

Resume Tips 1: Top 8 Suggestions for Resume Appearance and Layout

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Talk to 20 different experts, and you'll get 40 different pieces of advice – many contradictory – on what should be included and excluded in a resume. While opinions vary, what follows are ideas that the majority of recruiters and career counselors would agree are worth considering in creating a solid resume. That said, individual organizations and industries have differing standards on creativity or conformity expected in job applications, and you will have to make choices in how you present yourself; better to make educated choices than fly blind though, so read on. In Part 1 of our resume series, we review the top ideas for general appearance and document layout.

One important consideration these days is the increasing use of Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) in the recruitment process. Many companies are streamlining the recruiting process by scanning resumes electronically and filtering out candidates before a recruiter even sees any applications. Resumes thus need to be formatted in such a way that they are optimized for evaluation by both ATS scanning and human beings.

1. **Keep it to two pages:** If a resume is too long, you can guarantee two things: first, recruiters won't read it all, and second, your unique skills and accomplishments will be buried and missed. Be efficient with wording. Limit information to what's important. Pique interest; details can come out in an interview. If you're reducing margins, spacing and font sizes to jam the resume into two pages, go back and cull some more.
2. **Make the layout clean and easy to read:** Keep it simple! Recruiters will judge a book by its cover. Use a standard, black, sans-serif font like Arial, Verdana or Calibri in 10- or 11-point size for body text. Use bold text to highlight important information like job titles and qualifications, and 12-point, bold, underlined text for section headings. Use white space to separate sections of the resume and help the recruiter find the details they need.
3. **Don't format your resume using tables:** Invisible cell formatting in a Word document can confuse electronic screening systems, and get your application rejected. Use tabs rather than spaces to align sections and information. Avoid page-width underlines as these can signal "end of document" to some scanning systems, meaning everything that follows gets missed in evaluating an application.
4. **Avoid gimmicks:** No coloured print or paper. No curly fonts. No whacky bullets. No document borders. No fancy folders or binders. No "Me in a Sentence" or "Motto in Life" sections. These will make you stand out, but for all the wrong reasons. Book. Cover. Judge.
5. **Make yourself easy to find:** Put your name at the top of each page, and include your contact details on the first page (put them all in one line to save space). At minimum include home city, phone number and email. Your email address should be simple and professional (firstname.lastname@domain.com is better than onemorepintplease@xxxmail.com). Some people leave out a physical address these days, but be aware that this may raise questions for a recruiter about how local you are.
6. **Don't use headers or footers:** Some electronic systems get confused by headers and footers. Names and contact details can go in the resume body, and page numbers aren't necessary if you only have two pages.
7. **Don't waste space commenting on references:** References are expected at interview. This is standard hiring procedure. You don't need to state they're available on request. Save space for more important items.
8. **Don't submit your resume as a PDF:** The safest format for submitting an online application is as a Word document. You'll hear conflicting information on compatibility of .docx (Word 7 and later), so may want to opt for .doc (compatible with Word 97-2003) as your format of choice.

Once you have your resume formatted and looking good, it's time to think about introducing and selling yourself. In Part 2, we'll review the Top 7 General Content Suggestions.