Writing a good resume

yes, everyone needs a resume. Potential employers—for part-time jobs, internships and full-time positions—look at resumes to find the best candidates to invite for an interview. Graduate and professional schools also often ask for resumes as part of the application.

research before writing!

Every communication counts when you're contacting a potential decision-maker. Whether it's a resume, cover letter, or short email—be sure to do some research first. To be effective, you need to demonstrate your knowledge of who they are and/or what they are looking for. You also need to know enough about yourself and what *you're* looking for so you can present your skills, interests, and goals in a way that's relevant to your audience. Generic, one-size-fits-all documents aren't going to make the kind of impression that gets you to the next step.

✔ what you **need to know** about resumes

▶ **Resumes are most often skimmed** in seconds—not read word-for-word.

▶ When the job market is tight, it's even more important to **spend time customizing your resumes**. If you think your resume is "good enough," it probably isn't.

▶ **The job description, employer website, and your networking contacts** are all great sources for keywords and phrases to include. Your resume should mirror what they are looking for and what they value.

▶ **It's all about relevance.** Use your knowledge of the position and organization to make decisions about how you describe experiences and skills and what to include or leave out. MSU coursework is only relevant to employers in specific cases. If you need to include it, don't simply list course names or numbers. Identify the concepts or skills you've learned through those courses and include them as a bullet point in your "Education" section.

▶ **Active, skills-based language** is the best way to begin your resume bullet points. Even a quick skim by a reader should give them enough to know whether they want to read more. *See pages 36–37 for action verbs.*

▶ **Go beyond duties and responsibilities.** Be specific and results-oriented. What skills or knowledge did you develop? As you write, ask yourself questions like: How many? How much?

- **Employers are interested in what you've done recently.** Unless you are a freshman writing a resume for a part-time job or internship, your high school education, experience, and activities should *not* be on your resume.

- **Resumes evolve over time.** Your resume will need to be updated regularly to reflect new skills and experiences as you gain them. Not only that, but resume standards have changed over the years. If you are getting resume advice from someone who hasn't written one since 1989, chances are they might be giving you outdated advice.

  For instance, it used to be standard to include an "Objective" (now it's optional) and "References Available Upon Request" statement (which is now considered obvious and a waste of space). For tips on references, visit CareerNetwork.msu.edu and click on "Resumes" under "Resources + Tools."

- For most positions, **colored paper, funky fonts, and fancy graphics aren't going to help** your resume to stand out in a good way. If you are going into a creative field and want to integrate creative elements in your resume, talk to your Career Consultant or professionals in the field for advice on how to do it effectively. Even in creative fields, the quality of your *content* is key.

- When emailing or uploading your resume, **the best format is PDF**. However, many employers may specifically request MS Word format. **Follow instructions if given!** In general, Word is the best program for creating and editing your resume. (No, Microsoft isn't paying us to say that.)

☑ creating your resume

- **The first step is to get something written.** Use the information here to write the best draft you can. If you need more help, attend a resume workshop (*see page 10-11*). Then make a career advising appointment to get more feedback.

- If you're sending resumes out and not getting a response, come in and let us help! CareerNetwork.msu.edu/advising

- To make customizing your resume each time easier, start by making a "master resume" that includes everything. This document may be more than one page but, since it's just for you, that's OK. If you're having trouble deciding what to keep and what to cut, we can help with that, too.

- Before you start writing, consider one or more of these ideas for generating resume content:
  - Make a list of your skills, work and volunteer experiences, honors, awards, memberships, and activities
  - Use this to help determine what section headings might work best.

- When considering how to write bullet point descriptions:
  - Make two lists, one for skills/knowledge you gained, one for tasks/duties you performed. Put these lists together to write bullets that include both.
  - Make a list of keywords you want to include using the job description, information you've gotten from other sources, and/or the action verbs list on *pages 36–37*. Use those to start bullet points and then add details.
  - Do 3–5 minutes of free-writing about each experience you want to include to get yourself thinking about what you did, what you found meaningful, etc. Then translate that into bullets.

☑ online applications

Many employers have online systems they require applicants to use.

- If you need to apply online, **use the same care and attention to detail** as you would with your resume.

- Often you can **cut and paste** information from your resume into the application. You may need to **fix the formatting** so it doesn't look messy.

- Make sure you **fill in all fields** with the appropriate information and **include a cover letter**, even if it's not required.

- **Help your application stand out** from the rest by asking for advice from recruiters, alumni, or other contacts you might have at the organization. They may encourage you to use the "comments" area, complete an optional assessment, or include specific keywords.

