The No-BS Resume Guide 2025

This guide serves as a baseline for crafting civilian resumes in the government contracting world but is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Resumes should always be tailored to your specific industry, job, and role, as each sector has unique standards. For example, federal resumes follow entirely different guidelines than those outlined here. Use this guidance as a starting point, and if you're unsure how to proceed, don't hesitate to seek additional help or clarification.

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1. Contact Information—What Belongs and What Doesn't: Your contact details should be unmissable and professional, right at the top.

What to include:
- ✓ **Name**: Big and bold, followed by your clearance level if applicable.
    - ▪ Example: **Jane Doe | TS/SCI/FSP Clearance**
- ✓ **Location**: Just the city and state (e.g., Washington, D.C.).
- ✓ **Phone number**: Mobile only.
- ✓ **Professional email**: Think professional; not hotbunz69@gmail.com.
- ✓ **LinkedIn (optional)**: If it's listed, make sure it's up-to-date and polished. Make sure your LinkedIn profile and your resume match – this is a major red flag if there are discrepancies.

What NOT to include:
- X   DOB | SSN | Full address | Hobbies | "References available upon request | Pictures |

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2. Formatting Rules Everyone Needs to Follow: Keep your resume simple, clean, and professional.

- ✓ Use easy-to-read fonts like Calibri, Arial, or Times New Roman (10-12 pt).
- ✓ Present tense for your current role, past tense for all others.
- ✓ Check your grammar and spelling. Typos can cost you the job.
- ✓ Bullet points > paragraphs. Recruiters & Hiring Managers don't read essays.
- ✓ Check your spacing – do not overcrowd your resume.
- ✓ Use "narrow" margins for more room if needed.
- ✓ You can be creative with the layout – but keep it clean and simple – white space is good!
- ✓ Save & send your resume as a PDF unless otherwise directed.

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3. Nail the Summary Section: No need to label this section as "Professional Summary"—just dive in. Every inch of your resume matters, so make it count.

- Keep it concise: 2–5 tailored sentences maximum.
- Focus on your key skills, experience, and the value you bring to the role.
- Avoid generic terms or blanket statements; make your introduction unique and memorable.
- Minimize "I" statements to maintain a professional tone.
- Write in a first-person perspective (not third person) to create a more genuine and personal connection.

Example: "IT professional with 8+ years of experience in designing and managing secure, enterprise-level networks. Expertise in optimizing infrastructure for 99.9% uptime, implementing advanced cloud architectures, and delivering scalable solutions. Holds active TS/SCI/FSP clearance and a strong track record of driving efficiency and innovation in mission-critical environments."

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4. Order and Structure Matter: Here's the ideal layout for your resume.

1. **Contact Info** (top).

2. **Summary** (no label).

3. **Certifications & Skills (if relevant to the field).**

4. **Experience** (most recent role first):

   ▪ Title | Company | Location | Dates (Month/Year).

   ▪ 5+ impactful bullet points per role minimum – more if you have a lot of blank space.

5. **Education** (degrees separated by "|" instead of commas)

6. **If you have extra room, consider adding a meaningful section. See #10 below.**

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5. Certifications & Skills—Prioritize for IT/Technical Roles: For IT and technical fields, list your certifications, degrees, and tech skills **right under the summary** to grab attention immediately.
Break up the Certifications & Skills – make it easy to read.

Example:

Certifications:

- **Cybersecurity**: CISSP, CISM, CEH, CompTIA Security+, GCIH, GPEN
- **Cloud**: AWS Certified Solutions Architect, Azure Solutions Architect Expert, Google Cloud Professional
- **Networking**: CCNA, CCNP, CompTIA Network+, Palo Alto PCNSA/PCNSE
- **Project Management**: PMP, ITIL Foundation, Scrum Master (CSM, PSM)
- **Operating Systems**: Microsoft Certified: Azure Administrator Associate, Red Hat Certified Engineer (RHCE)
- Data & Databases: Microsoft Certified: Data Analyst Associate, Oracle Certified Professional
- Other IT Skills: CompTIA A+, TOGAF, Linux+

Technical Skills:

