

OFFICE OF CAREER SERVICES AND LEADERSHIP MANAGEMENT**Writing a Winning Resume****What is a resume?**

A resume is a marketing tool used to communicate your value to employers. Specifically, it is a career summary that conveys skills, experience, and knowledge you have that organizations seek and need. To be effective, it should be tailored to each role and organization and provide a clear and concise picture of your most relevant accomplishments, capabilities, and professional and educational background.

What are the standards for formatting and length?

All resumes, at minimum, should include your Name and Contact information, Education, and Experience. The required length of a resume depends on the sector to which you are applying and experience level. For corporate positions, a one-page resume is often standard, especially for early career professionals. Large hospitals and organizations also tend to prefer one-page resumes, though this varies greatly. For most nonprofits and social service agencies, a two-page resume is acceptable, as long as the content warrants it.

Federal government prefers longer resumes with greater details about your skills, previous responsibilities, and accomplishments. Accordingly, they may run anywhere from two to five pages or more. For guidance on developing a federal resume, use the [resume builder provided by USAJOBS](#). Think tanks and academically-focused employers also prefer longer, detailed documents, but in the form of a curriculum vitae or “CV”.

What’s the difference between a resume and curriculum vitae (CV)?

A curriculum vitae (CV) is a longer synopsis of your educational and academic background and is used for academic, scientific, and research positions. Many international employers often use CVs as well. There typically are no restrictions with length, as it is determined by the extent of your experience. They also tend to be less tailored than a resume, which should always be personalized to the target job.

Format can also vary by discipline, though they typically include the following sections: Areas of Interest; Honors and Awards; Research, Teaching, Practice, and University Service Experience; Publications; Presentations; and Professional Affiliations. Check the respective institution or organization for the format and content they would like included in the CV.

What should I include in the resume?

- **Header:** Headers should be the first item on your resume and include your name and contact information.
 - Name: Format your name to appear slightly larger and more emphasized than the rest. You can list your preferred professional name in place of your legal name and/or in parentheses, as long as its usage is consistent throughout your application. You must still use your legal name on official job applications.
 - Location: Full street addresses are now optional. At a minimum, list your city, state, and zip code to indicate your general proximity to the employer. If you plan to relocate, you can leave it blank or add a note stating that you're "Relocating to xyz" and mention a date, if known.
 - Phone number: Include only one phone number that you check regularly, and make sure to set up a professional voicemail greeting.
 - Email: Use your Columbia email if you are applying for field placement and the one you check most for your job applications.
 - LinkedIn profile link (optional): Add your LinkedIn profile url, if your profile is up-to-date. For a cleaner, branded look, [customize the link](#), removing any excess letters and numbers after your name.

- **Summary or Professional Profile (optional; see Skills section below):** Summaries are optional sections that can be particularly useful for career changers, experienced candidates, and candidates whose background are not linear and/or do not convey a clear career story. They consist of a few statements made at the beginning of your resume that help provide a quick sense of what you can offer a prospective employer. As with the resume itself, it should always be tailored to the target opportunity.
 - Provide a clear and concise overview of your professional identity (who you are) and expertise (what you offer) as they relate to the position and organization.
 - Strategically highlight the most relevant qualifications and accomplishments, including populations, issue areas, settings, and methods of practice in which you have working knowledge or expertise.
 - Avoid mentioning commonplace skills such as communication, organizational, and problem-solving skills, which are expected. Instead, emphasize job or industry-specific professional skills such as counseling, case management, program development, program evaluation, grant writing, community organizing, and research; specialized clinical skills and techniques, such as DBT, CBT, and MI, fluency in languages other than English; and proficiency in and/or knowledge of software and systems.
 - Keep it brief and to the point, with just enough key points to bridge the connection between your background and skills and their needs.

- **Education:** The Education should take only a small portion of space on your resume and include all degrees completed. If you are in school or are a recent graduate, Education should come before Experience. If you are experienced, or if your experience is more relevant to the job than your educational credentials, Experience should come first.
 - In reverse chronological order, specify each college or university you attended, its location (city and state), the degree received, graduation date (month and year), and major or specialization.
 - Include your concentration and field of practice, if applicable. For social work positions, the degree itself will usually suffice.
 - If you don't have a lot of professional experience, you can list relevant coursework or a GPA of 3.5 or better to demonstrate knowledge in target subject areas or evidence of academic success.
 - Honors and awards, such as academic honors and fellowships, may be included here as well.

