

Résumé  
WRITING GUIDE



CAREER SERVICES  
*Illinois State University*

# Résumé Basics

The résumé is a key marketing tool that helps build your personal brand and markets you to an employer. It is a vital part of the job search, providing important details of your qualifications, background, and what you can offer an employer—all in a concise format.

## Style and formatting tips

- **Font:** Choose an easy-to-read black font in 10-12 point size.
- **Format:** Present information under each header and section in reverse chronological order: most recent experience first. Stay consistent in the way you present your experiences.
- **Image:** Customize your résumé to each job or application purpose. A one-résumé-fits-all approach is generally not the most effective.
- **Layout:** Use bullets, bold text, italics, and capitalization sparingly to call attention to the most important information.
- **Length:** For undergraduate students and recent college graduates, use a full one-page résumé.
- **Paper:** Use 8.5 inch x 11 inch résumé-quality paper in a neutral color to print your résumé, cover letter, and references page.
- **Professionalism:** Eliminate all typos and misspellings by having multiple individuals proofread your résumé.
- **Spacing:** Use margins of 0.5" to 1" on all sides with appropriate, but not excessive, spacing.
- **Templates:** Avoid résumé templates as they tend to be difficult to edit and do not easily allow for changes as your résumé evolves with your experiences.

## Heading and section tips

Heading titles should highlight specific skills and experiences. Below is a list of possible headings you could use in your résumé if you have applicable experience:

- Education
- Objective/Career Summary
- Relevant Course Work
- Work Experience
- Related Experience
- Clinical Experience
- Observation Hours
- Internships/Externships
- Activities/Leadership Experience
- Academic Honors/Awards
- Community Service/Volunteer Work
- Skills & Certifications
- Military Service
- Languages
- Professional Development/Memberships/Affiliations
- Technical Knowledge or Skills

## Writing bullet points

Unlike other professional writing, résumés require writing about your experiences and skills in concise bullet points—it is not recommended to write in paragraphs or complete sentences. These should highlight the skills you gained from each experience more so than just listing a duty or task you completed. Tips for writing strong bullet points:

- Start with an action verb then add details.
- Bullet point = action word + skill + how/why
- If you are currently in the role or experience, use the present tense of the verb. If including something from the past, use past tense.
- List bullet points in order of importance that you want an employer to see.
- Look at a job posting or description for “qualifications and job duties” to match your bullet points to what the position requires. Be sure to use language in your bullet points that you see listed in the posting or description.
- Quantify your bullet points if applicable (e.g., specify how many employees you trained, how much you increased attendance, or how much of a budget you managed).

## Improved bullet points

If you are thinking of using this word:	Consider using this word instead:
Led	Conducted, Directed, Guided, Headed
Helped	Assisted, Contributed, Supported
Put together	Arranged, Collected, Compiled, Coordinated, Organized
Made sure	Approved, Assured, Corrected, Ensured, Verified
Kept track	Managed, Monitored, Recorded, Scheduled

Before	After
Worked the cash register	Provided customer service in an efficient and courteous manner and handled financial transactions with accuracy
Helped with various marketing projects	Assisted marketing chair on a campus-wide campaign to promote Homecoming event to 15,000 students and alumni
Took care of children at daycare	Created developmentally appropriate activities for five with children with special needs

# Transferable Skills

Transferable skills, often called soft skills or competencies, are skill sets you fine-tune and develop in one experience and transfer to another. Transferable skills can be gained anywhere—classes, jobs, internships, volunteering, working with faculty, etc. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers, the most desirable transferable skills employers from all industries seek are as follows. When in doubt on what to put your résumé, include experiences where you have used these skills.

## Global/intercultural fluency

- Value, respect and learn from diverse cultures, races, ages, genders, sexual orientations, and religions
- Demonstrate openness, inclusiveness, sensitivity, and the ability to interact respectfully with all people
- Understand individual differences
- Critical thinking/problem solving
- Exercise sound reasoning to analyze issues, make decisions, and overcome problems
- Able to obtain, interpret, and use knowledge, facts, and data
- Demonstrate originality and inventiveness

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## Oral/written communications

- Articulate thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively in written and oral forms to persons inside and outside the organization
- Demonstrate public speaking skills
- Able to express ideas to others
- Write/edit memos, letters and complex technical reports clearly and effectively

