

How to Write a Winning Résumé

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At the 2008 Summer Olympics, Michael Phelps became an international [swim](#) sensation after working hard to perfect his skills. Although he is only 23 years old, Phelps has already achieved worldwide recognition for his unparalleled achievements. What do you and Phelps have in common? You both have the ability to bring home the gold.

Practice makes perfect

Winning résumés and victorious athletes share several features; they both rely on extensive preparation and hard work.

As you begin to create your résumé, you need to invest time researching the subject. Visit a local [library](#) or [bookstore](#) and review professionally written résumés that focus on your job title, area or industry. Concentrate on content, format and style. Will you need a section for professional experience, education, [technological](#) skills and affiliations? What type and size font should you use? Should your writing style be formal or casual? Once you decide on and are comfortable with your résumé's appearance, style and content, then you are ready to take the next step.

Job advertisements and official position descriptions are a treasure chest for résumé writers. Not only do they include required skills and experience, they also contain industry buzzwords or keywords. Employers use keywords as part of their selection criteria and incorporate them into their scanning [software](#). Determine which keywords and phrases emphasize skills, strengths and achievements, then weave them into your content.

Leverage your strengths

How will your résumé differentiate you from the competition? In order to have a competitive advantage, your résumé needs to identify factors that define your unique value proposition. What information can you include that will impress prospective employers and convince them of your value?

Including a profile or qualifications summary in the beginning of your résumé is an opportunity to form a positive image in the employer's mind. Take time to develop and write your profile. Ask friends, colleagues and family to describe your personal and professional strengths and attributes. Find similarities between your personal and professional attributes and the competencies listed in the job announcement. Incorporate positive endorsements and testimonials into your profile. Remember your goal: You need to prove you are the best candidate for the open position.

Celebrate your successes

Research reveals that hiring managers review résumés for no more than 10 to 15 seconds; therefore, your writing needs to contain a "hook" that will immediately engage the reader. Although résumé writing is not an exact [science](#), there are a few formatting guidelines you can follow.

- Limit the résumé's length to one or two pages.

- Try to present work experience in reverse chronological order.
- Do not include employment more than 15 years old.
- Focus on achievements, not tasks.

Employers are not interested in reading about your daily routine. They want to see accomplishments! What are you most proud of? How did you add value to your position or company? Did you increase profitability, reduce expenses, improve efficiency or boost productivity? Can you quantify your achievements? These are some questions your résumé needs to answer.

A proven method of identifying achievements is to ask, "What problems did I encounter?" "What actions did I take to solve them?" and "What were the results?" In her book "Job Search Magic," Susan Britton Whitcomb states this "creates a consistent, balanced visual impact and gives the appearance of a strong, long-term history for taking on challenges and delivering results."

As Michael Phelps discovered, winning the gold means working harder than your competition. Investing your time and energy to convince employers you will be a valuable asset to their team will heighten your chances of bringing home the gold.