-appealing format, that is free from all errors. However, the perfect resume for one person may not be the perfect resume for someone else. This guide will help you understand appropriate categories of information to include in your resume, give you ideas of attractive ways to format your resume, and show you examples of finished resumes. Customizing your resume is the best way to make yourself shine!

Should I use a resume template?

No! There are many reasons why it is best to create your own resume using a blank Microsoft Word document rather than a template. Template resumes frequently suggest categories and organizational styles that are not ideal for students; they can be troublesome when applying for positions online or using applicant tracking systems; and they can leave the employer with a negative impression, as it may show that you lack initiative or imagination. Also, avoid using tables when creating your resume, as these can create problems when editing and applying online.

Resume components

Understanding common resume components, or categories of information, is the first step in creating an effective resume.

Basic components

Contact Information
Objective
Education
Experience

Optional components

Summary/Qualifications
Honors/Awards
Volunteer Experience
Leadership Experience
Involvement/Activities
Skills
Certifications/Licensure
Related Courses
Co-op/Internship Experience
Research
Military Experience
Memberships/Affiliations

Which components should I include?

As you review the component options above, think about your own experiences. Do you have a job? Have you volunteered? Are you active in clubs or organizations on campus? Do you participate in team sports? Are you learning skills in your classes that relate to your career field? Have you been recognized for an achievement?

All of these things can be included on your resume and can help to demonstrate to an employer the skills, qualities, and strengths that you would bring to their company or organization.



TIPS: As you begin writing your resume, it is a good idea to consider all the things you could potentially include on your resume; however, you may not need to include everything. Keep in mind that your resume is a summary and should be one-to-two typed pages. If you have limited experience, try to think of ways to fill the page. If you have numerous jobs, activities, and experiences, you may not be able to include them all. Focus on the most relevant and related information first, then fill in with additional information as needed to round out your resume.

Objective

The objective lets an employer know the type of opportunities you are currently seeking and sets the tone for the rest of your resume. Are you interested in a part-time summer position that allows you to work with children? Are you looking for an accounting internship? Are you hoping to gain experience in the field of information technology? Your objective statement relays this information in a brief, succinct way.

What should I say in the objective statement?

There are three main focus areas of objective statements: position, field, and skills. You can opt to use any of these approaches, or you can use a combination of them.

Below are examples of each:

Position:

A nursing assistant position with St. Elizabeth Hospital.

Field:

To obtain a position in the field of biochemistry.

Skill/Field Combination:

Seeking a summer position that allows me to use my creativity and problem-solving skills, ideally in a nonprofit setting.

Are there alternatives to objectives?

Objective statements work well for most students; however, if you are a seasoned professional with years of work experience, you may find it more beneficial to opt for a Professional Summary section instead. This component would include a brief, two-to-three sentence paragraph, highlighting your professional background and experience. Additionally, you can include key words or skills that are sought after in your field to further demonstrate the strengths you bring to the table. (An example of a professional summary can be found in resume Example #10.)



TIPS: Your objective should be tailored to match the position you are currently seeking, especially if you use the position-specific style of objective.

Will you be taking your resume to a career fair or networking event? Try the field-focused objective style, which is broader and will allow you to seek a wider range of opportunities.

Education

As a college student, one of the most important components of your resume is the education section. Even if you haven't earned your degree at this point, employers want to know what you are learning and what degree you are seeking.

What information should be included?

In this section, you will highlight your educational experiences, including your current school name and location, degree you are seeking, major(s) and minor(s), and expected graduation date. You may also include your GPA, either cumulative or within your major, if it is 3.0 or higher. Other optional content includes related coursework; study abroad experiences; academic honors, awards, or scholarships; and other noteworthy academic achievements.

Below is an example:

EDUCATION

Northern Kentucky University, Highland Heights, KY
Bachelor of Arts in Organizational Leadership, May 20XX
Minors in Spanish and Honors
GPA: 3.7/4.0

Should I include high school?

If you are a college junior or senior, or beyond, you will no longer need to include your high school information in the Education section. If you are in your first two years of college, you have the option of including your high school information. Keep in mind that you will be listing information on your resume in reverse chronological order, so list your current educational experience first, followed by previous schools.

What if I have relevant trainings or certifications?

The education section of your resume is typically reserved for diplomas and degrees, but may also be an appropriate place for undergraduate or graduate certifications relating to your degree. If you have multiple career-related trainings and certifications (e.g., OSHA, CPR, Six Sigma, etc.) they may work best in a separate *Training and Certifications* category.



TIP: Including transfer schools and other earned degrees on your resume is optional. Speak with a Career Advisor if you are unsure about what to include.

Experience

The experience section is a crucial building block of your resume. This is your chance to demonstrate to an employer the skills, abilities, and knowledge you will bring to their organization.

Should I only include paid work experience?

