

The background of the slide features several broad, diagonal brushstrokes in various shades of orange and terracotta, creating a textured, artistic effect. The strokes are layered, with some appearing more prominent than others, and they generally trend from the top-left towards the bottom-right.

Resume Writing Guide

Guide Overview

A resume is indispensable to landing your dream job. Usually consisting of one to two pages, resumes let employers know what your skillsets and qualities are. Resumes play an incredible role because they can either make or break a career opportunity. Employers make critical decisions based on skills, qualities, education, career history, and so forth. Even the layout of the resume can play an influential role in helping you be considered for the position you are applying for.

This guide will help you in crafting the perfect resume. It will walk you through each step so that you can easily design an articulate resume prepared in a reverse-chronological order. In addition, this guide will help you make sure your well-written resume passes the Applicant Tracking System (ATS) scan. Recruiters will definitely appreciate the time and effort you put into a carefully crafted resume that utilizes keywords and a template that is ATS compliant.

This short yet comprehensive guide will take the following points into consideration:

- The advantages of a resume in reverse-chronological order
- 5 ways to ensure your resume is ATS compliant
- 7 common ATS formatting errors
- The easiest way to structure your resume for readability
- Explanation of the various sections of a resume

The Advantages of a Resume in Reverse-Chronological Order

Not only is this the most classic and well-accepted style of resume, but it yields specific advantages. A resume utilizing a reverse-chronological order serves to showcase your career sequence and work history in a way that is easy to follow.

This simple yet traditional format has you list your work history and experience in reverse – with your post recent position and experience being at the very top. Because this is most relevant to employers, they can see the most pertinent information first. The list then filters backwards until you reach the first job you ever had. It is important to include dates, locations, the names of the employers or organizations, and all job duties performed with each entry. This will help your prospective employer assess your current skillset.

The goal here is to list pertinent information, but not to write multiple paragraphs. This will help the person reviewing your resume quickly locate what they need to know and move on. There are other advantages in using this traditional format, especially in the following scenarios:

- You have a history of career progression and professional experience
- Your career path has been straightforward and steady
- There are not lengthy gaps in your employment history

5 Ways to Ensure Your Resume is ATS Compliant

1. Customize Your Resume

One of the most important things you can do is to customize your resume. This is done in accordance with the job you are applying for. By customizing it, it increases your chances of scoring an interview and being considered further for the position. More generic resumes that are not customized to the job in question seriously jeopardize your chances of getting it.

2. Title Resume Sections to Enhance Readability

The titles of different sections of the resume must be easy to understand and have a distinct flow. For example, “Professional Accomplishments” certainly is easier to read than “Things I Have Done in My Career Life.” This is one simple example of how precise titles can enhance the readability of your resume. Most prospective employers or hiring managers only have so much time to give, so this helps them to capture what they need to know in a short amount of time. Otherwise, they may set it aside if there is too much confusion.

3. The Importance of Keywords

Similar to search engines, it is important for the right keywords to be used in a resume. In order to determine these keywords, pay close attention to the wording used in the job description. Then, mirror back that same language in your resume where possible. This will help the ATS see what a great fit you are. One example is if the employer is searching for someone who is outgoing, emphasize your sociable personality and specifically insert the word “outgoing” in your resume.

4. Emphasize Relevant Skillsets

You can be a great writer, but if the job you are applying for wants several years of SEO knowledge, that is what should be emphasized. Emphasizing relevant skillsets in relation to the job you are applying for will help ATS recognize and designate a higher candidate score to your resume. Using synonyms is perfectly acceptable, but as previously mentioned, using specific keywords used in the job posting will surely be beneficial. This will help the prospective employer recognize your qualifications once your resume passes the ATS scan.

5. Consider Your Prospective Employer when Customizing Your Resume for the ATS

When customizing your resume for the ATS scan, it is not very difficult to forget that this is being done so your prospective employer will have a chance to review it. Therefore, try to make sure everything is as clear and direct as possible, so that no confusion or frustration occurs on their behalf.

