

# WHAT IS A RÉSUMÉ AND WHAT SHOULD IT INCLUDE?

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A résumé is a document that summarizes your education, experiences, and competencies. It's designed to introduce you to an employer and highlight your qualifications for a specific job or type of work.

- Résumés are focused on non-academic work with an emphasis on related competencies (skills, knowledge and attributes)
- Résumés aim to summarize key information
- Résumés are generally 1 to 2 pages maximum

The terms résumé and CV are sometimes used interchangeably. However, a résumé is used for work search, and a CV is used when applying for contracts, advanced research or post-secondary teaching positions. For those who use the two terms synonymously, the terms “academic résumé” or “academic CV” are often used to differentiate between advanced research and post-secondary teaching documents.

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## What is the purpose of a résumé?

A résumé on its own won't get you a job—its purpose is to encourage an employer to consider you for an interview. You can use a résumé in a number of different situations:

- + Applying for work
- + Networking with potential employers
- + Applying for graduate school, co-op programs, internships, scholarships, etc
- + Participating in events such as career fairs, recruiting events, etc

## What are the common résumé formats?

There are three commonly used résumé formats to help you highlight your most relevant information:

- + Chronological
- + Functional
- + Combination (functional and chronological)

What distinguishes these formats from one another is how your competencies and accomplishments are presented in the document. Competencies are described in ways that are:

- + Observable
- + Measurable
- + Linked to the workplace, academic environment and other life experiences
- + Transferable
- + Based on performance

You can find more information about each type of résumé below, as well as samples and templates in the tool kit

### Type 1: Chronological résumé

The chronological résumé is the most common type. Descriptions of your competencies and accomplishments are listed directly under each position, and your employment and other experiences are organized by date in reverse chronological order. The chronological résumé is useful when your most recent experience is closely related to your career goal or when your experiences

show a pattern of growth and responsibility over time. See samples and templates in the tool kit.

Advantages of the chronological résumé:

- + It gives a clear profile of each separate experience.
- + It's the format preferred by most employers.
- + It's relatively easy to write.

Disadvantages of the chronological résumé:

- + It forces you to share information in a certain order rather than relating it to your career goal.
- + If you have held a number of similar positions, the statements under each one may be too repetitive.

## **Type 2: Functional résumé**

In this type of résumé, your competencies and accomplishments are separated from your chronological education and work history and organized into groups according to thematic areas (e.g. communication, marketing, research, etc.). The functional résumé is useful when you are making a career shift, or when your most recent experiences are not related to your career goal. See samples and templates in the tool kit.

Advantages of the functional résumé:

- + You can emphasize the competencies and accomplishments most relevant to your career goal.
- + If you don't have extensive or recent work experience, but have developed strong relevant competencies from educational activities and volunteer work, this format allows you to group your competencies together on the first page.

Disadvantages of the functional résumé:

- + It's more work to write a good functional résumé than a good chronological résumé.
- + It can sometimes be frustrating for the employer to identify which competencies you used in which work experience. This can be addressed in your competency statements by being specific about where or how you demonstrated these skills.

## **Type 3: Combination résumé**

The combination résumé format combines the two formats described above. It includes both a competency and accomplishment section organized by theme, and some descriptive information under each position you have held. You may choose a combination format when your career history is somewhat related to the position you are applying for, and you wish to highlight the transferability of your competencies from a variety of positions. See samples and templates in the tool kit.

Advantages of the combination résumé:

- + Your competencies are grouped in an order that relates best to your career goal.
- + Employers have some information about your responsibilities and accomplishments in each of your positions.

Disadvantages of the combination résumé:

- + This is the most complex format to put together as it can easily become too repetitive and dense.
- + It can be difficult to keep a combination résumé to two pages.

## **Can you have a "general", "all purpose", "one size fits all" résumé?**

It's not possible to have an effective "one size fits all" résumé for the simple reason that different types of work require you to highlight different aspects of your experience. If you're applying for a number of similar jobs, you can have a "master" résumé that reflects the general requirements for this work, but you should tweak this résumé to match your skills as closely as possible to each application.

An employer needs to see quickly and clearly how your background meets his or her needs for the particular work being recruiting for. Your résumé should make it as easy as possible for the employer to see how you fit his or her specific needs.

A résumé can be time consuming to prepare, but it's important to remember that it's an evolving document and it will change over time. Spend the necessary time on it to make it a quality, professional document that you will be proud to use.

## What content should you include in your résumé?

Résumés are organized in sections that describe your education, work/volunteer experience, competencies, accomplishments, etc. There are no strict rules on how to organize the information on your résumé. Different employers will have different preferences.

