

RESUME WRITING TIPS FOR POSITIONS IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR (BUSINESS, CONSULTING, FINANCE, ENERGY, AND BANKING)

PURPOSE

A resume describes who you are, where you have been, and where you are headed. When composed thoughtfully and with attention to detail, it becomes an effective marketing tool that presents you in the best possible light to potential employers. The skills and qualities you include in your resume should demonstrate that you are an appropriate candidate for a position and help you secure an interview.

The following guide provides information designed to help you construct an effective resume for the private sector, including business, consulting, finance, energy, and banking positions. The style, format and content suggestions are based on feedback from employers in those fields. At the end of the guide is a sample resume that illustrates the tips in each category.

FORMAT

Page Size

Use only U.S. letter size (8.5x11).

Length

Keep your resume to one page unless you are applying to a senior level position, or you have 5+ years of full-time experience in the field to which you are applying. When you apply to a specific job you may have to modify your resume to meet the employer's requirements.

Margins

Margins should be between .5" – 1" around the entire document. Be sure to maintain enough white space so that the resume doesn't look crowded, while including sufficient detail about your skills and achievements.

Line Spacing

Spacing between lines should be consistent throughout the document and look balanced.

Font

Use a simple font such as Times New Roman, and keep it consistent throughout the resume. Text should be between 10 and 12-point type, with the exception of your name, which might be slightly larger, and your contact information, which might be slightly smaller than the rest of the document. Keep things simple; don't overdo bold or italic type and avoid using excessive indentations (bullets within bullets). All text should be left justified.

Page Header

This is where your name and contact information go and it is important that it is clear and easy to read. A common format for the header is as follows: Name centered at the top of the page; on the line below, also centered, put a local mailing address, followed by email and phone, each separated by a simple bullet or symbol. The whole header should be in bold, followed by a single line that extends between the two side margins.

Section Headers

Left justify and bold each section heading. Use capital letters and do not underline. The three most common section headings are **EDUCATION**, **EXPERIENCE**, and **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**, in that order. If you are applying for a specific job, you may have to tailor your section headers.

Employer/School Names

Use consistent formatting within each section. For employers, put the name of the employer in bold, followed by your title in bold and italicized on the next line.

Locations

Locations should be listed to the right of employer/school names.

Dates

Dates should be listed to the left of employer/school names. Use a consistent format within each section. For education, dates should be the degree or certificate month and year of completion (ex. May 2011). For experience, dates should be the time you spent in the position listed, generally only month and year (ex. May 2005 – June 2008).

Bullets

Use basic round bullet points. Left align. Use consistent spacing. Limit bullets to no more than five per category/position. Be consistent throughout document.

Punctuation

Be consistent throughout the document. Bullet points do not need periods at the end unless they include multiple sentences.

CONTENT

Education

- List in reverse chronological order. Where you received a degree, include the month and year of completion.
- List your concentration.
- List relevant coursework. Not every employer is familiar with SIPA curriculum. It can help to include one or two lines of relevant coursework. Include advanced level classes or courses that equip you with key skills that are not evident in the rest of your resume.
- Unless you are applying for a competitive program, it is not always necessary to include your GPA. We recommend including a GPA of 3.7 or above.

Experience

- A resume should not sound like a job description. Avoid phrases such as “responsible for,” or “duties included.”
- Use action verbs and target appropriate key-words so that hiring managers don’t have to guess about your experience and qualifications.
- Provide brief descriptions of previous employers that are lesser known. This usually consists of a one-sentence description in italics underneath the company’s name.
- Use bullet points (limit of 5) to make your resume easier to read. Prioritize your experience by listing most relevant accomplishments or skills first.
- Bullets should be written in the **SAR** format:

Address the **Situation**

Identify the **Action(s)** you took

Show the **Results** that were achieved (How did your efforts add value to the organization?)

- Show **quantifiable** results of your work. Don't generalize; be specific. See examples below:

Think Money – Controlled a \$7.9 million annual operating budget

Think Time – Spearheaded costs-reduction initiatives that reduced overtime by 36%

Think Amounts – Managed a staff of 59 through five supervisors. Results included a 35% increase in daily productivity and a 69% increase in customer satisfaction

- Only include relevant experience. You don't always have to list all past employment. If positions held many years ago aren't relevant to your current career path, exclude or briefly summarize them at the end. If you are changing careers make your experience relevant by highlighting transferable skills.
- Emphasize what distinguishes your degree from an MBA. Skills such as foreign languages and international experience in the context of a global economy are what make a SIPA graduate stand out from the Business School graduate. Make sure these parts of your resume are noticeable.
- Use the position description as your guide. Make sure your resume speaks to that position. You may have to create different resumes for different positions.
- Avoid repeating yourself.
- Be careful about making grand claims such as meeting "record levels" at previous positions. Make sure you can support all claims with concrete evidence.

Additional Information

- Include professional associations or licenses, language fluency, computer skills, volunteer activities, personal interests, and travel.
- Only include information relevant to your target audience.
- The interests section can be a good conversation starter, but should be kept to one or two lines. Be specific; don't simply list "hiking," but give the name of the trail that you last hiked.
- For languages, include level of proficiency, such as *native*, *fluent*, *semi-fluent*, *conversant*, *advanced proficiency*.
- For skills, list those that would be of interest to the employer, and include your proficiency level. If a computer application is of particular interest to the employer, don't simply list it, but integrate it into your accomplishments, giving an example of how you have used it in the past.

