

# Writing a Winning Résumé

## Introduction

This short document discusses resumes and how to write and present them.

There are many books and as many different opinions about resumes. No one view is necessarily better than the other, including my own. I discuss the rationale behind why I do something and you can make up your mind what suits you and perhaps try different approaches.

My history with resumes goes back at least 20 years. For a decade or more I was a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) teacher and manager and taught, or managed programs for long-term unemployed people.

Much of the focus of these programs was to help participants prepare their resumes and job letters and apply for suitable jobs. During that period I made it my duty to learn as much as I could about resumes so that I gave my students only the best advice. I read almost everything I could find about resumes.

Since then I have worked in recruiting receiving numbers of resumes each week ... and having to wade through them. I think I've just about got to the nub of resumes.

**NOTE:** The word resume has two acute accents as shown in the heading. To save time I have not included them in the body text.

## Resume or Curriculum Vitae?

Although the term *Curriculum Vitae* (CV) is probably a more accurate description for a document presenting a brief history of your career, I prefer the word resume. It's less pretentious for most of us.

If you are a rocket scientist and have worked at several prestigious universities, maybe CV is more in keeping with the status you wish to project. For the rest of us, resume is fine - at least most people know what it means.

## What Goes In a Resume?

You have some latitude about what you put in your resume. There are some things that should be in every resume and others determined by your personal circumstances. For example, I was an associate fellow of the Australian Human Resource Institute (AHRI), a grade of membership for which appointees require specific formal qualifications, experience and current responsibilities. Therefore, I included a paragraph titled: **Professional Affiliations** in my resume.

Generally, you will need the following as a minimum:

- Personal Details (or Contact Details)
- Employment History
- Educational Qualifications
- Referees

Other headings you might use are:

- Career Objective
- Academic Papers
- Special Achievements
- Self-improvement Courses
- Professional Development

And there is a host of other possibilities.

## Better Left Out

There are numbers of things I see in resumes every day that are not necessary and are better left out. They include:

- Date of birth
- Marital status or spouse's name
- Children
- Religious or political affiliations
- Membership of unrelated organisations including sporting groups

Unless these matters are genuinely and directly related to the job, they need not be included.



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Some religious and political organisations seeking employees will ask that they be practising the relevant religion or supportive of the political philosophy. Here's an example from an advertisement for a private secretary to the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory,

*'The ideal person ... will have ... a willingness to work within the values of a Labor Government.'*

There are still people who prefer not to hire those of one religion or another, married, single etc. Don't give anyone an opportunity to scrap your application because you are married, older, young, have children, or practise a particular religion.

## Gathering Data - Preparation

Before you begin typing your resume you need to make sure you have all the details.

Assuming you are going to use the following topics as a minimum, make sure you have the details required to go under each heading.

- Personal Details (or Contact Details)
- Employment History (or Experience).
- Educational Qualifications
- Referees

You need to give as many forms of contact as you have eg, mail, email, telephone/mobile and fax.

If you are allowed to take calls at work, give your work contact details also. Make it as easy as possible for recruiters to find you.

Gather the full and correct contact details for your past and present employers. Make sure you have the correct commencement and separation dates.

Educational qualifications need to describe the award eg, Bachelor of Engineering, the date you graduated and the university from which the award was issued. Details of any major or minor studies should also be given.

Ask three people who can describe your personal attributes, work skills and attitude to act as your referees. Ask them to provide their preferred contact details and any dates during which they will be unavailable on leave, overseas etc.

One of these people should be your current supervisor. All should be business referees and not personal referees. Also, they should be current ie, not people you worked with 10 years ago ... a lot happens in 10 years!

## Resume Structure

Where do you place each heading on your resume? It's a good question which has several answers, none of which is absolutely correct. I think the real answer is, 'who knows?'

Some people place their personal/contact details at the beginning of their resumes; others at the end. So there are at least two schools of thought.

The first school - placement at the beginning - suggests that if you are to be contacted your details need to be at the top where they can be found. The second school suggests that if prospective employers are interested, they will find your contact details wherever they are.

I don't see why you can't place your telephone number under your name at the top of your resume and then restate it with all your other details at the end. That way it leaves the beginning of your resume for the most important information which will be either, educational qualifications or employment experience.

My suggestion regarding education and employment experience is to read the advertisement. If there is an emphasis on experience, then place your experience first. If education, then place

*"Workers today must be equipped not simply with technical know-how, but also with the ability to create, analyze, and transform information and to interact effectively with others."*

- Alan Greenspan, Federal Reserve Board Chairman

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education first. Alternatively, highlight your most promising feature first.