No! The experience section is broad enough to include paid and unpaid positions. Examples include volunteer work, research experiences, significant class projects, leadership roles within a campus organization, internships/co-ops, etc. As you are building your experience section, you should consider all the various ways you have gained experience, especially experiences related to the jobs you are applying for.

What information should I include?

You should include the name and location of your employer, your job title/role, and the month and year of the start and end dates for the experience. If an experience is ongoing, use *to present* instead of an end date. You should also include a brief summary of the experience, ideally listed in bullet point format. Your summary statements should include information that is relevant and relatable, demonstrates transferrable skills and abilities, and highlights unique accomplishments.

Below is an example:

EXPERIENCE

University Housing, Northern Kentucky University, Highland Heights, KY
Resident Assistant, Aug. 20XX-Present

- Develop and implement workshop series for 50 residents
- Plan, budget, and promote social events for residents
- Received Best Educational Program award for 20XX



TIPS: Avoid “I” statements in your experience descriptions. Start each bullet point with an action verb, and vary your verb choice for maximum impact. (See a list of action verbs on page 10 of this guide.)

If you are describing an experience that has ended, write the description in past-tense. If the experience is ongoing, write the description in present-tense.

Periods at the end of bullet points are optional, but if you choose to include them, be consistent in their usage.

Customizing your Experience section

For some people, listing all of their experiences in one section, in reverse chronological order, works well. For others, there are better approaches to showcase relevant skills and experiences.

What if some of my experiences are more relevant than others?

You can break out of the reverse chronological order format by creating two separate experience sections in your resume. List the most relevant experience(s) first, followed by additional experiences. For example, if you had a summer internship last year that was related to your major, but you currently work a part-time job that is not related to your career goals, you should first create an *Internship* category, where you can include your internship information, followed by an *Additional Experience* category, where you describe your other experiences.

Below is an example for someone looking to work in a nonprofit:

CAREER-RELATED EXPERIENCE

Volunteer Training Intern, Summer 2015

American Red Cross, Cincinnati, OH

- Taught and developed Community Disaster Education.
- Recruited and trained volunteers.
- Helped organize response teams for local and national disasters.

ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE

Bank Teller, Mar. 2016-present

Stock Yards Bank, Highland Heights, KY

- Handle and reconcile daily cash drawer; process credit card applications.



TIP: Consider how you can best customize your own experiences through the use of separate experience categories. Are you heavily involved in campus organizations? You could create a *Leadership Experience* category. Does your major involve significant projects? You might try a *Projects* category. You can also classify the type of work experience you have, such as *Sales Experience*, *Teaching Experience*, *Healthcare Experience*, etc. Other category options include *Employment*, *Work Experience*, and *Other Experience*. See our examples at the end of this guide for more ideas.

Additional components

There are many additional categories of information that you can add to your resume to showcase the unique blend of skills and experiences you bring to an employer.

Honors/Awards

Academic honors can be included within your education section, but if you have numerous honors and awards to mention, or if you want to bring special attention to them, creating an *Honors and Awards* category may be appropriate. Keep in mind to focus on college awards and honors, as opposed to those earned in high school.

Activities/Involvement

This section can include memberships in clubs, organizations, Greek life, athletic teams, etc. If you have simply been a member of an organization, you can provide minimal information, such as organization name and date of membership. (See resume Example # 2.) If, however, you have held leadership roles within organizations, it is recommended to include that information. (See resume Example # 9.) If your experience has been extensive, or if it is related to your career goals, you can include summary statements much like those included in your experience section to describe your experiences. (See resume Example # 3.)

Skills

You are gaining many wonderful skills during your college career, but do you need a separate skills section to list them? Maybe not. If you have technical skills, foreign language skills, and/or job-specific skills, including them in a skills section on your resume is appropriate. (See resume Examples # 1, 3, 4, and 6.) For non-technical skills, we encourage you to incorporate relevant skills into your experience descriptions, and to avoid lists of “soft skills” such as communication, organization, and people skills.



TIPS: You don't want to overwhelm an employer with pages of activities, awards, and honors. If you have been highly involved, it will be important for you to select a few key experiences, awards, etc. We know this can be a challenging process, but it can help to focus on these criteria: relevance and time. If an activity is valued by your employer or can help demonstrate your skills in a particular area, great! If you were involved in a club for an extended period of time, that may be worth mentioning. If you are thinking of adding something that is not relevant or happened a long time ago, it may be best to reconsider.

Also be cautious about including sensitive items relating to religious organizations, political groups, etc.

References

Most employers will ask you for a list of references during the hiring process. References are individuals who know you well enough to speak positively about your skills, attributes, and qualifications.

Should I include my references on my resume?

No, you will not add a list of references at the bottom of your resume. Instead, you will create a separate References page, which includes your name and contact information at the top in the same style as your resume, followed by the names and contact information of your references. (See Example #8 for an example References page.)