A good general rule is to make sure that your most relevant information is towards the top of the résumé. Another common practice is to list your experiences in your work, volunteer and educational sections in reverse chronological order so that the most recent information is at the top of each section.

Employers rarely read a résumé from beginning to end. They scan and skim them, usually starting at the beginning, and may spend only 10 or 20 seconds making an initial assessment. If there is not enough immediate information that connects you with the position, they may not bother looking at the rest of the résumé.

### Required information

- + **Personal contact information:** This forms the header of your résumé and includes your name, address, phone numbers and email. Make sure you have a professional email address and voicemail message.
- + **Education:** This is a list of your educational credentials in reverse chronological order. For each credential, include the name of the degree/diploma/certificate, the institution and the year of completion for each of your credentials. Once you have started your university degree, it is common practice to remove your high school diploma from your résumé. However, if you have had an unusual or unique high school experience that links to your work goal, you may want to include it.
- + **Work experience:** This is a list of your work experiences in reverse chronological order. For each work experience include the position title, the name and location of the organization and the start and end dates (both month and year) for each of your experiences. If you are at the beginning of your career, you should provide a complete list of your work experience back to your first job. If you are in mid-career, you may want to edit your work history somewhat to save space. It's common to only go back ten years unless you have a good reason to include earlier positions. For example, if you are targeting a career area that matches your earlier work, or you have been with only one employer for more than ten years. In some cases, you may want to divide your work experience into two separate lists, Related Work Experience and Additional Work History to focus the reader on your most relevant experience.
- + **Competencies/accomplishments:** Competencies/accomplishments need to be embedded throughout different sections of your résumé but presented in the context of your work and educational experiences. Use the [HOW TO EXPRESS YOUR COMPETENCIES](#) info sheet as a resource, or check out other material in the competency kit.
- + **References:** Your references are three to four people who know you, generally from a work or educational setting, and who are willing to be contacted by a potential employer in order to comment on your contributions, personal qualities and work ethic.

References most often include former or present supervisors, professors and coaches. References must NOT include relatives or friends. For each reference you will include the name, position title, organizational affiliation, location, phone number and email address. Always ask permission of your references to use their information. You may also want to ask them what they would say about you if someone called doing a reference check. It's a good idea to let them know about the kind of work you are applying for. Keep your references updated on your work search progress to ensure they will not be blind-sided by a call they were not expecting. It is also a good idea to provide them with a current copy of your résumé.

You have the option of including your references at the end of your résumé or keeping them on a separate sheet and indicating "References available on request" at the bottom of your résumé. It can be efficient to include these on your résumé. However, if you do not want to publicly circulate contact information for your references, you may decide not to have your references on your résumé. If you have not included your references on your résumé, it is important to bring this list with you to your interviews.

Reference letters do not replace a personal connection and employers usually prefer to make direct contact with your references. It's important to keep in contact with your previous employers, even if they change jobs, as prospective employers will still wish to speak with them. Put a notation on your résumé indicating the context in which you knew your previous employer (e.g., "former supervisor").

## Optional information

- + **Objective:** This is a brief statement at the beginning of your résumé that focuses on how you can contribute to your field of practice.
- + **Professional profile/summary:** This is a brief and very useful section near the beginning of your résumé that includes four to six statements that strongly connect you to the work you are seeking. Often you will include statements describing your specifically related competencies and accomplishments. Think of this as a summary of the key points from your cover letter.
- + **Volunteer experience/community involvement:** Celebrate your volunteer experience and format it as you would your paid work.
- + **Technical expertise:** This is often used by people in scientific or technical professions and most frequently consists of relevant techniques, processes and equipment. Technical expertise often appears near the top of the résumé and includes key words that relate to the position.
- + **Professional memberships or affiliations:** These are the professional associations you are a member of or informal professional groups in which you participate.
- + **Additional training:** These are courses or training programs you have taken in addition to your formal education.
- + **Professional credentials/licenses:** These are the qualifications or credentials provided by professional groups following a training program or a testing process (e.g., Class 5 Driver's License, CPR training etc.).
- + **Interests:** This is a brief statement at the end of your résumé that lists interests, hobbies or activities that provide a more rounded picture of you.

## Information NOT to include

- + In Canada and the United States, you should not include photos, birth dates, social insurance numbers, marital status and number of children on your résumé.

## Résumé checklist

Use this checklist to put together content for your résumé. Next, meet with a Co-op and Career staff member to review your draft together.

Section/area	Completed?
<b>Required on a résumé</b>	
Personal contact information	
Education	
Competencies/accomplishments	
Work experience	
References	
<b>Optional on a résumé</b>	
Objective	

Professional profile/summary	
Volunteer experience/community involvement	
Technical expertise	
Professional memberships or affiliations	
Additional training	
Professional credentials/licenses	
Interests	