Writing a good resume

☑ **formatting** essentials

Yes, you're going to have to make decisions about what to include and how you present yourself, but following these guidelines for formatting can help make the resume writing process a little easier.

▶ **Use a blank Microsoft Word doc to start.** Resume templates send the message that you can't format a document on your own, and they can limit what you choose to include or update.

▶ **Use bullets instead of writing in paragraphs.** Bullets help your reader skim more quickly and guide them through the page.

▶ **Stick to one page.** Most college undergraduates don't have the range of relevant experience that warrants more space.

▶ **Be consistent with format.** Use the same spacing, font size, placement of headers, etc.

▶ **Leave some white space.** One-inch margins are standard.

White space not only gives your reader's eyes a break, but it also leaves room to make notes.

▶ **Use ALL CAPS and bold.** Avoid *italics* and underlining since both can be misread by scanners or electronic systems.

▶ **Choose a standard font that is easy to read**—like Arial, Times New Roman, Garamond, Tahoma, or Verdana. Use no less than 11 points for smaller fonts; larger fonts can be easily read at 10 or even 9 points.

▶ **Make headers larger than body text.** Use them to organize your content and make it easier to find relevant information. You may choose to strategically use headers by incorporating key words from the job description, "Editing Experience" or "Financial Management Experience" for example.

☑ resume **essentials**

Research with employers reveals some of their biggest "pet peeves" when it comes to resumes. Below are some essential tips to help your resume avoid an unfavorable review from employers.

▶ **Read your resume out loud** to check for spelling errors, typos, and poor grammar.

▶ Be sure to **highlight your accomplishments** instead of just listing work duties that read like a job description.

▶ Include dates—**accurate dates**.

▶ List education and experience in **reverse chronological order** (most recent first).

▶ Use **bullet points** instead of narratives or paragraphs.

▶ Include **correct and complete contact info**, using a professional email address.

▶ Follow the formatting tips listed above!

▶ **Keep it short**—one page is the best!

▶ Leave out personal **information that doesn't belong** on a resume (age, height, weight, etc.).

▶ **Remember:** Your resume should provide support that you are qualified to apply!

Sparty Spartan

Campus: A111 Butterfield Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824
Permanent: 123 North Avenue, City, MI 45654
(517) 582-5555 • Spartan1@msu.edu

Education

Bachelor of Arts, Communication   May 2019
Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI

High School Diploma   May 2015
North Street High School, City, MI
- National Honor Society Scholar

Experience

Senior Class Vice-President   August 2014–May 2015
North Street High Student Government, City, MI
- Facilitated 8 senior class meetings with 25 members
- Spearheaded "Fall Carnival" fundraiser that raised over $1,900 for senior class trip
- Oversaw the homecoming and prom planning committees

Youth Counselor   May 2013–August 2015
North Street YMCA, City, MI
- Supervised 35 youth campers ranging from 7 to 10 years old
- Coordinated daily activities for campers to keep them active and engaged
- Planned an end of summer event for 200 campers with a group of 4 other counselors

Crew Member   October 2012–May 2013
McDonalds, City, MI
- Received 2 awards for outstanding customer service
- Provided exceptional customer service increasing repeat business
- Collaborated with a team of 5 to provide efficient services in a fast-paced environment

Activities

Member, North Street High Track Team, City, MI   January 2015–May 2015
Volunteer, Boys & Girls Club, City, MI   June 2013–August 2013

Certifications/Skills

- Proficient in Microsoft Word, Microsoft PowerPoint, and Adobe Photoshop
- Certified in CPR/First Aid

resume space allocation

As a general rule, follow this formula to determine how much space you should give to specific kinds of content:
- Name and contact info: 5%
- Education: 10–15%
- Relevant experience and/or skills: 75%
- Other (objective, activities, awards, memberships, computer skills, interests, etc.): 5–10%

resume **variation**

For some, a "Skills Summary," "Summary of Qualifications," or other similar section toward the top of the resume can work well. A section like this serves as a short introduction to your strengths that can keep an employer reading. In fact, many hiring managers say this is the first thing they read! To make this work for you, keep these tips in mind:

- Keep it short, ideally 3–5 bullets.
- Don't overstate your level of skill or experience. In most cases, the typical college undergrad still has more to learn on the job and is not an expert.
- Back it up. This is one place where general statements (such as "Proven ability to work in teams as both leader and contributing member") can work—as long as you provide concrete, specific examples under your experience to support those claims.