- **Experience:** The Experience section should be the bulk of your resume. This section can include both paid and unpaid positions, as well as community and volunteer work, if relevant.
 - List all positions in reverse chronological order.
 - For every position, include the name of the employer, city, state, job title, and dates of employment.
 - Explain in concise bullets what you did in each role, including the populations you worked with, the issues you addressed, the skills, methods, and tools you used, and outcomes you achieved.
 - Prioritize the bullets in order of relevance and importance to the target role.
 - Use power verbs and keywords that demonstrate evidence of relevant professional and transferable knowledge and skills.
 - If you have a lot of experience or want to strategically highlight select activities over others, you can break it up into "Relevant Experience" and "Additional Experience", with the latter including less relevant experiences, such as professional/paid positions that are not related to the target job. This may be particularly beneficial to career changers who may not have relevant professional/paid experience but have volunteer experiences that are applicable. All experiences should still be listed reverse chronologically within the categories.
 - You can also emphasize select activities by using targeted section headings such as "Clinical Experience", "Research Experience" or "International Experience". If you have extensive volunteer or leadership experience, this may warrant a section on its own. Use section headings sparingly, however; not all experiences warrant new categories.

- **Skills (optional):** Skills sections typically include "hard" language and technical skills. If you already included your relevant skills in the Summary, creating a separate section is optional. Make sure you include the proficiency level of any

skill you list and incorporate how you used the skill within the context of your resume in the Experience section.

- **Language(s):** List any language(s) you speak beyond English and your respective fluency level (e.g. Fluent, native fluency, conversational fluency, basic knowledge of, etc.) Only include “English” fluency for international opportunities.
- **Technical Skill(s):** List any relevant office software (e.g. Excel, PowerPoint), medical records and other databases (e.g. EPIC), statistical software (e.g. SPSS, SAS, STATA, R), programming languages (e.g. Python, SQL) and CRM systems (e.g. Salesforce, Raiser’s Edge) you have experience with, and your respective proficiency level. You may include social media platforms (e.g. Twitter, Instagram) you have used *professionally* as well, if that is required in the role. Label proprietary software accordingly if it’s not recognizable outside the organization (e.g. medical records database, CRM system).
- **Licensure and Certification(s) (optional):** Include this section if you have multiple items to add. Otherwise, you can indicate your social work licensure status after your name (e.g. Name, LMSW) or other relevant section. If you graduated and are in pursuit of licensure, you can note that you are “License-eligible”.
 - Add the state in which the respective license was issued. For certifications, also indicate the issuing organization.
 - Move this section right below Education if you are early in your career and want to ensure employers see your credentials immediately.
- **Professional Affiliations (optional):** This section can be useful to show your professional dedication to the field.
 - List the names of professional organizations to which you belong, indicating leadership positions and committee work where appropriate. Be sure to include the corresponding years of membership.
- **Professional Development / Training (optional):** As a social worker, ongoing professional development and training will be expected. Highlight only those that are most relevant to the target opportunity.
 - If you completed additional or specialized training (e.g. Naloxone Training, Mental Health First Aid), you can include them under Education (if completed at the school), a separate section, or a combined heading, such as “Education and Training”.
 - If you received a certificate as a result, you may include this under Licensure and Certifications. Note that most section headings are not fixed and can be modified accordingly.
- **Research Projects / Papers / Publications / Presentations (optional):** This section may be more applicable for those seeking opportunities involving research, writing, or public speaking roles.

How can I make my resume stand out?

- Lead with your strengths! Prioritize your content such that the **most relevant information** is visible first. This may include reorganizing or renaming your section headings or reordering the bullets within your experiences.
- Highlight **skills and experiences most related** to the target position.
- Use **action verbs** to describe your achievements, depicting yourself as someone who actively contributed to resolving a problem, addressing an issue, or implementing a solution, as opposed to someone who “participated in” an action or event or carried out tasks they were “responsible for”. Refer to the [Action Verbs](#) tip sheet for reference.
- Vary the verbs used, and always use the present tense for current jobs and past tense for previous jobs.
- Incorporate **keywords**, including industry terminology and job-specific knowledge, skills, abilities, credentials, and qualities.
- Use **results-oriented language** to communicate the impact you had, outcome you achieved, and/or goal you worked towards.
- **Be specific** about what you accomplished, and showcase the scope of your achievements by **quantifying** in numbers, dollars, or percentages, where relevant.
- **Be consistent** in your formatting, including with states, dates, and other details.
- **Proofread carefully! Errors are unacceptable.**
- If your resume is two pages long, make sure to include your name and the page number in the header or footer of the second page.
- When evaluating the effectiveness of your resume, ask yourself:
 - Did you provide a clear and concise narrative of who you are and what knowledge, skills, and expertise you offer?
 - Could you readily assess from the information you provided how your qualifications match the needs of the job or organization?

Do not include:

- Photos, graphics, or personal details (marital status, date of birth, citizenship status/national origin, religion, etc.)
- “Phone” or “Email” before your respective contact information
- A list of all your tasks and responsibilities or language that starts with “Responsible for” or “Responsibilities included” -- focus on what you achieved as it relates to the job using action and results-oriented language
- Organization or industry-specific jargon that’s irrelevant to the target opportunity
- Exaggerated statements about your contributions
- Subjective descriptors (e.g. “excellent communicator”) -- prove these qualities through your results-focused accomplishment statements
- Names and contact information of supervisors
- Hobbies, especially if they’re not relevant
- References -- create a [separate document](#)