



Resume optics

A good resume can be your business calling card and should convey your experience and expertise to others. I've reviewed hundreds of student and experienced professional resumes and it always amazes me what people accomplish throughout their careers. Yet often times the format of the resume fights with the content on the page. Much like a [presentation or a report](#), even before I read a single accomplishment or experience bullet, I step back and look at the optics of the resume and scrutinize the aesthetic. For many people, if the reader cannot get beyond how the document looks, he/she will have to work harder to read it. Make your reader work too hard and he/she may just give up on it all together.

I made a list of some common recommendations I make when reviewing resumes. To illustrate some of these tips, here are two resumes: the first one is a bad example and the second is a good example of implementing the tips discussed below. PS – If you like the “good” template, I have provided a link at the end of the article to download it in MS Word below.



Fname Lname

Current Address: 123 Current Street Name City, ST 12345	Permanent Address: 123 Permanent Street Name City, ST 12345
email@domain.com (123) 456-7890	

EDUCATION

University, College/School, City, State Degree Majors: Major 1, Major 2	Month Date GPA 3.85/4.00
University, College/School, City, State Degree Majors: Major 1, Major 2	Month Date GPA 3.85/4.00

ACTIVITIES

- Activity – Title, Organization**
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References Available Upon Request

PERMANENT ADDRESS 123 Permanent Street Name City, State 12345	Fname Lname email@domain.com (123) 456-7890	CURRENT ADDRESS 123 Current Street Name City, State 12345
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EDUCATION

College, University, City, State Degree, Majors: Major 1, Major 2 (Overall GPA: 3.85/4.0)	Graduation Date
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EXPERIENCE

Company Name Title, City, State	Start Date – Present
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Company Name Title, City, State	Start Date – End Date
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ACTIVITIES, PHILANTHROPY AND LEADERSHIP

Organization Name Title, City, State	Start Date – Present
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Organization Name Title, City, State	Start Date – End Date
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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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Full is good

Your resume should reflect your breadth and depth of experience. A skinny or sparse resume implies a lack of experience or depth of expertise. Be verbose if you have to but the document should “look chock-full-o-experience.”

Keep it symmetrical

Text that takes up one side of the page makes the document seem uneven or unbalanced. Try to extend your sentences through the whole page of the resume. I typically use “Full Alignment” and not left alignment in resumes. Left alignment tends to stack the content over to the left. “Full Width” spaces the text out across the full width of the page.

Say it in one page

A resume is an abbreviated table of contents for your career. If you cannot say it concisely in a page, there's may be a problem with your ability to distill lots of data into the most meaningful information. That said, your CV (or Curriculum Vitae) can describe project-by-project accomplishments at a very detailed level. But do not confuse a detailed CV with a Resume; they are not the same document.

Ladies and gentlemen: set those margins!

Some people are afraid to play with the margins to give themselves more page real estate. Since we are trying to keep the document to exactly a page, you should feel free to set the margins to 0.25 – 0.5 inches. I don't think I would go much smaller than 0.25 inches so you give your reader something to hold on to when they are reading your resume. By default most documents have a bigger top/bottom margin and a thinner right/left margin; this is generally so that authors can insert header text, page numbers, footers, etc. Since you don't need that on a one-page document, you could make the margins equal and even make them smaller if you need more space.

Use bullets wisely

The bullets under your main sections should describe what you have achieved and accomplished vs what your job responsibilities were. Many times I will review a resume that reads like a job description or an account of what was done on the job. Rather than detail what you “did” you should describe what you “accomplished.”

Which bullet would you rather read?

- Reported key performance metrics from the enterprise data warehouse.

or

- Consolidated over 1,000 data feeds into an enterprise data warehouse to create an actionable executive dashboard which improved customer profitability by 17% and raised service delivery effectiveness metrics by 43%.

The answer is obvious, right? Bullet 1 is the job. Bullet 2 is the what you achieved on the job.

Another difference between bullet 1 and 2 is bullet 2 followed the C-A-R model: *Context, Action, Result*. Communication and HR experts have used this model in providing effective feedback and in structuring your interview responses but I also think it's especially relevant for resume bullets.

First, you set context on what the task or responsibility was. This is often times where most bullets – if they are written like a job description – stop. Next, the action indicates what you did. Finally, the most important, yet often overlooked part: the result. The more you can quantify the result, the better.

