

Building or updating your resume is one of most important (and most stressful) parts of preparing for your job search. Remember to be kind to yourself during this process: take breaks, stretch, get outside, stay hydrated, and remind yourself that your resume is just one piece of the modern-day job search puzzle — it does not reflect your self-worth. You are much more than your resume. So let's work together on getting past the hiring gatekeepers!

Before we get into the checklist, here are some things to keep in mind:

- **Your resume can be up to two pages, but use space wisely.** If there are only two lines on page two, find a way to reformat.
- **Beware of resume templates.** They're finicky to update, recruiters have seen them all, and they're often not easy to skim.
- **Focus on the right information and make it easy to skim.** Statistics show that recruiters and hiring managers spend about 6-7 seconds skimming a resume during their initial look. They are essentially pattern-matching for titles, key skills, location, and software. Make it easy for whomever — or whatever Applicant Tracking System (ATS) — is reviewing your resume by focusing on the right information (see details below) and making it easy to skim.
- **Readability is more important than flashiness.** It's okay for a resume to be "boring." The goal is to clearly express your experience and abilities. A resume with too much going on is more difficult for humans to scan, let alone an ATS that doesn't compute the slick graphics you thought would help your resume stand out. Keep it simple.
- **Keep blocks of text short.** 2-3 lines of text with bullet points at the start of each chunk is ideal. White space throughout will help the eye track through.

HEADER

- This section includes your name, title (optional), phone number, email address, city/state, LinkedIn URL, link to portfolio if applicable, and profile (optional).
- The top quarter of your resume is prime real estate; this is where people spend the majority of their time skimming.
- Use the name you want to be called at work on your resume, and use the same name in your email. (e.g. if your legal name is Abigail, but you've gone by AJ your whole life, use AJ.)
- Use a business-appropriate email address (and make sure your email display name is correct too).
- Only include your city/state — no need to include your home address; it opens up security and bias issues. If you're planning a move, write that instead of your current location (e.g. "Relocating to Portland, OR in Summer 2021").
- Create a custom LinkedIn URL and include it with your contact information. Not sure how? Ask Google.
- Skip the "Objective" and instead consider a "Profile" section with a short elevator pitch of your experience. Keep it to 2-3 sentences.
- If your past job titles are confusing or don't match the role you're applying for, consider including a title at the top of your resume. For example: Paula Doe, Communications Professional.

SKILLS

- This section is typically placed *before* the Experience section, but could go after depending on the role you're applying for. For example, if the role requires a lot of specific software knowledge, put Skills before Experience.
- Skills are common keywords, so use the job description to make sure you've included all the relevant skills someone skimming your resume is looking for.
- Include technical skills and other "hard skills" rather than "soft skills". Hard skills are things that can be evaluated objectively, such as MS Excel or a typing speed. Soft skills such as "good communication skills" or "hard worker" can be left off the skills section. Instead, try to demonstrate your soft skills within the experience section.
- Avoid evaluating your own hard skills with things like "expert ability" or "90% Excel aptitude" — let the employers decide if you're an expert.
- Include all relevant/required software, even if it seems obvious. "MS Office" may not suffice for a job that requires MS Access.



EXPERIENCE

- Think of your resume as a sales pitch rather than an autobiography. Focus on recent and relevant experience that relates to the role you're applying for. We suggest including your last 3-5 roles or 10-15 years.
- Your experience should tell *your* story, not just the story of anybody who might do that job, so whenever possible, use details that highlight your specific achievements rather than just listing your assigned duties. (e.g. "answered 10+ phone lines on Mitel system" vs. "acted as receptionist").
- Use chronological format, starting with your most recent roles, unless you have a very good reason not to.
- For each role, we recommend 2-3 lines of text that highlight your relevant experience, with bullet points at the start of each chunk of text. White space throughout will help the eye track through.
- Leave off or minimize job tasks you really do not want to do in the future.
- Significant volunteer experience can be included in experience — just because it wasn't paid doesn't mean it wasn't work.
- If any of your past employers were small, obscure, or located elsewhere, help give context to potential employers. One short line of text before you get into the bullet points can go a long way. You can usually pull this info from the company's website if you're not sure of the specifics: "New Jersey's largest widget manufacturer, employing 3,000 in NJ/NY/PA" or "A small branding firm serving non-profits in major cities nationwide."
- Address any employment gaps longer than about ~12 months (there's no "rule" and the best practice may vary based on your industry). You don't need to go into a lot of detail. "Traveled the world" or "Took care of family" is enough to satisfy any curiosity.

EDUCATION

- Unless you are a recent grad, your education should be placed *under* your work experience.
- Leave off your GPA (unless required or relevant for your industry).
- For college degrees, use this format: Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Arts, or Associate of Arts.
- If you're worried about ageism, don't feel like you need to include any graduation dates.

DO NOT INCLUDE

- Photographs — they trigger bias and take up a lot of space.
- Your references' names and contact info — this should only be supplied upon request since references should not be called without your knowledge/consent. Also, you don't need to say "references available upon request".
- Irrelevant personal details like hobbies and interests — they can trigger a lot of bias.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Consistency is key! Some commonly-missed details:

- Use the same style of hyphen in every date range (and bonus — always align dates to right).
- Hyphenate words that ought to be hyphenated (e.g. "detail-oriented").
- Make sure design elements are aligned together the same way from top to bottom.
- To end bullets with periods or not to end bullets with periods? It doesn't matter as long as you're consistent.
- Make sure that your resume can be read by an automated applicant tracking system — the final draft should have selectable text and your name should be written plainly in text at the top of the resume.
- Make sure that all content attached to your application is professional, relevant, and up-to-date, including your LinkedIn profile and any personal websites that might be associated with your email address or otherwise featured.
- Don't make your font and margins super tiny just to fit on one page. Size 11-12 font is safe. Less than 0.5" margins is probably too small.

Congratulations — you're making major progress on your resume! One step at a time.
Visit our Job Seeker Resources page at bolywelch.com/jobseekers for more tips and advice.