

## 7 Steps to a Winning Resume

---

Your resume has a single purpose; to persuade the *human* reading it that you are worth meeting. Beyond that initial hurdle your resume provides little more than a reference sheet – in an interview, for example – to steer the conversation.

We emphasize *human* to labor a critical point: While it's now common for a computer program (performing keyword analysis) to judge your resume first, it remains – for now – a person's decision to invite you in for an interview or not. And, like it or not, humans are imperfect, highly subjective decision-makers with absurdly short attention spans.

### Tick Tock

Five-to-seven seconds; that's the ludicrously short period of time graduate recruiters invest to in the first skim read of your resume – that first skim will determine whether your resume belongs in the 'maybe' or 'no' pile.

That figure might be shocking, but it shouldn't really be. In 2015/16, the UK's 100 largest graduate employers received an average 250 applications for every graduate job vacancy they advertised. (Ludicrously, almost 20 per cent of those vacancies were not filled because the employer – despite spending an average \$4.9k advertising and assessing applications for the role – didn't find someone suitably qualified to fill it.)

Comparably detailed statistics are harder to come by in the US and elsewhere in the world, but our first-hand experience with leading graduate employers paints a similarly cutthroat picture.

Your resume needs to be a compelling, yet concise. To properly succeed, it needs to be – no less – a highly effective piece of marketing that describes precisely why you are a more interesting prospect than the other 249 applicants in the pile.

Your resume won't hit the mark every time, but, with a little effort, you can stack the odds in your favor. To that end, we've collated a few tips to help your resume be the very best reflection of you it can be.

## Step One - Before You Begin, 7 Golden Rules

### 1) The common thread

Your resume should read as though you've dedicated a good portion of your early adulthood to exploring – and succeeding in – your desired career field.

If a sentence is neither indicative of your appropriateness for your elected career, demonstrative of an appealing personality trait or particularly outstanding, exclude it. Be merciless; the 5-meter swimming badge you earned aged 6 and  $\frac{3}{4}$  won't earn you an interview.

### 2) Keep it clean

Use a simple business-style font (Arial, Calibri and Verdana are good choices) in black. Use bold or *italics* to emphasize text rather than underlining.

Always, always avoid complex formatting such as tables and textboxes; they'll become untidy or even unreadable if your resume is parsed into a database or converted to another file type.

### 3) Size matters, apparently

A single side of A4 (an American-style resume) is universally preferable nowadays. A two-sided version (a UK-style Curriculum Vitae) is okay, albeit increasingly unpopular. No one is interesting enough to warrant three pages.

### 4) Brevity is brilliant

If you find yourself writing lengthy paragraphs of, say, three lines or more, consider using bullet points, numbering and dashes instead. They'll help your reader locate and absorb what they're looking for more easily.

Expect a (very) short initial skim by the reader. In those initial five-to-seven seconds, they'll review a few core items before committing to a more comprehensive read later.

At the college graduate level, those core items include your work experience (signaling work ethic and career preparedness), academics (university, major, grades) and extra-curricular activities and interests (signaling character and well-roundedness), in roughly that order of importance.

## 5) Show some personality

Include genuine interests, hobbies and achievements, unless they're needlessly divisive. They'll help individualize and humanize your resume.

And, while it's close to impossible to engineer such occurrences, the discovery of a common interest by your reader can create an advantageous connection.

## 6) Photos bomb

Unless you're an aspiring actor, actress, or model, don't bother attaching a photo. Outside of continental Europe, photos on resumes are an unexpected (and often derided) distraction.

## Step Two: Creating compelling content

### 1) Hard Skills: *Can you do the job?*

The fundamental question a graduate recruiter will be seeking to answer when reviewing your resume – and then seeking to affirm during an interview – is whether you have the technical foundation to do the job well.

To help them arrive at the conclusion you're the best guy or gal for the job, you should provide tangible examples demonstrating your familiarity with, or even mastery of, the most desirable hard skills in your chosen field.

Start by listing the top five technical and cognitive (aka 'hard') skills desired by employers in your field, then focus on the three you think you can best demonstrate on your resume right now.

