

Resume Best Practices 2024: What's Out, What's In, and What's Next

What's Out

Functional structure	In the past, two resume structures predominated: the chronological and the functional. The functional resume structure opens with an Accomplishments section, followed by the Experience section, which is often limited to a list of current and past employers with associated titles and dates of employment. This arrangement frustrated recruiters who could not match accomplishments to employments. The functional resume is out of favor.
Objective statement /Intro paragraph	The objective statement tended to be self-serving ("A position where I can develop my capabilities"). The Intro paragraph lost impact due to use of overly generic attributes and proved ineffective for readers who only spend a few seconds in a skim-level reading These should not be used.
Contact info	Avoid your street address, company email, birth date, driver license, social security number, immigration status, place of birth, and citizenship. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do not place your contact information in a header or footer. It will likely vanish during digital scanning• Do not place anything before your name. The scanning software is still in development and less than proficient. The software may interpret the first few characters as your name, so be certain it is actually is your name.
Poor readability	You have 3 to 6 seconds to capture your reader's attention. Your reader will be skimming and will be looking for something to keep them on the page.
Graphics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid using text boxes and shapes, which will likely disappear during digital scanning• Avoid using columns because the orderly sequence you set up is likely to disintegrate into chaos as your resume is converted during scanning• Do not use extreme fonts and italics. Scanning software may misread all but the simplest elements• Do not include head shots and other images, page borders, and added embellishments (use emojis at your risk)• Adhere to visual standards that guide proximity, alignment, and contrast
Visual complexity	Left justify every line including your name. Placing your name in the center violates this premise. Right (full) justification has fallen from favor.
Typewriter look	Use an appropriate font and carefully select word processing features that enhance readability beyond the possibilities of an electric typewriter.
Third person	Write in first person to assert your achievements: "[I] Drive growth" rather than third person [She] Drives growth. (The "I" and "She" are absent but understood and determine the verb form.
Duties, processes	We are most interested in the difference you made and least interested in how you kept busy throughout your day. Focus on results, not duties.
References upon request	"References provided on request" is understood. Do not include Refs in resume unless a job posting requests this (government jobs, for example).



What's In

Flipped Mindset	Flip your mindset 180 degrees: No more “me-me-me out to the world.” Instead adopt the mindset of the reader, which means the scanning software, recruiter, and hiring manager. The mindset is expressed in the job announcements (postings). Best to think “How can I present my information to be more relevant to job postings?” That is, what can you do for them?
Key words	Rigorously reflect key words and their synonyms in your resume. Software tools are available to generate a “match score” that places a number on how closely you match the job requirements.
Job-specific resume	Prioritize job search targets. Develop your resume around a specific role in a specific industry. This improves your key word usage and match score.
2-page resumes	At entry level, a 1-page resume can be appropriate, but only with the condition that it has enough white space to be reader-friendly and enough key word density to pass the digital screening. At mid-career, applicants have earned their second page and more. If you exceed 3 pages, consider offloading detail by using one or more separate communication pieces.
Quick read	Be sure your layout and structure emphasize the highpoints of your message. Your skimming reader should “get it” within 6 to 8 seconds.
Contact clarity	Place your name, phone, personal email, and LinkedIn URL in the Contact section. Consider including the name of your city of residence if you have a non-local phone area code and current employment that is out of the area.
Tables	You may use tables if you save your resume in plain text format (.txt). Cut information from the .txt file, then paste it into dialogue boxes of online applications. Tables convert to lists when saved to .txt format. Place a space before each hard return to prevent words from running together (merging).
Experience section and sub-sections	Within the Experience section, your most recent position is typically the most relevant and its description is longer than others. Consider reducing attention from less relevant, earlier experience entries by grouping these jobs in a “Previous Experience” section and shortening their descriptions.
Bulleted points	Bullet points are effective because they guide the reader’s eye and contribute to brevity.
Context	Introduce each employment experience with an overview statement before listing bullet points. This context helps the reader interpret your points.
Grouping	Place similar items together to increase readability. Use subcategory headings for bullet points and group key words and phrases in a list or table.
Gap explanation	Explain the reason for a gap, length (from-to), and career-related activities along with knowledge gained and capabilities developed.
Skills	Software screening tools (ATS systems) match job requirement skills to the applicant’s hard skills. You will be ahead by placing these prominently in your resume, perhaps in a table in a separate Skills section.



Certificates	Additional mention of your skills can be listed in or close to your Education section. Certificates, training, tests passed, and self-study of relevant tools can be placed here.
Achievements	Results produced carry more impact than duties and responsibilities. Even better are challenges met, changes initiated, differences made, benefits delivered, and value contributed.
WP features	Use large fonts for major headings, begin bullet point with a symbol, and make appropriate use of separator lines, shading, and vertical spacing >1.0.
Reinforcement	Your resume will be empowered by creating additional communication pieces including your LinkedIn Profile, work samples, case or project examples, achievement stories, annotated capabilities listing, bio, mission statement, and your elevator speech (brief networking introduction). Unloading information from your resume can shorten it, and placing reinforcing information in a portfolio keeps it readily available.

What's Next

Massive databases	More of everything is going online. Additional information will be "mined" to provide a comprehensive set of information about you.
AI Prompting Skills	Looks as if prompting skills will be a "must have" for marketers, content developers, and almost everyone else.
Improved scanning software	The scanning software selects job candidates that match requirements, heavily skewed toward hard, as opposed to soft, skill requirements. The software will improve steadily to include refinements (key word synonyms), soft skills, and capabilities that will improve inclusiveness.
Video media	Richer media and continuing tech enhancements will become extensively used. These will raise the bar compared with today's standards.
Emphasis on values and priorities	Employers are adding steps that lengthen the interviewing process. The apparent purpose is to get to know the job candidate and ensure a good fit to the organization and the position.
Soft Skills	The emphasis on key words and the need for a resume to survive digital scanning have resulted in a de-emphasis on soft skills. This is unfortunate because soft skills are critical in the last hurdle of interviewing, that is, the hiring manager and team. The final offer choice will tilt toward the candidate with the stronger soft skills.
Reinforcing info	Having separate write-ups that include work samples, capabilities, and achievements will become more important as the interviewing and onboarding processes become more complex and thorough.
Implanted chips	The Swedish people have an option to have a microchip that carries key information. Will the use of this spread to key resume information?