7 Common ATS Formatting Errors

The format of your resume is very important because of how the ATS processes it. First, let us take a look at how this works.

Once your resume has been sent via an online application, the resume is then automatically filtered into the Applicant Tracking System. It is here that the scanning process begins, with various systems scanning it for relevant information. This information is then structured to construct a digital candidate profile. Prospective employers or hiring managers may then conduct a search of the ATS via keywords. This helps them filter out the resumes that are most likely to be of benefit to them. Of course, ATS systems are still prone to error. Critical information may be missed if it does not recognize the formatting used. Therefore, there are seven common ATS formatting errors to avoid.

1. Avoid Using Acronyms and Abbreviations

If a word can be spelled out, do so. One example is if you have a BA, try putting “Bachelor of Arts.” A lot of ATS scans will not discern acronyms or abbreviations, so it is best to avoid using them at all costs. However, if you wish, spell it out first, then put the acronym or abbreviation in parentheses. This will cover you both ways.

2. Do Not Incorporate Tables into Your Resume

The information that is present in tables can be confusing to the ATS. Sections may become mixed together, or data and other important information may not get recognized at all. Taking the lines out of a table can help, but in general, it is best to avoid incorporating tables into your resume, especially if you are applying through an ATS.

3. Eliminate Creative Bullet Points

While it may be tempting to dress up your resume with a diamond or star, this can cause problems within the ATS. Standard black dot bullet points are the easiest way to bypass this issue altogether.

4. Avoid Getting Carried Away with Unique Fonts

While fonts can be fun, there are only certain ones that are approved for the ATS. The approved fonts are as follows:

- Times New Roman
- Cambria
- Calibri
- Georgia
- Tahoma
- Palatino
- Verdana
- Arial
- Helvetica
- Garamond

7 Common ATS Formatting Errors

5. Make Sure All Dates are Formatted in a Correct Manner

The ATS usually utilizes the format of “01/2021” when it comes to dates. Another acceptable format by the majority of ATS is “January 2021.”

6. Eliminate Any Extra Spaces Between Words

When it comes to keywords, ATS can sometimes be a bit tricky. For example, some ATS cannot discern keywords that are more than one word if those words are set apart by extra spaces. If the keyword is “sales pitching” the ATS will be able to discern it, but for example, it may not be able to identify “sales pitching” since there is more than one space between “sales” and “pitching.”

To fix this issue, always eliminate any extra spaces between words, especially keywords. In addition, Microsoft Word has a handy feature that can help with this. You can utilize the Show/Hide function (icon ¶), or Ctrl+Shift+8. The dots will reveal how many spaces there are between words so that you do not miss removing any extra spaces.

7. Make Sure Your File is Titled Professionally

Choosing an unprofessional file name for your resume has the potential to wreck the chance of getting chosen for an interview. Simply put, naming the file using the Name-Job-Title-Document (Courtney-Smith-Editor-Resume.pdf) is a straightforward and professional way to title the file. However, if the job title is very long, you can simply drop it and put Courtney-Smith-Resume.pdf. Moreover, it is imperative to either use a hyphen, as shown in the example, or an underscore (Courtney_Smith_Resume.pdf) to set the words apart. Also, it is necessary to capitalize the first letters of each word.

The Easiest Way to Structure Your Resume for Readability

Using the reverse-chronological resume structure previously discussed, the sections of the resume are usually divided in the following order:

1. Full Name
2. Job Title/Position
3. Contact Information
4. Summary or Objective
5. Work Experience
6. Educational History
7. Skills
8. Additional Sections

The use of a resume summary or objective is highly beneficial for professionals. It helps showcase achievements, skills, and also serves the purpose of letting the prospective employer or hiring manager know that you are more than capable to handle the job. Do not make this section lengthy but do add a couple of lines that bring attention to your most relevant skillsets.

