



Résumé Writing: A Focus on Process

Résumés, like any other writing task, involve pre-writing, brainstorming, revision, and editing. The steps below are designed to help you generate a solid résumé from first draft to final product.

Pre-write: Create a list of all of the jobs you've held in the past, including volunteer work and campus employment. Just focus on creating a list; later, you can delete those items that are not relevant to the position for which you are applying.

Brainstorm: Now that you have a list of previous jobs held, generate a list of the responsibilities that pertain to each job. Consider the following writing prompts:

- Make a list of the tasks you performed daily/weekly/monthly.
- Note any special responsibilities you were given.
- Ask former co-workers how they would explain the job and its responsibilities.
- Review the official description of the position, if you have it.
- Review records of performance reviews.

If you are writing the résumé with a specific job application in mind:

- Consider how you would describe your previous positions in a way that would make you a “best fit” for the job you seek.
- Use language that matches the description of the job for which you are applying.

If you are having difficulty remembering or generating words to describe your prior work experience, visit Career Services and the Writing Center to discuss your draft. Also try the following brainstorming strategies:

- *Freewriting:* Write for ten minutes about the job, jotting down anything you can remember. Try reflecting on and then writing about a typical work day.
- *Looping:* alternate freewriting with reflection. Write for a specified period of time about the job and then stop and write a reflection on what you just wrote. You might also discuss your freewriting with a friend or former co-worker in order to generate more ideas.
- *Clustering or webbing:* create a visual “cluster” to show the relationship between ideas you might write about. Write the name of the job in the center of a page and circle it. Think of responsibilities or tasks related to the job. Write them elsewhere on the page and draw lines to show connections. Then write down any ideas that follow from the new information. This is especially

helpful if you are having trouble organizing your ideas or avoiding redundancy.

Revise: Once you have written a draft listing your jobs and their responsibilities, you are ready to revise for clarity, conciseness, and accuracy. When revising a résumé, the following issues are especially important:

- *Redundancy:* Your task is to represent a range of skills and experiences for each job as well as a wider range of expertise gained over the course of your working life. For each job, make sure that you combine similar tasks/experiences into one item and delete repetitive information. If two jobs show similar experience, revise to emphasize differences. Consider differences in work environment, population served, or company size.
- *Parallel Structure:* Your résumé will be easier to read and understand if you match the grammatical form of words, phrases or clauses within an item and among similar items. See the Writing Center's handout on parallel structure for more information.
- *Action Verbs:* Revise your list of experiences into descriptive phrases headed by various action verbs. Reference the Career Services guide for help in choosing powerful verbs.
- *Verb Tense:* You can write in either the present or the past tense, but not both! Choose a tense and use it throughout the document.

Edit: Your résumé is your first impression on a potential employer, and in a competitive job market, small errors make a big difference. Read through your final résumé several times, paying close attention to:

- *Consistency:* If you've chosen to use the past tense, be sure to use it throughout the résumé. If you use a serial comma, do so in every list or series.
- *Bulleted Items:* Make sure each item begins with an action verb. Do not write in complete sentences; instead, create short, meaningful descriptions.
- *Spelling and Grammar:* In addition to using a spelling/grammar check tool, ask a friend, career services advisor, or writing center consultant to give your final version a "once-over" to ensure you haven't missed something
- *Formatting:* Review formatting choices, including the use of italics, bold type, and font, for consistency.
- *Margins and Layout:* Check that you have margins that leave enough white space and that text of the same level (e.g., headings, bullets) lines up correctly.

If you have questions about how to identify or correct problems, please bring your résumé to the Writing Center and a writing consultant can teach you.