

Choosing The Best Resume Format

By Bill Radin

Your resume can be arranged in one of two basic formats: summary or chronological.

- The summary (or functional) resume distills your total work experience into major areas of expertise, and focuses the reader's attention on your accumulated skills.
- The chronological resume presents your skills and accomplishments within the framework of your past employers. (Actually, it should be called a reverse chronological resume, since your last job should always appear first.)

Although the information you furnish the reader may essentially be the same, there's a big difference in the way the two resumes are constructed, and the type of impact each will have. My experience has shown that the chronological resume brings the best results, since it's the most explicit description of the quality and application of your skills within a specific time frame.

The summary resume, on the other hand, works well if you've changed jobs or careers often, and wish to downplay your work history and highlight your level of expertise. If a prospective hiring manager is specifically interested in a steady, progressively advancing employment history (as most are), then the summary resume will very likely work against you, since the format will seem confusing, and might arouse suspicions as to your potential for longevity.

However, if the employer's main concern is your technical or problem-solving ability, the summary resume will serve your needs just fine. Either way, you should always follow the guidelines mentioned earlier regarding content and appearance.

Crafting Your Resume "Objective"

Most employers find that a carefully worded statement of purpose will help them quickly evaluate your suitability for a given position. An objective statement can be particularly useful as a quick-screen device when viewed by the manager responsible for staffing several different types of positions. ("Let's see; programmers in this pile, plant managers in that pile...")

While a stated objective gives you the advantage of targeting your employment goals, it can also work against you. A hiring manager lacking in imagination or who's hard pressed for time will often overlook a resume with an objective that doesn't conform to the exact specifications of a position opening. That means that if your objective reads "Vice President position with a progressive, growth-oriented company," you may limit your options and not be considered for the job of regional manager for a struggling company in a mature market—a job you may enjoy and be well suited to.

If you're pretty sure of the exact position you want in the field or industry you're interested in, then state it in your objective. Otherwise, broaden your objective or leave it off the resume.

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