How to Organize a Résumé

Information must be RELEVANT to the position you are applying for and EASY TO READ.

1. DETERMINE YOUR AUDIENCE

Who's going to be reading this résumé? What are you applying for? An internship? A specific job? **In order to make your résumé work effectively for you, you MUST know your audience.** Avoid "generic," unfocused resumes that list everything you've ever done. Don't assume your audience will pull out the relevant information. Highlight your skills/experience that most relate to the posting. Networking helps immensely in determining what to include in your résumé.

2. CREATE A "WORD BANK."

The word bank is a compilation of all your experiences: paid, unpaid, volunteer, extracurricular, class projects, etc. Write down a brief description of all your duties during this experience. You will not be including everything on your résumé, only relevant information. Office work, customer service and administrative experience should also be included. This is a helpful exercise to determine what you've done and identify the most relevant content.

3. SELECT A FORMAT

a. **REVERSE CHRONOLOGICAL** – Most recent experience first, **b. FUNCTIONAL** - Experiences grouped by skills, **c. COMBINATION OF BOTH OF THESE FORMATS** – This last format tends to be best fit for most communications students; starts with reverse chronological format but then takes relevance into account, "bumping up" those experiences that are most relevant

4. WHAT TO INCLUDE

EXPERIENCE – **The most important part of the résumé: Any time you are building or using skill sets hands-on, that's experience!** Extracurriculars, relevant course projects and unpaid work is still experience. Use phrases rather than full sentences (think "sound bites"). Begin each phrase with an action word. List your most relevant experiences *first* regardless of chronology. QUALIFY: Were you selected from a pool of 100, for example? How often did you perform tasks? Convey skill through action words, don't simply list tasks you completed. QUANTIFY: How many feature articles did you write? How many people did you supervise?

SKILLS – List computer programs, technical equipment, research skills (LexisNexis, MRI+) and any language skills you have. Specific social media platforms should also be listed.

EDUCATION – Include Syracuse University, college(s), degree(s), year and major(s) – keep it simple as it won't be your most compelling selling point. Education is best listed after your experience section, unless you have minimal experience (though this should be a temporary problem!) and education is the most relevant thing on your résumé.

5. OPTIONAL ITEMS

SUMMARY – At the top of your resume. MUCH more effective than a vague objective. Summaries or highlights **specific** skills, experiences or qualities you have for the reader. A very effective tool (page filler) for those with little experience. **GPA** –If over 3.5 or if an application requests it, include it; if not, omit.

ACTIVITIES/INTERESTS – Non-career related activities can be a helpful résumé addition if you have the room. Remember – some activities may qualify as relevant experience!

6. DON'T BOTHER WITH…

OBJECTIVE – Usually trite and vague such as "a position in tv/film that will allow me to use my skills." Doesn't add value.

"REFERENCES AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST" – Ted Bundy had references, which goes to show that *ANYONE* can get a reference. Don't bother with this tired, overused line. Besides, potential employers assume that you have references, so to note this is redundant.

Résumé Do's and Don'ts

DO...

- **Keep it ONE PAGE.** The rule is one page equals about 10 years of experience. Multiple-page résumés indicate a lack of understanding of the position – the "here's everything I've done, YOU figure out what's important" approach. Ninety percent of multiple-page résumés are a result of graphic problems – don't skip unnecessary spaces or lines; don't under-utilize margins; keep font size reasonable; don't put ONE item per line; make best use of your page.
- **Keep information RELEVANT to the position you're applying for**. If you want to write news, put writing experience front and center. If you want to convey reliability or responsibility, make sure you include that part-time job you've had since high school. The reader should view your résumé and say to him/herself, "This makes sense – s/he can do this work." If the experience is old or does not use skills necessary for the position, relegate it to the bottom or to a sentence or eliminate it all together.
- **Use bold face, capitals and bullet points for emphasis**. Underlining is too busy, *italics* fade away and indenting is downright confusing. Keep graphics simple. It's your job to make the page easy to read/navigate.
- **Start each descriptive phrase with a verb to emphasize skill.**
- **Use activities and/or class projects** to support experience. Sometimes these are your most relevant experiences.
- **Keep the space ratio in mind**. Dedicate the most space to relevant information, least space to least relevant. In other words, if your name, address and education take up half your résumé, you need to rethink the space ratio.

DON'T...

- **Expect the reader to know what you actually did when you use vague terms** such as "assisted" or "worked with." Be as descriptive as possible to represent the skills you have or have used.
- **Use narrative to describe your experience.** Stick to short, incomplete sentences. It keeps the readers attention better.
- **Hang on to the past.** By the time you're a senior, the high school information should be LONG gone (unless you won a Pulitzer in junior high or did something truly shocking). As you go through your college and then professional careers, you will "bump" older, less relevant content when you need the room for newer, more marketable experiences.
- **Include information** such as health or marital status, country of birth, etc. It's illegal for companies to inquire about that so best not to offer it!
- **Overestimate the value of a college degree**. Most people today have a bachelor's degree. Your experience discerns you from others. This goes for master's degrees as well. Sell experience first, education second. This is best done with your education at the bottom of your resume, experience at the top.
- **Forget your skills section**. This helps potential employers see that you have the skills they're looking for, without having to pick through your experience section.
- **Use Times as your chosen résumé typeface**. Times is actually hard to read in large quantities on a computer screen. A résumé will less generic without it.
- **Despair that your résumé doesn't have graphic elements.** They can be nice for branding but are not necessary. Picking an easy-to-read main font and a contrasting (yet still professional!) font for your section titles and your name at the top will go a long way. Visual majors (GRA, PHO, creatives in ADV) are the only ones expected to have some elements of design.