Including the “References available upon request” phrase at the bottom of your resume is optional. It is understood that you will provide this information to the employer when asked.

How many references do I need?

Some employers will request a specific number of references, but a good general guideline is three to five references.

Can anyone serve as a reference?

References usually fall into one of two categories: personal or professional. Unless an employer asks for personal (or character) references, they are most likely seeking professional references. Try to select references who have worked with you, supervised you, instructed you, etc. The reference needs to be able to speak to your work and/or classroom behaviors, such as work ethic, strengths, and personal traits. For these reasons, managers and supervisors of work or volunteer experiences are appropriate, as are faculty members. You should avoid using family members as references.



TIPS: You should always ask a person’s permission before using him or her as a reference, and you should determine that the person will be able to give a positive and informative reference. Not only is this a common courtesy, but it works in your favor as well. While asking someone to serve as a reference for you, you have the opportunity to update that person on your major, current employment pursuits, etc.

Give your references a copy of your finished resume.

If you are hired for a position, it is nice to thank your references and update them on your successes.

Layout and formatting

The visual appeal of your resume can be just as important as the content you include. Take care to consider the style, layout, and readability of your document.

Layout and use of space

Consider this: how reader-friendly is your finished resume? Will an employer be able to quickly skim the information and identify your qualifications? Is it easy to see where one component ends and another begins? Make your category headings pop; use bullet point statements rather than paragraphs; leave some white space on the page; don't overcrowd your text and leave a half-inch to one-inch margin all around the page.

Fonts, highlights, and emphasis

There is no perfect resume font, but choose a font that is easy to read and not distracting. Font size for your resume should be between 10 and 12 points, with your name slightly larger. Use of all-caps, boldface type, italics, and underlines can really make pertinent information stand out, but be careful not to overuse these and to apply these styles consistently.

Style

Most students should take a conservative, traditional approach to their resume, avoiding color, graphics, and bold layout choices. However, if you are entering a creative or design-focused career field, you may be able to take more risks with your resume to demonstrate your artistic skills.

Consistency and errors

Consistency in your resume is very important. Use a consistent font, make consistent design and layout choices, and be consistent in the writing of your resume. For example, if you choose to underline one job title, you will need to underline all your job titles. If you choose to put a dividing line between two categories, you will want to include the same line between all categories. Even details as small as date formats and state abbreviations matter, so pay very close attention to those details!



TIPS: Errors are not acceptable in your resume, so be sure to have your document proofread by Career Services or someone else you trust. Career Services offers resume reviews during our walk-in hours or by appointment. See our website for days and times.

If you are a student, be sure to upload your finished resume to HireNKU so employers can find you. Visit careerservices.nku.edu for additional information on HireNKU.

Action Words

accelerated	coordinated	framed	obtained	reviewed
accomplished	corrected	fulfilled	operated	revived
achieved	created	generated	ordered	saved
acquired	cultivated	guided	organized	scheduled
activated	decreased	halved	originated	secured
adapted	defined	handled	overcame	selected
administered	delegated	headed	overhauled	served
advanced	delivered	helped	oversaw	set up
advised	demonstrated	hired	participated	settled
allocated	designated	identified	performed	shaped
analyzed	designed	implemented	pinpointed	showed
anticipated	determined	improved	pioneered	simplified
applied	developed	improvised	planned	sold
appointed	devised	increased	prepared	solved
appraised	directed	influenced	presented	sorted
approved	discharged	initiated	prevented	specified
arranged	discovered	inspected	processed	sponsored
assessed	distributed	inspired	procured	streamlined
assisted	documented	installed	produced	strengthened
assigned	doubled	instituted	programmed	stretched
attained	earned	instructed	projected	suggested
audited	edited	integrated	promoted	summarized
augmented	effected	interpreted	proposed	supervised
averted	eliminated	interviewed	proved	supported
avoided	employed	introduced	provided	surpassed
broadened	enforced	invented	published	surveyed
built	engineered	invested	purchased	sustained
calculated	established	investigated	realized	taught
centralized	estimated	launched	recommended	tested
clarified	evaluated	lectured	reconciled	trained
collaborated	examined	led	recruited	transferred
combined	exceeded	liquidated	redesigned	transformed
completed	executed	located	reduced	translated
composed	exercised	made	re-established	trimmed
conceived	expanded	maintained	regulated	tripled
concluded	expedited	managed	reinforced	uncovered
condensed	extended	marketed	rejected	undertook
conducted	extracted	mediated	related	unified
consolidated	facilitated	minimized	renegotiated	utilized
constructed	financed	mobilized	reorganized	verified
consulted	forecasted	modernized	reported	vitalized
contracted	formed	modified	represented	widened
contributed	formulated	monitored	researched	won
controlled	found	motivated	resolved	worked
converted	founded	negotiated	restored	wrote