For candidates who are entry-level, students, or those looking to change careers, utilizing the objective over the summary is helpful. This is due to the fact that it serves as an introduction to both who you are at the moment, as well as the person you wish to become in the future.

It is important to note that the section regarding professional experience and education is connected to how relevant your education is to the profession you are either in or wish to be in.

A great example of this is to take a resume written by a student. In this particular case, the education section is going to be more relevant because it shows where the student is now and where they are striving to be. They may not necessarily have a lot of career or work experience, but they are working to get there. Emphasizing the education section in this case becomes even more important in the event that diplomas, certifications, degrees, or other coursework have been completed.

However, for an individual who is currently on a career path, the educational section of the resume is important, but is not the first thing to highlight. Here, the educational section would come after the work experience section. Therefore, the placement of these sections really depends on where the individual is currently at and where they wish to be.

Explanation of the Various Sections of a Resume

Full Name

To make your resume stand out, you will want to make your name in larger font. After all, you do not want your name to be crowded out with the other resumes submitted.

It is important to use your full name, as well as spell it exactly as it appears on your driver's license, identification card, or passport. Once you do this, keep it consistent in any other conversations or correspondence with the company.

It is perfectly acceptable to use your middle name or a middle initial on your resume. Again, simply be consistent with the company, and use the same format when you craft a cover letter.

Job Title/Position

A surprising number of applicants do not put their job title or position on their resume. This should be included, but in smaller font than your full name. This job title or position could be anything, such as "Editor," "Consultant," "Registered Nurse," and so forth.

However, if you have a key license or certification, you will want to denote this. In this case, it will look something like "John Sparks Certified Web Designer," or "Eugene Austin, Registered Nurse" in the header of the resume.

Contact Information

Address

The first component to your contact information will be your address. It is perfectly acceptable to leave this off, however. In some cases, it may even be in your best interest. For example, if you have a longer drive to work, the company may not look at this in a favorable light. One way to avoid this issue is to simply put no street address and just the same city that the job is located in.

Another option is to add something like "open to relocation" to the header of your resume. P.O. Boxes are fine, but they do not look as good as a permanent address since they can lend the impression that you move around quite a bit.

Explanation of the Various Sections of a Resume

Phone Number

Since a phone number is one of the main ways a company will attempt to contact you, it is important that you add the number of the phone you use most often. However, try not to list a work phone, especially since this may be a flag to your current employer. It may also send a mixed message to the company you are applying to.

Email Address

The second most common way that a company will attempt to contact a person is through email. However, you want to make sure it is a professional email address and not something like starwarsrocks@gmail.com. A professional email address will help take you a long way. It is best not to use a work email address since it can look quite unprofessional. Always use a well-known and dependable provider, such as Gmail.

LinkedIn

A shocking number of prospective employers and hiring managers utilize LinkedIn in the hiring process. In fact, 85% use LinkedIn. Therefore, it is important to have a professional LinkedIn profile and add this to the header in your resume. It will give the company a good sense of who you are and what you can do.

One key tip is to personalize the link to your LinkedIn profile. Try modernizing your professional profile using a great headshot, background image, resume keywords, and a succinct summary.

Summary or Objective

A summary is simply a succinct introduction that is often located at the very top of the resume. This is what showcases experience, accomplishments, and skills. In other words, it is a brief summary of your professional career. This is what helps a company decide if you are a good candidate for them.

Remember, what you emphasize in the summary should be in alignment with the qualities and skills requested in the job post. Therefore, make sure that all experience, accomplishments, and skills listed are indeed relevant to the job description you are applying for.

In turn, this brings up the question regarding how to handle resumes for entry-level candidates or those who are changing careers. In these cases, this part of the resume should still be filled out, but instead of a summary, it should be titled as an objective, which shows a statement of intent.

Explanation of the Various Sections of a Resume

Instead of emphasizing work experience, this section will instead reference a career objective that showcases your skills. When work experience is insufficient, an objective is used to convince the company that your skills can directly be translated into success. In other words, you are convincing them to take a chance on you.