It is reasonable for a recruiter to seek broad skills; general computer proficiency, for example. Though, in a jobs market such as today's, recruiters have the luxury of being more demanding and may expect to see evidence of industry or role specific skills and knowledge, too.

For banking and financial services, for example, familiarity with discounted cash flow analysis, financial statement analysis, pecking order theory, and financial modelling in Microsoft Excel will put you in good stead.

Similarly, for marketing advertising & PR, references to copywriting, data analysis (think conversion rates, cost per acquisition, etc.), and digital channels (think SEO, SEM, PPC, etc.) will be equally well received.

If you're not sure what the most desirable skills are in your desired industry, it may be time to do a bit of research. Search the *Industry Guides* on the [CI Blog](#) if you're in need of a primer on your desired field.

### 2. Soft Skills: *Will you do the job?*

Truth is, most jobs can be done by most intelligent people.

Hard skills, like Excel, can be taught. Whereas soft skills, like communication and leadership, are more innate and (arguably) less easy to teach. And so, they're understandably prized by graduate recruiters. (If you're interested in the subject, there's plenty of literature available on the impact of "IQ" versus "EQ" on a person's career.)

Soft skills, such as your ability to communicate clearly and persuasively, your ability to lead and inspire and – referencing the ‘*will*’ in the subtitle – your work ethic are inherently more difficult to demonstrate on paper than hard skills. Fortunately though, they can be effectively drawn from and signaled by a wide array of experiences.

Avoid using unqualified statements like, “I have strong leadership skills”. Instead, highlighting positions of responsibility where leadership skills are implicit, such as “Soccer Team Captain” or “Head of Investment Club” is a much more effective approach. (Especially when they’re accompanied by explicit achievement-themed descriptions like, “As team captain I organized, mobilized and led a squad of 22 independent and strong-minded characters to six county level wins”.)

### 3. Stand Out: Highlight your achievements

Among the worst outcomes you could hope for immediately after someone has read your resume – or, worse still, after they’ve interviewed you – is to be quickly and easily forgotten.

Including unique experiences, achievements, or responsibilities will help provide interesting make you memorable and provide interesting talking points for later on.

Few people have climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro, but if you have, boast accordingly. The same goes for any adventurous or entrepreneurial achievements of yours; perhaps you’ve founded a new student group, raised considerable funds for a good cause, travelled the world or started a successful eBay business. Anything you do that most other people don’t is probably interesting.

### 4. Demonstrate commercial awareness

Commercial awareness, or lack thereof, is consistently cited by employers as the area in which graduates fail to impress the most.

Interpretations on the meaning of commercial awareness vary, but if you don’t understand how a company goes about making money you’ll understand very little about its commercial objectives.

For the various companies that operate in your field of interest, you should be able to knowledgably discuss the following:

>> Market problem: What problem do companies in your desired field solve?

>> Marketplace: Who do they solve the problem for?

>> Solution: What products/services do they offer?

>> Revenue model: How do they charge for those products/services?

While directly competing companies seek to solve a given problem for the same (or similar) marketplace of consumers, they may well have even discrete differences in the solutions they offer. Those differences are important, as they effect a company's success over its peers.

## 5. Convey *what* you want to do, and *why* you want to do it

The single biggest resume and/or interview crime committed by graduate interviewees is to demonstrate a poor understanding of what the job you're interviewing actually entails.

A shallow understanding of your chosen industry/profession or woolly explanation of your career aspirations can convey that (i) you don't understand the industry/profession well enough to be excited by it or (ii) you don't know yourself well enough to determine what industry/professions you should find exciting.

In either case, it's a green light for the interviewer to conclude you're a hiring risk; you may not truly be motivated to work hard and stick at a job.

Your resume reader or interviewer very likely wasn't born knowing what they wanted to do either, so they're unlikely to appreciate clichés like "I've wanted to be a [insert profession] since I was 4." And truth is, most four-year-olds aspire to be astronauts, racecar drivers or dolphin trainers; deciding how you want to live your life requires maturity.