- **Network Administration:** Routing & switching, firewalls, VPNs, DNS, DHCP, VLANs
- **Cybersecurity:** Vulnerability assessment, penetration testing, SIEM, incident response, IDS/IPS
- **Cloud Computing:** AWS, Azure, Google Cloud, hybrid and multi-cloud architectures
- **Programming & Scripting:** Python, PowerShell, Bash, JavaScript, SQL, JSON
- **Data Management:** Database administration, ETL processes, data analytics, big data tools
- **DevOps:** CI/CD pipelines, containerization (Docker, Kubernetes), Jenkins, Ansible, Terraform
- **IT Support:** Helpdesk management, hardware/software troubleshooting, ticketing systems
- **System Automation:** Automation scripts, RPA tools, workflow optimization

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Systems & Tools:

- **Operating Systems:** Windows Server, Linux (Ubuntu, Red Hat, CentOS), macOS
- **Virtualization:** VMware vSphere, Hyper-V, Citrix
- **Cloud Platforms:** AWS (EC2, S3, RDS), Azure (Active Directory, Virtual Machines), GCP
- **Security Tools:** Nessus, Splunk, Wireshark, Metasploit, Kali Linux, CrowdStrike, Palo Alto, Cisco ASA
- **Monitoring Tools:** Nagios, SolarWinds, Zabbix, Datadog
- **Version Control:** Git, GitHub, GitLab
- **Database Management:** MySQL, PostgreSQL, Oracle DB, MongoDB
- **ITSM Tools:** ServiceNow, Jira, Confluence
- **Collaboration Tools:** Slack, Microsoft Teams, Zoom
- **Automation Tools:** Puppet, Chef, Ansible, Terraform

For other industries, keep education and certifications toward the bottom.

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6. Bullet Points That Actually Mean Something: Skip the fluffy, meaningless phrases and focus on specifics.

- **Wrong**: "Effectively communicated with team members to achieve goals."
- **Right**: "Led a cross-functional team of 10 to deliver a $1.2M project two weeks ahead of schedule."

Bullet consistency: Use the same style and indentation for all bullet points (e.g., circles, dashes, or solid dots).

Formula for strong bullet points: Action Verb + Task/Responsibility + Impact/Result

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7. Tailor Your Resume to the Job and Industry: No generic resumes. Narrow it down to your target industry and customize it.

- ✓ Research common keywords and skills for that industry.
- ✓ Align your achievements with what the company is looking for.

Pro Tip: Once you've nailed your industry-specific resume, tailoring it for individual jobs gets much easier.

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8. Career Gaps: Be Honest, Keep It Brief: Recruiters appreciate honesty, not oversharing.

Example: "2021–2022: Career break for caregiving responsibilities."
That's it. No need to write an essay. Acknowledge it and move on.

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9. Recruiters Check Everything—Don't Lie or Embellish: Inflating your achievements might get you an interview, but it can cost you the job and your reputation!

- ✓ If you use AI tools like ChatGPT to refine your resume, **proofread and fact-check** before submitting.

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10. Remove the "Key Skills" Section – It's Vague & Outdated: The old "Key Skills" section (e.g., a list of generic buzzwords like "teamwork" or "problem-solving") is a waste of valuable space. Instead, replace it with something meaningful.

Options:

1. **Certifications and Technical Skills (for IT/Technical Roles):**
   List relevant certifications and technical proficiencies right under your summary.
   Example:
   - ✓ Certifications: AWS Certified Solutions Architect | CISSP | CompTIA Security+
   - ✓ Skills: Python | Kubernetes | Cloud Migration | CI/CD Pipelines

2. **Career Highlights (for Senior/Leadership Roles):** A brief list of measurable achievements to hook the reader.
   Example:
   - ✓ Delivered $2M cost savings by streamlining supply chain processes.
   - ✓ Led a global marketing campaign that increased ROI by 25%.