Key Tips to Creating a Summary:

1. Use words that emphasize your positive character traits
2. Explain your job title and experience level
3. Communicate how you wish to help the company
4. Highlight professional achievements that showcase your skills
5. Only use three to five sentences and numbers where possible

Customizing your resume to make it relevant to the job position you are applying for is the key to success. Use the job listing itself as a “cheat sheet” of sorts in crafting your summary, objective, and the rest of your resume. As previously mentioned, insert keywords wherever possible.

Key Tips to Creating an Objective:

1. First, you will want to start with a positive trait that is well-developed. Then, add a few skills (2-3 will work), outline your professional goals in detail, and issue a statement of what you wish to achieve at the company for which you are applying.
2. Do not forget to use the name of the company to which you are applying, as well as list the position you are applying for.
3. Make sure your objective is not too lengthy. Use your words wisely, and try to land on approximately 30-50 words, or 2-3 sentences in this section of the resume.
4. Do not utilize first-person pronouns in stating your objective.
5. Attempt to incorporate resume action verbs into this portion of the resume. It will add emphasis to what you are saying.

As previously stated, your resume, including your objective, should be customized for the job position you are applying for. Use keywords that are linked to the position in your objective.

Explanation of the Various Sections of a Resume

Work Experience

This is one of the most important sections of your resume. It is one of the major things the company will gravitate to in order to see if you are qualified for the position.

As a rule of thumb, include relevant experience that spans the last 10-15 years (if you have been in the workforce this long). This section will vary a bit, taking into account the different jobs you have had, gaps in employment, or any side hustle or freelance gigs performed.

In fact, the timeline of your resume will differ a bit considering your level of experience. Let's take a look at how this works.

Senior-level Candidates: This level of candidate should list approximately up to 15 years of work experience that is connected to the position to which they are applying.

Junior and Mid-level Candidates: Candidates of this level will want to list thorough job descriptions that are relevant. Also, other opportunities that provide relevant experience should be mentioned, such as freelancing, internships, and temporary work.

Entry-level Candidates: Entry-level candidates will want to include and explain all relevant work experience. This may include many forms of work experience, such as part-time, full-time, temporary, internships, freelancing, or other projects of an independent nature.

Candidates Without Relevant Work Experience: If you fall into this category, there are still many things you can include on your resume. For example, detail all experience, whether it is paid or unpaid. Examples of this include volunteer work, practicums, involvement in student or other organizations, or internships of any kind.

Below are some key tips to really make your work experience stand out in an easy format.

1. Create a brief, clear title for your work experience section:

- Work Experience
- Experience
- Employment History
- Work History

2. Make sure your employment history is listed in the correct spot on your resume.

- Considering your experience level, if you have a lot of relevant experience you will want to list it after your resume summary.
- If you do not have a lot of relevant experience, list your employment history after your education.

Explanation of the Various Sections of a Resume

3. Utilize Reverse-Chronological Order in Listing Work Experience

- Your first entry will either be the job you are at now, or the job you last worked at.
- Your next entry will be the job before that one, and so on until you reach your first job.

Using reverse-chronological order is one way to immediately get your prospective employer's attention. They will see your current or most recent job and how you have worked your way up to this position.

The reverse-chronological order is a classic format that most companies prefer. It is easy to reference, and it also showcases the most recent, relevant experience first so that the employer does not have to go looking for it.

4. Ensure Every Entry is Straightforward

When listing work experience, there are a few things to include to ensure every entry is straightforward:

- Title/job position
- The name and location of the company
- The date ranges of the time worked there

Sometimes an individual may have held various positions or received promotions throughout the time they worked. Instead of crafting independent entries, especially if the job positions or responsibilities are related, you may compile your job titles and insert only one set of bullet points.

However, if these were not similar or related positions and duties, then simply add each one as an independent subheading. Then, you can simply include a bullet point list after this.