Place your referees' details at the end of your resume.

Any other headings should be placed where they are associated with another heading, near it, or according to their level of importance. The more important, the closer to the beginning.

This is intended to accommodate the lazy reader who looks at the front page and skims the other pages. For the same reason, place your employment history so that your current employer is at the top and your first employer at the bottom. Similarly, educational qualifications are placed with the most recent qualification at the top (In chronological order).

## Paper or Electronic

How do you intend to produce your resume?

It's probably a sound idea to prepare it for electronic submission and use the prepared data to produce a hardcopy.

Many online recruiting services have forms into which you can enter your data. Therefore I suggest you have an ordinary text file containing all

the data for each heading. That way, when you enter text into a recruitment site's forms, you can cut and paste - it saves time and is more accurate.

You can then paste the same data into a word-processor file and format it for printing or production as an electronic file (like this).

Once you have it stored as a wordprocessor file you can have the file converted to Adobe Acrobat Portable Document Format (PDF). This format is universal, produces small file sizes and usually maintains layout integrity when printed.

If you produce it on paper, use A4 (Australia) or Letter (US and some overseas countries) and leave a 1" (2.5 cm) margin all round. Use a 12 pitch typeface and perhaps a *seriffed* font such as Times New Roman for the body text and Arial for the headings (this text is Arial *non-seriffed*).

However, research has shown that while *seriffed* fonts are easier to read on paper, *non-seriffed* fonts are more comfortable for VDU use.

## Keywords

The large recruitment agencies with online resume submission and processing capabilities

have database filters which filter (separate) by occupational skill or related topic.

For example, if they are looking for a **project manager**, they search their database for the term 'project management' or 'project'. All resumes within their database with the keywords project management will present in a list from which recruiters seek other attributes eg, geographical location, salary requirements, availability etc.

Think about the keywords that describe your occupation or intended occupation and make sure you scatter plenty of them throughout your resume. Your personal attributes may also be used as keywords eg, attention to detail, inventive, team player, conscientious etc.

## Major Heading

Rather than type Resume at the top of the first page, I prefer to write my name, however, you could put something like these (Centred on the page):

Resume of  
Julia Broomsweeper

or

*"At the heart of the human capital challenge ... is the fact that skilled and knowledgeable workers are fast becoming an endangered species."*  
- ASTD Public Policy Council

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## Julia Broomsweeper's RESUME

or the way I prefer

**Julie Broomsweeper**  
**(08) 8959 4456**

If you've done the job properly your document will *look* like a resume, so I prefer to place the word resume in the footer rather than emphasise the obvious. (I'm a pedant)

## Footer

A footer is text or images produced automatically at the bottom of pages, usually by a wordprocessor.

Multiple page documents without page numbering are a nuisance. If you drop them and the pages separate, it's time consuming to work out where one page ends and the other begins.

Wordprocessors have a header/footer capability which is easy to set up. The header goes at the top of pages, the footer at the bottom.

I usually write a footer in text smaller than the body text that reads something like this:

Resume - Robin Henry - Page 1

Footers don't need to be lengthy, but should as a minimum have the page number and your name.

## Subheadings and Content

Your subheadings will be the key headings we have discussed such as Referees.

Under each subheading place the relevant content. If you use bullets wherever possible, it makes the document easier to read and helps get over the problems we have of writing 'I' so frequently that it becomes nauseous.

Here's a couple of example subheadings:

### Educational Achievements

Bachelor of Engineering (Electrical)  
University of Tasmania, 1994

Diploma of Mechanical Engineering  
TAFE Queensland, 1990

### Relevant Experience

**Mount Isa Mines Ltd 1979 - Present**  
I work for MIM Ltd as an electrical engineer

involved with:

- High transmission modulation
- Power distribution
- Mine power planning

During the last six months I was responsible for installation, testing and operation of three English Electric gas turbine generators which provide power for the mine and city of Mount Isa.

I designed three substations using the latest available technology and received a Best Practice award from the Australian Institute of Engineers.

Remember the recruitment and selection people who have to read your application and focus on facts. Cut out the waffle and exaggeration or you'll bore them to death and they'll get a bad impression of you. Worse, they may give your resume the flick.

Theme Resumes wherein applicants state what they will do, are of little use since there is no evidence that they can do it.

"Give me this job on \$85,000 per annum with a company car and I'll make your widget sales go through the roof"

*"... Another factor is a persistent and nagging gap between the knowledge and abilities of today's workers and the requirements of today's jobs."*  
- ASTD Public Policy Council

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is much less convincing than,

"Last year I sold \$10 million worth of widgets for the Widget Company of New Zealand - I can achieve similar results for Widgets Australia"

Recruitment interviewers are interested in what you **have achieved** in the past because what you have done, you will probably be able to do again. Makes sense eh?