3. **Core Competencies (for General Roles):** A compact list of your expertise areas tailored to the role.
   Example:
   - ✓ Strategic Planning | Budget Management | Data Analytics | Process Improvement

4. **Project List: Project Name | Role | Date**
   Example:
   - ✓ Hybrid Cloud Infrastructure Migration: Designed and executed migration strategy for on-prem systems to AWS, ensuring 100% data integrity.
   - ✓ Zero-Trust Security Implementation: Deployed zero-trust architecture across 5 global offices, enhancing security compliance.

The No-BS Golden Rules for Your Resume

Structure and Formatting:

1. **Keep It Concise:** Limit your resume to two pages, unless applying for executive or niche roles. Focus on the last 10 years of experience to keep it relevant.

2. **Use a Clean, Consistent Format:** Choose professional fonts (e.g., Calibri, Arial, Times New Roman), avoid overcrowding, and balance white space for readability.

3. **Always Send as a PDF:** Save and send your resume as a PDF unless another format is specifically requested.

4. **Test for Readability Across Devices:** Make sure your resume looks professional on both desktop and mobile screens.

5. **Make Contact Info Obvious:** Include your name, phone number, email, city, and LinkedIn profile (if professional).

Content and Customization:

6. **Tailor Your Resume for Each Role:** Use industry-specific keywords and align your skills and experience with the job description.

7. **Avoid Copy-Pasting Job Descriptions:** Write authentically; recruiters will notice if it's copied—even with "hidden" text tricks.

8. **Quantify Results Over Listing Responsibilities:** Focus on measurable achievements (e.g., "Reduced downtime by 30%") to demonstrate impact.

9. **Current Role = Present Tense; Past Roles = Past Tense:** Ensure grammatical consistency throughout your resume.

10. **Highlight Certifications and Skills Where Relevant:** For IT/technical roles, list them at the top. For others, include them at the bottom.

11. **No Fluff Words:** Avoid clichés like "team player" or "hard worker" unless backed up with concrete examples.

12. **Provide Relevant Links:** Include links to your LinkedIn, portfolio, GitHub (for IT roles), or professional website, if applicable.

Content Organization:

13. **Use Strong Action Verbs:** Start bullet points with impactful words like "Implemented," "Optimized," or "Designed," and avoid overused terms like "spearheaded."

14. **Use Metrics Wisely:** Include numbers, percentages, or measurable outcomes, but don't overwhelm the reader.

15. **Include a Career Highlights Section (for Senior Roles):** Showcase 2-4 standout accomplishments upfront for quick impact.

16. **Five Strong Bullet Points Per Job Minimum:** Each point should focus on action and results.

17. **Keep Technical Skills Separate:** Add a dedicated section for tools, technologies, and certifications, especially for IT or technical roles.

Professionalism and Compliance:

18. **Ensure LinkedIn Matches Your Resume:** Inconsistent profiles are a red flag for recruiters.

19. **List Clearance at the Top:** If applicable, place your clearance designation (e.g., TS/SCI/FSP) prominently near your name.

20. **Stay Professional:** Use a polished email address and save your file with a clear name (e.g., FirstName_LastName_Resume.pdf).

21. **Keep Personal Details Off:** Do not include photos, hobbies, full address, date of birth, or social security number.

Final Touches:

22. **Avoid "References Available Upon Request:"** It's outdated and unnecessary—everyone assumes this.

23. **Skip Headers Like "Professional Summary" if Space Is Tight:** Just dive into your content.

24. **Use "|" to Save Space:** Separate degrees, certifications, or skills with "|" to keep it clean and concise.

25. **Optimize for ATS:** Use keywords naturally, avoid images or complex formatting, and keep the layout ATS-friendly.

26. **Proofread Relentlessly:** Spellcheck, check for typos, and ensure grammatical accuracy. Ask trusted colleagues for feedback.

27. **Take Advice That Works for You:** Use these rules as a guide but adapt based on your unique goals and career needs.

Have questions or concerns?

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910.850.3055
Cleared & Confused LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/groups/13118066/

John Doe | Cybersecurity Engineer | Clearance: TS/SCI/FSP

Washington, D.C. | j.doe@gmail.com | 555-555-5555 | linkedin.com/in/johndoe

Experienced cybersecurity professional with 10+ years of proven success in protecting enterprise systems and ensuring compliance with federal standards. Skilled in designing and managing secure infrastructures, mitigating threats and optimizing cloud security solutions. Reduced vulnerabilities by 40% across high-risk platforms while maintaining 99.9% uptime for mission-critical systems.

