Resume Tips

Your resume is your most important job search tool. No matter how qualified you may be for a position, you won't get your foot in the door unless you look good on paper.

"The bottom-line purpose of a resume is to get called for an interview," says Kathryn Kunkel, a program supervisor at Job Quest - Career Services in Selkirk, Manitoba.

A good resume follows one of the three recognized formats. A chronological resume lists each of your most recent work experiences in reverse chronological order, followed by a quick summary of your educational achievements. A functional resume stresses skills and accomplishments, allowing you to list the most impressive, followed by summaries of your past jobs and education.

The third choice is a combination of both styles. "It's your choice which you use, based on your level of experience and length of work history," says Kunkel.

What to Include

Your resume should be no more than two pages in length. Provide all relevant contact information, including your name, mailing address, phone and fax numbers, and email address (only if you check it regularly).

On strategy for creating your resume is to start by clearly stating your employment objective, followed by a summary of your relevant qualifications. You can list specific skills and abilities, languages, special awards, written works or publications, and years of experience. Since this section is a summary, choose four to five items to highlight.

Your employment history should also be incorporated into your resume. "This could also be volunteer experience, if you have no paid work experience," says Kunkel, "as well as part-time, casual, and summer jobs." Education and training can be

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separated or listed together, depending on how much formal education you have. Make sure to indicate your level of education reached, the year completed, and the name and location of the educational institution.

Your Privacy

Never include your age, marital status, religion, or social insurance number (SIN). For the most part, employers don't need this information—and they only have the right to your SIN once you are hired.

Religion, political affiliation, or photos are not required unless it is important to the job. This information may be required if you want to be a researcher for a political party, or if you want to teach at a religious school. Photos will be requested if you are a model or an actor.

Common Mistakes

It is important to edit your resume very carefully before you submit it. Easily avoided mistakes are often the deciding factor between two otherwise well-matched candidates.

Typos and spelling errors are the most common and embarrassing mistakes. "Spell checker won't catch everything," says Kunkel. "You need to proofread your resume carefully. And it helps to have another pair of eyes look at your resume."

Another frequent blunder is a lack of formatting consistency. This includes spacing between lines of text and sections. It's also wise to limit decorative touches. "Keep it simple, especially if you are faxing it, or if you know the resume will be scanned," says Kunkel.

If emailing your resume, don't use an uncommon typeface because the employer's computer may apply a substitute font that will mess up your formatting.

Cover Letters
Once you have created your resume, you are ready to move on to the cover letter. This is a formal letter to the potential employer that introduces and summarizes why you are the ideal candidate for the job. Cover letters and resumes should always be submitted together.

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Write a unique cover letter for each job that you apply to. You want to show the employer you are interested specifically in them. Do your research about the company and determine the name of the recipient. "If you can't find a name, use a simplified letter format, one with no salutation or closing," suggests Kunkel. "Never use 'to whom it may concern.'"

Your cover letter should fit comfortably on one page. The first paragraph should tell the employer why you are writing to them. It should mention which position you are applying for, how you learned about it, and why you want to work there. Your second paragraph should state the key skills and abilities you possess that correspond with what the employer wants. "Make the match for the reader," advises Kunkel. "If the employer is looking for a specific skill and you have it, say so—and back it up with an example."

The final paragraph should request an interview or meeting, and include your phone number.

Tips for Students
If you are a student or new graduate, you probably don't have a great deal of work experience. In this case, your most recent education will provide the most relevant information for your prospective employer. When writing about your skills and experience, describe what you have done in work practicum, lab or course work, and volunteer positions.

"Consider listing course names on the first page to highlight specific skills," says Kunkel. "You may need to do this to indicate the knowledge you have in a specialized area. Employers will know you are a recent graduate, so they will not be looking for as extensive a work history as they would for someone who has been in the workforce for many years."

Other Resources
There are a lot of resume resources available, from your on-campus career centre, to your nearest employment office.

Online resources also abound. These include the Career Cruising Resume Builder, which can be found in the Portfolio section of the program. You can also visit these sites:
http://www.selkirklearningcentre.ca/jobquest/services.htm http://www.learningciti.ca/
http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/aet/ets2/looking4work/resume.html
http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/youth/JobPreparation/index.html
http://youth.gc.ca/yoaux.jsp?&lang=en&flash=1&ta=1&auxpageid=214
http://www.nextsteps.org/resume