An authentic and introspective explanation as to why you think you'll enjoy a career in your desired field is always best; it'll help make you relatable, and above all, show you have a good grasp of the day-to-day realities of your desired profession.

This is what the 'objective' section of your resume (read the health warning overleaf!) is meant to achieve!

## Step three: Piecing your resume together

You've come up with a foundation of compelling content to add to the standard elements – let's put it all together.

### 1. Your details

An uncomplicated section: Your name, school or personal email address (a professional sounding one), and telephone number across one or two lines only. Something as simple as this will do:

Anne Example | +1 310 361 6468 | anne.example@gmail.com

Don't include the header 'curriculum vitae'! It's wasted space that you might need to utilize later. Same goes for indicating 'email address', 'telephone number' or 'address'; most people will understand what they are.

(You may include an address, but, nowadays, its unnecessary. A recruiter doesn't need to know where you live, and knowing you have a long commute, for example, could make you a less favorable candidate.)

### 2. Personal statement

Consider this section (very) optional. For experienced jobseekers the profile/statement section is intended to summarize the kind of role they're looking for. But for graduate jobseekers it's a potential minefield.

Therefore, if you feel compelled to include one, stick to factual statements pertaining to your academics, experience, skills, and interests and avoid saying what you are looking for in any specific terms. For example:

*I am currently undertaking a [insert degree] at [insert university/college] and am due to graduate in [insert graduate year]. I have a variety of work experience in [insert relevant experience] and a strong grasp of [insert relevant hard skills].*

Don't fall into the trap of making unsubstantiated statements here, such as "I am hardworking", that should be evident from the content of your resume.

I'll repeat: If you choose to make reference to your career aspirations here, tread carefully. There is a very fine balance to be struck when it comes to the specificity of your career aspirations: Too broad and you may be perceived as being unfocused. Too narrow and you may encourage the reader to assume you are not interested in the role they're offering. (For instance, plenty of

good resumes have been dismissed for stating “seeking a role in investment banking” when the reader represents a hedge fund. (Search “buyside versus sellside” if you’re unaware of the distinction.)

Your personal profile should:

- Be no longer than 2-4 sentences
- Refer to your current situation – “I have just graduated with a degree in ...”
- Add something that will set you apart from the competition – “I have work experience in ...”

In general use, it is advisable to amend this section as appropriate for different job applications.

### 3. Education

Until you have a few years work experience under your belt, your education section will form the first proper section of your resume. Write your educational experience in reverse chronological order.

Be sure to demonstrate any academic experiences where you have gained ‘transferable skills’; project management, team working, and presentation skills, for example.

The education section should contain:

- All qualifications in reverse-chronological order
- The dates you attended (or expect to attend if you haven’t graduated yet) each institution
- Degree subject, type, and grades
- More detail on majors/specialisms/relevant modules
- High school subjects and grades

A note on bad grades: If you think your grades in any given area are so low as to be detrimental to your resume, you might be tempted to exclude them. Sometimes it can be the right call, but bear in mind that any obvious omissions will, by default, lead an astute recruiter to assume the worst.

### 4. Work Experience



Include any work experience that demonstrates your drive and determination in pursuing your career choice.

So long as you've developed hard or soft or commercial skills, such as, "the importance of good customer service" then it is probably worth a space on your resume. Waiting tables, for example, can provide a number of interesting experiences that you can call on in interviews.

Work experience should be listed in reverse chronological order, each comprising:

- Company or organization, job title, and start and end dates (month and year is fine)
- Use bullets to provide one to three examples (according to the relevance of the experience to your desired field) of your responsibilities and your achievements (in quantifiable terms)

## 5. Extracurricular Activities & Interests

This is the place to (i) show some personality, (ii) throw in something interesting and memorable about you and your achievements thus far, and (iii) demonstrate how you have actively pursued interests related to your chosen career path (beyond your academic and work-related activities).