Avery Black

(231) 123-4567 / averyb@msu.edu / 2468 Maple Rd., Traverse City, MI 49684

Education

Michigan State University; East Lansing, MI
Bachelor of Arts, Psychology   May 2016
- Concentrations in Spanish and Education
- G.P.A. 3.91/4.0, Dean's List, The National Society of Collegiate Scholars

Experience

NorthWest Initiative; Lansing, MI
Community Outreach Intern   June 2015–August 2015
- Recruited 4 nonprofit organizations and 5 business partners to sponsor or attend conference
- Maintained database of contacts, updated conference website, and created promotional plan
- Oversaw teams of volunteers in set-up, registration, food, and take-down
- Compiled final conference evaluation reports and made recommendations to Executive Director

FACES Research Project; East Lansing, MI
RESEARCH ASSISTANT   October 2014–May 2015
- Conducted interviews, research tasks, and took measurements in the child development lab with over 30 diverse family groups following strict protocols set forth by researchers
- Answered questions about the study and built trust among participants to promote honest responses and quality data collection for researchers
- Collected responses, created reports, and assisted in coding and cataloging the data

Study Abroad; Quito, Ecuador   May 2013–August 2013
- Participated in an intensive Spanish language and cultural immersion experience
- Volunteered at local orphanage building a new common room and engaged 3–7 children weekly
- Utilized strong communication and interpersonal skills daily to accomplish goals

Michigan House of Representatives; Lansing, MI
Office Support Intern   January 2013–May 2013
- Wrote letters and organized literature for distribution to constituents
- Used MS Excel to maintain contacts database in support of donor and constituent relations
- Answered high-volume calls, prepared presentations, and managed digital and physical records

Additional Experience
- Nanny for middle-school student with special needs; Holt, MI   March 2014–Present
- Tutor for elementary student; Lansing, MI   July 2013–Present
- Tutor/Mentor at Southside Community Coalition; Lansing, MI   October 2013–December 2013

Affiliations
- Associated Students of MSU; Social Chair   January 2013–Present
- University United Methodist Choir; Member   March 2012–Present
- MSU Marching Band; Member and Squad Leader   March 2014–Present

resume **self check**

Once you have a resume draft, use the following evaluation to take a critical look at it. This can help you to identify and work on problems so that you can make efficient use of a career advising session and resume review. Also consider sharing your resume and this evaluation with someone whose opinion you trust to get feedback.

overall impression

How does the resume look in a 15-second glance?

POOR		OK		EXCELLENT
1	2	3	4	5

Some questions to consider: Does the formatting work to guide your eye to key content? What parts of the resume stand out? (Headings? Job titles? Keywords?) Does it appear organized or jumbled? If you took any creative risks with formatting, are they working for you or are they distracting? Does it seem like it represents a real person or does it feel artificial?

obvious career direction

Is it apparent that you are looking for a specific type of opportunity?

POOR		OK		EXCELLENT
1	2	3	4	5

clear contact information

Are all the basics on the resume: name, address, phone number, email address? If you included your LinkedIn, website, or blog URL, is it employer-ready?

POOR		OK		EXCELLENT
1	2	3	4	5

Is the formatting here working? Have you used space efficiently so that this section doesn't take up a disproportionate amount of space?

Dalia Levine

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EDUCATION

Bachelor of Arts, English/Creative Writing   May 2017
Michigan State University | East Lansing, MI
- Specializations in Jewish Studies and Digital Humanities
- Honors Credits

EXPERIENCE

Front Desk Receptionist   June 2014–Present
MSU Career Services | East Lansing, MI
- Compiled hundreds of new job postings into database using attention to detail to ensure accuracy
- Communicated with diverse clientele including students, staff, professors, and employers
- Responsible for smooth front office operations

Student Webmaster   August 2015–Present
MSU Interfaith Council | East Lansing, MI
- Responsible for Council web content and blog posts; increased web views 23% during fall 2015
- Solicited feedback from members and leadership on direction and content
- Collaborated with Publicity and Membership chairs to promote the Council to MSU students

Office Assistant   May 2014–August 2014
Heartcare MD | Waterford, MI
- Organized hundreds of patient files into new system resulting in increased ease of retrieval
- Located and obtained patient files from various other physician offices
- Interacted with patients, vendors, and delivery people in a friendly and professional manner
- Organized and tacked appointment calendars for two doctors and one PA

English Tutor for Hebrew Speakers   May 2013–August 2013
Tapuach Pais | Tel Aviv, Israel
- Polished Hebrew fluency skills through daily communication with students
- Inspired students by relating material to everyday life using creative techniques

High School Mentor/Tutor   August 2012–December 2012
Refugee Development Center | East Lansing, MI
- Overcame cultural and language barriers with students by remaining open-minded and encouraging
- Adapted lessons and activities to students' learning styles and levels of proficiency
- Coached students in reading, writing, pronunciation, and culture

SKILLS PROFILE

- **Language:** Fluent Hebrew and English, conversational Spanish
- **Technical:** Adobe Creative Suite (including Photoshop), New Media Driver's License, and SPSS

content
Resume is free of redundant, irrelevant, or vague/general information.