For example:

...in order to increase sales by 300%.

...and improved customer retention by 15%.

...resulting in a balanced \$150 million portfolio of customers.

...thereby achieving an A+ customer service rating.

Whatever bullet you write, try to add some quantitative measure to capture the attention of your reader.

Phone number and answering the call

OK, so this is not really a resume suggestion but just a note I pass along to people who list their phone number of their resume... If you list your phone number on your resume, make sure you answer your phone professionally.

Some suggestions:

"Hello, this is Justin."

"This is Justin."

"Good morning, Justin here."

Whatever the greeting, make sure it's professional. I recommend avoiding:

"Hello?"

"Yo!"

"Wassaaaaaap?"

"Who dis is?"

“Talk to me.”

And yes...I have heard all of the above examples when calling people at their listed phone numbers on their resumes.

Fonts, fonts and more fonts!

Religion, politics and fonts. Three topics that will divide people into fierce ideologies. My personal preference is a non-serif font like Arial. I find it cleaner and more contemporary, but again, that is just my preference. In reality it does not matter what you use as long as you are consistent and do not mix fonts or indiscriminately vary fonts throughout the document. And of course, **Comic Sans** should never be used on a resume or any professional document [not written by a clown] for that matter...but you already knew that...

Keep aligned and space on

Alignment is critical. All your bullets should be aligned exactly evenly and you should hang your indent consistently. I sometimes take a ruler just to make sure the beginning of my resume aligns perfectly.

Line spacing is also important. Single spacing is preferred.

Leave the photos for your scrapbook

Occasionally I will run across a resume with a photo or graphic on it. Three words: don't do it. It's unprofessional, and for some organizations, a head-shot photo is against policy as it introduces the potential for biased employment decision making.

Sectionology

Use sections to categorize content. Not every resume will have the same sections in the same order.

Student resumes will have education right at the top of the document while experienced professionals may drop that to section 2. Some common sections are:

- Education
- Experience
- Activities
- Honors and Publications
- Technical Skills
- Volunteer and Philanthropy
- Additional Information

Additionally...

The “Additional” category is a really good way to indicate things your interviewer or potentially employer may not know about you. For example: avid football player, rock collector, proficient in Portuguese. These bullets make great conversation starters and can often become the sole focus of a great interview. You should make these bullets personal and interesting. I’ve seen cases first-hand where interviewers focused almost entirely on someone’s interest in fishing, hockey or cross-country running because they had something in common.

References available upon request: duh...

References are important but you do not need to list them on your resume. I typically recommend maintaining a running list of references in a separate document. If someone wants references, they will ask for them. You should also leave the “References available upon request” off your resume. Most people know that they are available, and if needed, will ask you to provide them.

Get inked

Keep the ink black. It’s easiest to read and looks professional. I always recommend laser printing the

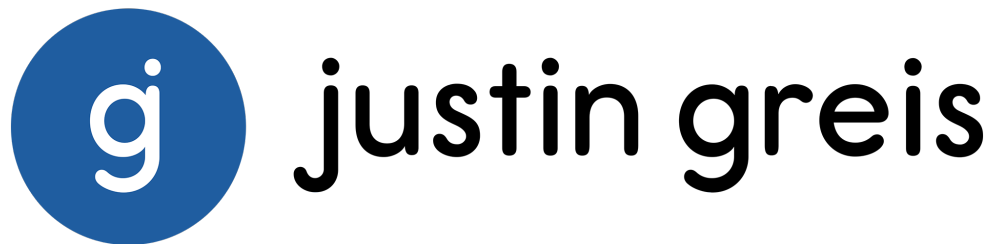
resume on a printer with adequate toner. Ink jets have the potential to smear the text or look blurry.

The paper

When I was in college I had the bright idea to print my resume on cardstock. What was I thinking?... I do not recommend this. However, I do recommend an upgrade from typical low grade copy paper. Buy some high quality bright white heavy laser paper. This really makes your resume pop and stand out from the stack.

Download the “good” resume template

Like the “good” template? Well, look no further! [Click here](#) to download a copy of your very own in MS Word format.



hi, i'm justin
(nice to meet you)

I post weekly **professional insights** and **personal stories** from my life as a management consultant, a dad, and an eternal optimist.



Click here to learn more about my **professional, personal,** and **“perfeSSIONal”** background.

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