You can mention virtually any activity or hobby. Examples worth including are:

- Non-academic and non-work positions of responsibility
- Student organization membership
- Sports clubs and achievements
- Travel
- Hobbies
- Charity
- Awards

Don't be afraid to be specific here. "I like reading" is dull and uninformative. "I like reading about astronomy and the cosmos" or "I like reading 18<sup>th</sup> century poetry" is (slightly) less dull and more insightful and memorable.

## 6. Skills & Qualifications

This section should be a no-nonsense list containing hard (or technical) skills and, where appropriate, your level of proficiency.

- Languages (list and state your proficiency)
- Computer programs and coding languages (list and state your proficiency)
- Specific concepts relating to your desired field (e.g. financial statement analysis)

If you have any professional or non-academic qualifications or have completed any additional courses, you can include them here.

While some career advisors suggest including a dedicated soft skills section, we don't. Instead, examples of soft skills should be woven into your Work Experience and Extracurricular & Interests sections.

## Step Four: Proof Reading

Before you're done, use the following proofing methods:

- Leave it for an hour. Fresh eyes will spot more mistakes.
- Read it aloud. What is the overall tone?
- Spell check. Then check again. A typo or two may render the whole thing useless.

Now, follow the resume structure on the next page to put together a concise and persuasive resume.

# Resume Template

## 1. A Brief Introduction

- Contact details: your first and last name, phone number, and email address. You can add your current address or a link to your LinkedIn profile, if desired.
- Optional. One or two short, focused sentences summarizing your educational status, a few stand out skills/traits with a positive, forward-looking closing statement.

## 2. Education

- The college or university you attend(ed) goes here < MMM YYYY to MMM YYYY >
  - Your Degree and (expected) grade go here  
If relevant, list a selection of classes from your degree here. Include any areas of specialism that may relate directly to your chosen field.
- The high school you attended goes here > < MMM YYYY to MMM YYYY >
  - < SATS/A Levels/IBs (or equiv.) and grades go here >

## 3. Work Experience

- Employer and location go here < MMM YYYY to MMM YYYY >
  - Job title goes here >
  - A short paragraph introducing the company, division and role you worked in. >
  - Bullet points describing (i) your responsibilities, (ii) the hard and soft skills you developed, and the impact you made work best here. Quantify your impacts; perhaps you helped grow revenues by 5%, redesigned a process saving 20 man hours per week, etc..
- Repeat above for each work experience item

## 4. Extracurricular Activities & Interests

- Use this section to elevate your candidacy by referencing outstanding achievements, unique interests and activities that have helped you develop your commercial knowledge.

## 5. Skills & Qualifications

- List language skills, technical skills, then any familiarity with industry-specific concepts. This section should also include any non-academic qualifications (an Excel programming course, perhaps).
- List interests and hobbies. This section gives you an opportunity to demonstrate that your interests are aligned with your chosen career and it shows the reader you have a life and personality! (If you like swimming, say you love swimming because you like to keep fit. If you like reading, say what you like to read and why. Etc, etc.)



## About CI

City Internships (CI) is an accelerated learning provider. CI partners with traditional educators and leading companies to bridge the gap between education and employment.

CI's immersive, in-person study and intern abroad programs equip students and graduates with the skills, experience, and links to employers necessary to launch successful careers in today's highly competitive and fluid jobs market.

CI creates globally engaged, career-ready students. On graduation, CI alumni get hired three times more quickly and enjoy 30% higher starting salaries than their peers

## Learn more

Information for undergraduate & graduate students:

<https://www.city-internships.com/getstarted/>

Information for parents & advisors:

<https://www.city-internships.com/parents/>

Information for educators:

<https://www.city-internships.com/educators/>

Written for City Internships by Lewis Talbot.

Lewis is the founder and CEO of CI. He began his career in investment banking, joining Merrill Lynch's graduate scheme in London in 2006. Lewis has enjoyed positions in the UK, Europe and North America with Merrill Lynch, Barclays Global Investors, and BlackRock, where he specialized in equity and multi-asset portfolio management and analytics.

Lewis now resides in Los Angeles, California where he leads CI from its US HQ. He enjoys driving, amateur astronomy, and being on or in the ocean.