When you talk about your work experience try to focus on the benefits you will provide for your prospective employer. You do this by reading the job advertisement or duty statements etc and then giving examples which are similar. For example, if you are going for a job that requires an ability to 'tune widgetometers' and you have done that, mention it specifically in your work experience.

Instead of saying. 'When I worked for Great Escape Machines Co I tuned various equipment to manufacturers' standards', say, 'When I worked for Great Escape Machines Co I tuned equipment including widgetometers to manufacturers standards.'

Get the drift? Use EVERY opportunity you have to show the recruitment people how very well qualified you are for *their* job.

## How Many Pages?

This is another tough question, the answer to which is: fewer than two is probably too few, more than two is probably too many.

Three or four pages sounds good to me, but there are people with years of experience and long lists of qualifications who may need more.

I think the secret is to tailor your resume to suit the job. No point telling people what a great fighter pilot you were if you are applying for a job as a medical practitioner.

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**ASIDE:** *I met a medical practitioner who was a fighter pilot in the Chinese Army before graduating. A rare combination eh?*

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Focus on more content in those areas that warrant it and keep it short in others. For example, the doctor might show the Chinese Army as an employer, but not go into great detail about his flying career because it's irrelevant for a medical position (usually).

Does that make sense? I hope so.

Forget the pages and focus on the value of the content. Be concise, complete and correct.

## Modifying Your Resume

Recently an employment agency sent me a resume of a young lady who had a science degree majoring in physics. She had had several research positions and would have made a strong candidate for a researching position. The problem was, I needed someone with reception and customer services skills.

I felt annoyed that someone had sent me a resume that wasn't in any way related to the job I had advertised. It was a waste of my time and an insult to my intelligence.

The point is, if you have a variety of skills within different disciplines, modify your resume to suit the requirements of the advertised job. It may have been that our physicist had reception experience, but the resume didn't show it.

There's little to be gained by sending a standard resume to a prospective employer with the hope that it might do. If you're going to apply, go to the effort to ensure your resume is right for *the* job.

I hope this short document helps you win your dream job and I wish you all the best in your job search.

Sincerely, Robin Henry

*"Ninety-six percent of workers agree that an employer is more attractive when it helps them meet family obligations through options like flex-time, job sharing or telecommuting."*

- Spherion Fast Facts (UK)

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## About the Author



**Robin Henry** is a human resources and development professional with over 20 years' experience. He has worked as an adult education teacher and manager with TAFE Queensland, training manager and HR specialist with the Australian Government, and as an HRD Adviser with one of Australia's 'Big Four' financial institutions.

During his TAFE career he taught and managed within business, computing and general studies departments. Among other things, he taught typing, wordprocessing and desktop publishing which led to an interest in the written word, document improvement, document design and layout, and various production methods.

He has considerable experience recruiting, and training people how to find, apply for, and win a job.

Robin holds Master of Education (Education Technology), Bachelor of Business (HRD/HRM), and Bachelor of Education degrees, a Diploma of Teaching (TAFE), and a Graduate Certificate in Open and Distance Learning. He has also completed numerous post secondary management,

business, computing and other certificates including the Certificate IV in Workplace Training Category II.

Robin is the proprietor of Desert Wave Enterprises which was previously known as Desert Wave Publishing.

## Desert Wave Enterprises

Desert Wave Enterprises is a provider of quality online consulting services and electronic products.

Our range of goods and services fall into the following categories:

- 1 Professional human resources and management cyber-consulting services
- 2 Writing and publishing services
- 3 Third-party sales of related products and services

**Consulting Services:** Our cyber-consulting includes conducting reviews of training proposals or programs, strategic plans, instructional materials, and advising about specific HR&D issues. We'll conduct research or gather information in any of our areas of expertise.

More recently we are also able to advise small businesses about e-commerce meeting recommendations of the Federal Government's National Office of the Information Economy.

**Writing and Publishing:** We write or edit form letters, brochures, capability statements, procedures and policies and also produce several electronic publications.

We'll Information Map publications such as policies, guidelines and procedures using the renowned Information Mapping™ technology.

If you need help producing a kiosk or presentation using MS PowerPoint or Adobe Acrobat Exchange, we can help there too.

**Third-Party Products and Services:** We selectively partner with organisations providing high quality products and services and sell them to our clients. We have stringent standards that products and services must meet before we accept them and usually try them ourselves before recommending them to our clients.

If you need more information about our services or products, please contact us - details appear on the opening screen.

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