5. Utilize a Total of 1-5 Bullet Points for Each Job Description

- Bullet points should help pinpoint achievements that are quantifiable, instead of simply listing a set of responsibilities for each job.
- The most recent job listed is the one that should contain the greatest number of bullet points and information. In using reverse-chronological order, the further you go back, try to confine the amount of bullet points for the description and simply focus on duties and quantifiable achievements that are most relevant.
- Suppress the urge to list every task ever performed. Instead, allow each bullet point to focus on something that is both significant and relevant. In addition, make sure each entry is crafted to fit the job position you are applying for. You can use the responsibilities listed in the job posting as a good reference.

Explanation of the Various Sections of a Resume

6. Add a Subsection Listing “Professional Accomplishments” or “Key Achievements”

- This will catch the company’s attention and may compel them to hire you.
- Mention your most important accomplishments and achievements to date.
- A unique writing formula, called the **Problem-Action-Result (PAR)** method, should be used in portraying your success. It emphasizes your unique skills, accomplishments, and achievements in a way that enhances their influence.

The **Problem-Action-Result (PAR)** Method can be constructed as follows:

1. Define what the **PROBLEM** is. This will act as the subject of the sentence and may be a specific task or job duty/responsibility.
2. What **ACTIONS** did you take? In other words, what is it that you did? A verb will be used here.
3. What **RESULT** did you achieve? Here, this will be any goals or outcomes met.

You will want to utilize an action verb for the beginning of the statement. Then, you can state the problem, actions taken, and the result of those actions.

Explanation of the Various Sections of a Resume

Educational History

This will be similar to the section on your resume listing experience, but it will be titled “Education.”

List your most current and highest degree at the very top. This section will include all education listed in reverse-chronological order. However, if you have graduated from college, it will not be necessary to include your high school information, since this is implied.

Include the Following Elements:

- The type of degree received
- What your major/minor was
- The name of the school you attended
- The location of the school
- The year you graduated or will graduate
- All coursework that is relevant coursework (optional)

Unless your GPA is higher than 3.5, you may not want to include it.

This section of the resume is a lot of times the briefest section. It should be approximately 15-30 words. However, various jobs may require various degrees of explanation.

Often, the person doing the hiring is on the lookout for what pertains most to their job posting or listing. For example, if you are applying for a job that is entry-level, the company will probably be looking at the education section for a high school diploma or a college degree.

However, if you are applying for a position that is senior level, the company may wish to see that you have an MBA or other relevant experience concerning business and managerial training.

To see what education level the company is looking for, you can often find this listed under the “Job Requirements” or “Education” section of the listing. It is important to make sure you have what is requested before applying.

Explanation of the Various Sections of a Resume

Skills

This portion of your resume lists all skills or attributes that are in direct correlation to the position you are applying for. Here, list these skills and attributes, specifically the ones that are most relevant to the job position or career field you wish to enter. Examples of this include managerial skills, computer and software skills, or editing and writing skills.

Remember, the more your skills and attributes align with the position you are applying for, the greater your chances will be at landing an interview.

It is a great idea not to confine your skills and attributes to that particular section. Try inserting them throughout your resume, such as your summary, objective, or experience section. Wherever they fit organically, simply plug them in.

It is important to note that there are two types of skills. These are soft and hard skills. Let's define each.

Soft skills are skills or attributes that are a part of you, and they help show the company that you would be a great employee in any department. While soft skills may be a part of your personality, they can certainly be learned as well.

Conversely, hard skills demonstrate your ability to perform a specific job duty, title, or function. These are skills that one must actively learn. Listing both soft and hard skills in the right proportions will increase your chances of getting hired.

Additional Sections

The following categories are optional resume categories:

- Awards and Honors
- Volunteer Work
- Certifications and Licenses
- Projects
- Hobbies and Interests
- Qualifications
- Extracurricular Activities
- Accomplishments
- Associations
- Publications
- Languages
- Training
- Conferences
- etc.

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