LANGUAGE

Avoid using vague or generic language

Describe specifically what your role was and what you accomplished in your previous positions. Avoid using words such as *undertook*, *assisted* or *initiated*. Never use *helped*. Verbs such as *researched*, *analyzed* or *liaised* must be supported with specific and concrete examples. A complete list of action verbs is located in the OCS Professional Development Guide and on the OCS Resume Writing - General Tips fact sheet.

Use industry specific keywords

Some employers will expect certain phrases to appear in a candidate's resume; however, you should make sure not to go overboard.

Use language that is appropriate for the type of position you're seeking

When you use technical jargon, make sure that the person reading your resume knows what you are talking about. If not, rephrase your experience in words that the employer will understand.

SELL YOURSELF

People talk about features vs. benefits

A resume is a personal sales and marketing tool that is designed to attract and impress employers. When marketing yourself, sell the strengths and benefits you bring to the table. Don't simply list your responsibilities, but give examples of your achievements. Your resume's job is to get you an interview.

Here are some examples of selling yourself:

Poor

Managed sales regions throughout the US with 82 sales associates.

Good

Independently planned and directed a team of 82 sales associates marketing sophisticated technology products throughout the northeastern US.

Poor

Met all company sales goals and profit objectives.

Good

Launched a series of customer-driven marketing programs to expand market penetration and increase key account base. Closed 2008 at 182% of revenue goal and 143% of profit objective.

Poor

Managed all financial, accounting, budgeting, MIS and administrative functions.

Good

Served as Chief Financial Officer with full responsibility for the strategic planning, development and leadership of the entire corporate finance organization for this \$280 million consumer products manufacturer. Directed financial planning and analysis, accounting, tax, treasury, budgeting, MIS and administrative functions through a 12-person management team.

Poor

Updated computer technology.

Good

Launched the introduction of PC-based client server technology to expand MIS operations throughout the finance function. Resulted in a measurable improvement in data accuracy and

LAST STEPS:

Proofread

Go over your resume repeatedly for typographical and grammatical errors. Then ask three to five others to review it, paying attention to your terminology and tone. An imperfect document isn't acceptable. If you are not a native English speaker, have it reviewed by someone who is.

Get an insider's opinion

Have your resume reviewed by someone in the field you are entering, either by an acquaintance or during an informational interview. An insider will know how your resume will fare in a highly competitive market.

Submit

Send the final version of your resume to an employer. You may want to send the document as a PDF file to avoid any format changes that might occur during sending.

Citations: Barnet Sherman, SIPA MPA '82

“The Six Cardinal Rules of Resume Writing” By Wendy S. Enelow

<http://www.careerjournal.com/jobhunting/resumes/20010104-enelow.html>

Enclosed: Sample resume

JEAN BERTRAND

313 W 10th Street ▪ New York, NY 10025 ▪ jmb82@columbia.edu ▪ 212-555-0987

EDUCATION

- May 2013 **COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, School of International and Public Affairs** New York, NY
Master of International Affairs in International Finance and Economic Policy
Research Assistant (2009-2010) and Fellow (2010-2011) of the Center for International Business
- May 2008 **UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA, Wharton School** Philadelphia, PA
Bachelor of Science in Economics with a concentration in Management
Graduated Cum Laude, Recipient of the Simpson Foundation Scholarship for Entrepreneurs
- June 2006-
Aug. 2006 **UNIVERSITÉ DE COMPIÈGNE** Compiègne, France
Coursework: Commercial French, Economic Policy of the European Community

EXPERIENCE

- July 2009-
Aug. 2011 **HSBC BANK, USA, N.A.** New York, NY
Financial Analyst
- Re-engineered a business process used to value complex financial portfolios, which improved efficiency of profit and loss calculations by 20%.
 - Achieved 30% cost savings over a six-month process improvement effort.
 - Monitored reconciliations between accounting systems; reduced improper trade bookings by 15%.
- June 2008-
June 2009 **U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY** Washington, DC
Special Assistant for Housing, Office of Domestic Finance
- Contributed to policy design and helped lead day-to-day management of the Home Affordable Modification Program (HAMP), Treasury's \$75 Billion Foreclosure mitigation plan.
 - Conducted 30+ interviews with regulators, analysts, and investors to help construct the initial capital allocation hypothesis for the \$700 billion Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP).
- Nov. 2007-
May 2008 **FIRST INVESTORS CORPORATION** Philadelphia, PA
Financial Analyst Intern
- Delivered oral presentations to prospective clients outlining various financial services, including money market, income, and high-yield mutual funds.
 - Prepared budget reports for potential investors and provided clients with asset management and financial investment advice. Licensed by the National Association of Securities Dealers.
- May 2007-
Aug. 2007 **MERRILL LYNCH GLOBAL WEALTH MANAGEMENT GROUP** New York, NY
International Bank Management Intern
- Researched international economic conditions and reported investment opportunities in international bond and currency markets to the group's financial consultants.
 - Analyzed investment options for hedging and leveraging, and recommended investment strategies in the foreign exchange markets to the group's clientele.
- June 2006-
Aug. 2006 **CREDIT LYONNAIS** Compiègne, France
Financial Accounting Intern
- Researched the bank's subsidiary responsible for issuing commercial paper and its small business investment company.
 - Developed procedures and prepared financial statements for the monthly accounting cycles of these subsidiaries for use by the bank's management, regulatory authorities, and external auditors.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Fluent in French and English, working knowledge of German and Spanish.
- Proficient in Excel, Bloomberg and STATA.
- Extensive travel in Europe (France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Greece), North Africa, and the U.S.
- Series 7 Certification.