## Professionalism/work ethic

- Demonstrate personal accountability and effective work habits
- Work productively with others and manage time workload
- Understand the impact of non-verbal communication on professional work image
- Demonstrate integrity and ethical behavior, act responsibly with the interests of the larger community in mind
- Able to learn from mistakes

## Digital technology

- Leverage existing digital technologies ethically and efficiently to solve problems, complete tasks, and accomplish goals
- Demonstrate effective adaptability to new and emerging technologies

## Leadership

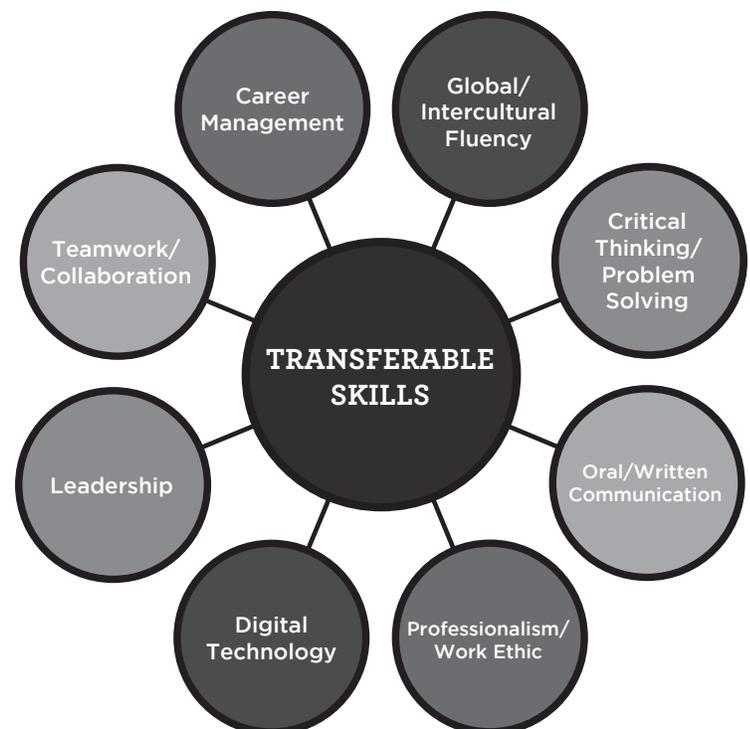
- Leverage the strengths of others to achieve common goals
- Use interpersonal skills to coach and develop others
- Able to assess and manage emotions and those of others
- Use empathetic skills to guide and motivate, and organize, prioritize, and delegate work

## Teamwork/collaboration

- Build collaborative relationships with colleagues and customers representing diverse cultures, races, ages, genders, religions, lifestyles, and viewpoints
- Able to work within a team structure
- Negotiate and manage conflict

## Career management

- Able to identify and articulate one's skills, strengths, knowledge, and experiences to the position desired and career goals
- Able to identify areas necessary for professional growth
- Navigate and explore job options, understands and can take the steps necessary to pursue opportunities
- Understand how to self-advocate for opportunities in the workplace



Source: National Association of Colleges and Employers

# Résumé Checklist

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Use this checklist to be sure your résumé is ready to go.

## Is your résumé:

- Free of spelling and grammar errors?
- Devoid of personal pronouns (e.g., I, we, me, my)?
- A good reflection of how your skills and experiences relate to the job?
- One full page (this is a common expectation for entry-level professional positions without much professional work experience and a bachelor's degree)?

## Does your résumé:

- Use consistent formatting for dates, job titles, etc.?
- Display your most relevant qualifications near the top of the page under appropriate section headings?
- Highlight all relevant experience?
- Use action verbs to describe experiences?
- Use key words from your area of discipline and/or a job posting to describe your experiences?
- Demonstrate an understanding of the position you are seeking and/or the needs of the employer?

# References

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Applications or employers may request references from you. If so, use these guidelines when submitting:

- Ask 3-5 individuals for permission to use them as a reference and gather their contact information.
- Try not to use relatives or friends as references.
- List your references on a separate page with the same heading of contact information used on your résumé.
- For each reference, list the following: name, title, organization, physical address, phone number, and email.
- Only send a reference page with your résumé if requested by the employer.

## Example:

Reggie Redbird  
Mascot, Illinois State University  
Campus Box 1857  
Normal, IL 61790  
(309) 438-1857  
rredbird@ilstu.edu