Certifications and Technical Proficiencies:

Certifications:

- CompTIA Security + | Network+ | CCNA | CCNP | GSEC

Technical Skills:
- **Network Administration:** Routing & switching, firewalls, VPNs, DNS, DHCP, VLANs
- **Cybersecurity:** Vulnerability assessment, penetration testing, SIEM, incident response, IDS/IPS
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- **Security Tools:** Nessus, Splunk, Wireshark, Metasploit, Kali Linux, CrowdStrike, Palo Alto, Cisco ASA
- **Monitoring Tools:** Nagios, SolarWinds, Zabbix, Datadog
- **Version Control:** Git, GitHub, GitLab
- **Database Management:** MySQL, PostgreSQL, Oracle DB, MongoDB
- **ITSM Tools:** ServiceNow, Jira, Confluence
- **Collaboration Tools:** Slack, Microsoft Teams, Zoom
- **Automation Tools:** Puppet, Chef, Ansible, Terraform

Career Highlights:

- Secured a $5M federal contract by leading the development of a compliance-driven cybersecurity strategy, meeting all NIST 800-171 requirements ahead of schedule.

- Designed and implemented a company-wide incident response plan that successfully mitigated a ransomware attack, preventing potential data loss across critical systems.

- Recognized with the "Innovator of the Year" award for introducing an automated vulnerability scanning tool that improved detection accuracy and reduced manual effort by 50%.

Professional Experience:

Senior Cybersecurity Engineer | SecureTech Solutions | Arlington, VA | Jan 2018 – Present

- Implement a zero-trust security framework, improving overall system security and reducing unauthorized access incidents by 25%.

- Deploy SIEM solutions (Splunk, QRadar) to streamline threat detection and enhance incident response times by 40%.

- Conduct risk assessments with internal teams to address vulnerabilities and ensure compliance with NIST 800-53 and FISMA standards.
- Collaborate with IT leadership to align security measures with organizational goals, supporting cloud migration initiatives for hybrid environments.
- Mentor and train a team of 10+ junior analysts, fostering skill development and improving team performance by 30%.

Cybersecurity Analyst | GovProtect Inc. | Washington, D.C. | May 2014 – Dec 2017

- Monitored network activity to identify and mitigate cybersecurity threats, reducing vulnerabilities by 20% through proactive risk management.
- Deployed encryption protocols for federal clients, ensuring full compliance with federal data security mandates.
- Led a collaborative effort to upgrade legacy systems, improving system resilience and operational efficiency.
- Authored detailed incident response reports for executive leadership, enabling informed decision-making during security events.
- Developed and maintained a vulnerability remediation schedule, reducing downtime caused by patching activities.

IT Support Specialist | TechNova Corp. | Bethesda, MD | June 2012 – April 2014

- Provided tier-3 support for network and system issues, maintaining a 90% resolution rate within SLA timeframes.
- Assisted in the migration of legacy systems to a cloud-based infrastructure, streamlining operations and reducing costs by 15%.
- Managed inventory and procurement of IT hardware and software, ensuring seamless operation across teams.
- Conducted system backups and implemented disaster recovery plans, minimizing potential downtime during outages.
- Delivered hands-on training sessions for employees, improving adoption rates of new software tools by 30%.
- Designed and documented internal knowledge base articles to standardize troubleshooting processes across the IT department.

Relevant Projects:

- **Hybrid Cloud Infrastructure Migration:** Designed and executed migration strategy for on-prem systems to AWS, ensuring 100% data integrity.
- **Zero-Trust Security Implementation:** Deployed zero-trust architecture across 5 global offices, enhancing security compliance.
- **DevOps Pipeline Automation:** Built an end-to-end CI/CD pipeline using Jenkins, Docker, and Kubernetes, improving deployment efficiency.

Education:

▪ BS Cybersecurity | University of Maryland
▪ AAS Information Technology | University of Maryland