A Brief Guide to Writing Resumes
Charley Mitchell PSU '78
cmitchell1954@gmail.com
410-952-6610

<u>Readability is key</u>—your resume should be designed to make you stand out—especially if you're after that first job without much, if any, professional experience.

<u>Tailor your resume</u> as best you can to the description of the job for which you're applying—use KEY words and phrases from the description. Organizations are increasingly using automated systems that look for specific word/phrase matches with the positions they're looking to fill—and only after resumes have gone through that does a human see them.

Start with a brief summary of your employment goal (which won't necessarily be a career objective). Be concise—your resume will tell readers your story.

<u>*Note*</u>*: A resume is still occasionally referred to as a "Curriculum Vita" (Latin for "course of life)." So don't be thrown by that (and this may help in a trivia contest some day).*

<u>Structure</u>: Choose one that fits your profile

- Chronological—probably best for those seeking that first job
- Functional—better for those with experience and specific skill sets
- Combined

<u>DO</u>:

- Use a readable font—this is not the time to experiment with that Franklin Gothic or Old English you think is cool
    - Times-Roman, 12-pt. size is safe
- Use clear, concise headings
- Use bullet points, which are easily and quickly read
- Use cap/lower case (first letter of first word in the line capitalized; all other words are lower case, excepting proper nouns)—examples:
    - "Certification in **d**ata **a**nalytics" is good (*cap/lower case*)
    - "Certification in **D**ata **A**nalytics" is not good (*all cap*)
- Be consistent in use of:

- o Headings
- o bold vs. italic type (don't switch)
- o how dates are expressed
- o spacing
- Ensure verb tenses are consistent (present vs. past)—a common error
- Include, as appropriate:
  - o special skills
  - o awards
  - o language proficiency (reading, writing, conversational spoken/fluent speaker)
  - o study abroad
  - o internships
  - o certifications (CPR, lifeguard, etc.)
  - o volunteer activity
  - o publications
- Spell-check (but don't rely on that entirely for accuracy)
- Proofread!
- Have a careful reader review resume before submitting it

DON'T:

- Use inconsistent formatting—a common error that makes your resume look sloppy
- Switch fonts or type sizes
- Capitalize common nouns (only proper nouns, such as names, should be capitalized)
- Confuse hyphens and dashes
  - o hyphen makes a compound noun or adjective (a "post-mortem" or "bed-ridden")
  - o dash indicates a pause ("he got to the top of the Berlin Wall—then quickly got down")
  - o dash is made by typing two hyphens together—which convert automatically to a dash after hitting the next key)
- Use loud, bright colors, unless you're a designer applying for a design job (and even then, don't overdo it)

Common Mistakes:

- Capitalizing common nouns; e.g., "Marketing"—should be "marketing," unless it's the first word in the line)
- inconsistent verb tense (present to past, or vice-versa)—a BIG one
- inconsistent capitalization
  - First word in caps in some instances, but not others
  - All words in a bullet point are capped
- inconsistent spacing
- omitting hyphens on compound adjectives (and confusing hyphen with dash)
- failure to proofread carefully
  - Good proofreading makes things much easier on the next set of eyes and can avoid silly errors that can wound an application.

Some of this may seem picky, but recruiters and managers notice—same with cover letters (note dash!). Human Resources folks and hiring managers will spot any error, and you'll immediately be at a disadvantage.

A clean, well-crafted resume will help you stand out, because many young/first-time job seekers submit resumes that are neither well-crafted nor clean.

Other Resources:

- The Penn State Career Resource Center (also good for information on career fairs, placement, interviewing skills/tips and so forth)
- Online resume services—some have helpful guidance you can access for free (with more detailed information available for a fee)