POOR		OK		EXCELLENT
1	2	3	4	5

Have you fully described experiences with enough specific detail and active, skill-based language to connect what you have done to what you want to and can do for your intended audience without having to work to read between the lines? Underline words or phrases that could be more specific, detailed, or targeted toward a particular skill set.

correct spelling and grammar
Any errors? Mark them. Fix them!

POOR		OK		EXCELLENT
1	2	3	4	5

consistency of formatting
The resume has same style of fonts and headings, and not too many or too few bullets.

POOR		OK		EXCELLENT
1	2	3	4	5

What elements work well in directing your eye to relevant information on the page? Where could formatting be more consistent, more effective in using space, etc.? Do you like the font?

Skill areas: Use action verbs!

the action verbs listed here are organized by skill areas to help you think about how your past experiences can apply to skill sets employers seek. Of course, many of these verbs apply to multiple skill areas—use all categories to get ideas for how you might describe your own skills and experience in your resume, cover letter, portfolio, interview, and other interactions.

Always describe your experiences in the **past tense** —even your current work!

ANALYSIS

analyzed
ascertained
assessed
compared
computed
conceptualized
concluded
confirmed
critiqued
deciphered
deliberated

determined
devised
diagnosed
estimated
evaluated
examined
forecasted
formulated
integrated
investigated
justified
measured
negotiated

prescribed
prioritized
projected
questioned
rated
recommended
researched
scrutinized
studied
substantiated
synthesized
validated
verified

COMMUNICATION

addressed
apprised
arbitrated
attested
authored
clarified
communicated
composed
convinced
corresponded
drafted
edited

explained
informed
interpreted
lectured
marketed
persuaded
presented
promoted
publicized
queried
reported
spoke
summarized
translated
wrote

FLEXIBILITY

accommodated
adapted
adjusted
altered
amended
balanced
converted
grew
improvised
tailored

INITIATIVE

accelerated
accomplished
achieved
acquired
advanced
bolstered
boosted
built

coordinated
created
dedicated
demonstrated
enriched
established
expanded
expedited
implemented
improved

increased
initiated
innovated
inspired
introduced
launched
minimized
mobilized
modernized
modified

multiplied
overhauled
pioneered
revamped
revised
spearheaded
stimulated
suggested
updated
upgraded

ORGANIZATION

arranged
assembled
budgeted
calculated
catalogued
centralized
charted
classified
collected
compiled
consolidated
correlated
indexed
linked
orchestrated
organized
oriented
planned
processed
purchased
recorded
regulated
scheduled
systematized
tabulated

CREATIVITY

brainstormed
constructed
designed
engineered
envisioned
fabricated
illustrated
produced
shaped
visualized

PROBLEM-SOLVING

aided
alleviated
ameliorated
augmented
counseled
customized
debugged
eased
elevated
enlarged
extended
extracted
finalized
fulfilled
generated
identified
interceded
invented
lightened
polished
procured
reconciled
rectified
reduced
refined
reformed
rehabilitated
reinforced
rejuvenated
relieved
remedied
remodeled
repaired
restored
retrieved
revitalized
revived
settled
solicited
solved
streamlined
strengthened
supplemented
transformed

LEADERSHIP

administered
advised
allocated
allowed
appointed
approved
assigned
authorized
chaired
coached
delegated
designated
directed
educated
elicited
employed
empowered
enabled
encouraged
endorsed
enhanced
facilitated
fostered
founded
guided
hired
influenced
instructed
interviewed
judged
led
moderated
monitored
motivated
officiated
recruited
sanctioned
supervised
trained

TEAMWORK

assisted
collaborated
contributed
cooperated
mediated
participated
partnered

...AND MORE!

acted
activated
added
admitted
apportioned
appraised
approximated
attained
audited
certified
commissioned
committed
consented
contracted
disbursed
dispatched
displayed
enlisted
excelled
executed
exercised
familiarized
figured
guaranteed
indicated
instituted
involved
issued
licensed
maintained
operated
performed
prepared
programmed
realized
related
reserved
reviewed
satisfied
screened
secured
served
set
smoothed
sought
specified
submitted
surveyed
sustained
traced
transacted
transmitted
valued