

What a resume is for

Moderate · 2 hours for a first draft · Free

YOU'LL NEED

- ☐ Two or three job postings you'd actually apply to
- ☐ A word processor or a free resume template
- ☐ A list of your jobs, school, activities and volunteer work, with dates

WHAT TO KNOW

- 1 **Know what it's for.** A resume summarizes your abilities, education and experience. It won't get you a job on its own, but it's an important factor in getting an interview. Employers use it to quickly see whether your background fits the opening.
- 2 **Find the keywords.** Scan 10 to 15 postings for the job title you want and list the requirements that come up most: experience, technical skills, soft skills, training and credentials.
- 3 **Put your contact information at the top: full name, address, phone number and email.** Missing email and phone information is one of the top five resume mistakes.
- 4 **Add a summary with your 3 or 4 top accomplishments or skills.** Show you meet the minimum qualifications near the top, where a 15-to-20-second scan will catch them.
- 5 **List work history, most recent first: employer, city and state, job title, dates, and what you accomplished.** Start each line with an action verb, and quantify where you can.
- 6 **Add education and training, then volunteering and activities.** Put education near the top if you're a new grad or it's required for the job.
- 7 **Use the exact terms from the posting.** A variation may not be recognized as a qualification. This means adjusting your resume for each job.
- 8 **Proofread, then have someone else check spelling, grammar and how well it matches the job.** Spelling and grammar errors are the top resume mistake.

Watch out Software often reads it first. Many companies use an applicant tracking system (ATS) that can filter out resumes missing essential criteria, and it may misread or reject a resume because of formatting. Use a clean, standard format, and send Word, PDF or plain text. Never send a scanned image, because it won't be recognized.

DAD NOTE Write it for someone who has 20 seconds and a stack of 80 more.

Full lesson: aptkeys.com/work/resumes-and-applications/what-a-resume-is-for/

Checked October 2, 2026. Sources: CareerOneStop (U.S. Department of Labor); Harvard University Mignone Center for Career Success.