

Resume Do's & Don'ts: Reference Table

More details for those who really want to know...

Type	Do's (Include)	Don'ts (Avoid)																				
Layout	Clean, standard layout using simple formatting • Paragraph borders (attached to the paragraph, part of the text) • Tab stops (which can mimic column layouts) • Simple, universal icons • Bold and italics • Colors (darker colors) • Standard bullet points like: <table><tr><th>Symbol</th><th>Character Code (type this, then press alt+x)</th></tr><tr><td>•</td><td>2022</td></tr><tr><td>○</td><td>25CB</td></tr><tr><td>■</td><td>25A0</td></tr><tr><td>▪</td><td>25AA</td></tr><tr><td>◆</td><td>25C6</td></tr><tr><td>◇</td><td>25C7</td></tr><tr><td> </td><td>Shift + \ (keyboard)</td></tr><tr><td>—</td><td>2014</td></tr><tr><td>.</td><td>00B7</td></tr></table>	Symbol	Character Code (type this, then press alt+x)	•	2022	○	25CB	■	25A0	▪	25AA	◆	25C6	◇	25C7		Shift + \ (keyboard)	—	2014	.	00B7	Complex, fancy graphics, like: • Page columns (added through layout) • Non-universal icons • Fancy symbols: ☐:◆◇※ • Tables • Emojis 📞📠✉️✅🌐🔗 • Page Headers/Footers • Bright colors • Custom list symbols • Page borders • Floating objects: ○ Text boxes ○ Images ○ Lines and shapes
	Symbol	Character Code (type this, then press alt+x)																				
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	Comments: • ATS software often reads from left to right across the whole page. • Avoid bright colors because they can be difficult to read and make the resume look unprofessional. • Tables and columns can scramble your data, making you appear "unqualified" simply because the machine couldn't read your info. • Non-standard objects (like symbols, shapes, etc) can be invisible or misunderstood																					
Fonts	Web-safe fonts include: • Sans-Serif: Arial, Calibri, Helvetica, Aptos, Lato, Verdana, Tahoma • Serif: Georgia, Cambria, Garamond	Uncommon fonts																				
	Comments: ATS software needs to understand the text, and it can't understand all fonts – so stick to the “safe” fonts.																					
Fonts	Stick to at least size 10 font; For body text, 10-12 size is good.	Go below size 10 font, or above size 12 for the body text.																				
	Comments: Text smaller than 10pt can become a blurry mess for ATS parsers. If needing to condense text more, use a “condensed” font like Tahoma or Garamond instead of shrinking the size.																					

Type	Do's (Include)	Don'ts (Avoid)
File Type	Digitally share the resume as a PDF.	Digitally share the resume as a word document
	How 1. Go to print and select a printer 2. Choose “print as PDF” (or something similar; will mention PDF).	
	Comments: • The PDF version will maintain the formatting that you worked so hard on, no matter what device or software is used to open it. • A word document will show it differently and can make it look all messed up.	
Length	Keep it to 1-2 pages • Most relevant information • Usually last 10-15 years • Condensed formatting without a ton of blank space	More than 2 pages (unless applying to academic or research positions) • Lots of irrelevant information • Going back decades • Huge blank spaces • Big lists that take up a lot of vertical space
	Comments: The recruiter only wants to see the most relevant information. Also, if there's too much blank space or long lists, it will look like a mess and that will make a bad impression.	
Resume Type	Use the right type of resume for your employment history. Use a functional resume if you: • Don't have much experience • Work history looks unstable (Recent employment of weeks or months) • Are a contractor or do mostly project-based work Use a Chronological Resume if you: • Have mostly been an employee • Have a stable work history • If listing experiences by employer makes you look good	Use the standard (chronological) resume if it makes you look like a bad bet. If you have a spotty work history: The chronological resume makes it obvious because most of the space is taken up by employment history. If your employment is project-based and not employer-based: Listing experiences by employer just doesn't make sense.
	Comments: • <u>Functional Resumes</u> devote more space to the summary, skills, and experiences, and almost no space on the employment history (although it's still included). Skills and experience stand out, instead of employers and employment dates. • <u>Chronological Resumes</u> devote more space to employment history and list experiences by employer. Employment dates are obvious, and stand out to the recruiter.	
Resume Sections	Summary section at the top of the resume. • Short and sweet • Why they should hire you • Very brief objective at the end	• Keep to no more than 3 lines. For a functional resume can be longer. • Use objective section or just skip straight to employment history.
	Comments: The very top of the resume is the first thing that the recruiter might read. It needs to be short and sweet – highlighting the most important parts of your resume (why you are a good fit). Can also include a brief mention of your objective, but the bulk of it should be the summary.	

Type	Do's (Include)	Don'ts (Avoid)
Skill Section	Include a skills section, preferably right under the summary. • 3-6 lines (normally) • Include relevant skills • Order from most to least important skill • Fill the entire last line of skills	• Exclude skill section • Add too many irrelevant skills • Take up too much space with skills list • Take up an entire row with just 1 or 2 skills • “Qualify” the skill. You’re adding it to the skill list because you are claiming that you are skilled in it. Examples (of what not to do): ○ Great Leader ○ Good Problem Solver
	Comments: Having the skills section near the top of the resume allows it to be easily scanned by the recruiter in first glance.	
Skills Section	Use tab stops to make columns for skill lists Example (skills): Leading Problem-Solving Teamwork Graphic Design Driving First Aid	Listing things all in one line or paragraph Example (skills): Leading, Problem-Solving, Teamwork, Graphic Design, Driving, First Aid
	Comments: • Using columns for these types of lists adds white space between each item, making it much easier to pick out individual items. Clumping them together into a sentence or paragraph makes it difficult for the recruiter to easily skim and pick out useful information. • Using tab stops is ATS friendly; columns and tables are not.	
Experience Section	Use bullet points to list details about experiences and jobs. Example (job duties): • Welcomed patients and checked them into appointments. • Answered phones and helped patients to schedule appointments. • Completed patient intakes and ensured all information was entered into database. • Supervised the waiting room and ensured it was clean and tidy.	Explain experience or job duties in a paragraph. Example (job duties): Welcomed patients and checked them into appointments. Answered phones and helped patients to schedule appointments. Completed patient intakes and ensured all information was entered into database. Supervised the waiting room and ensured it was clean and tidy.
	Comments: • Paragraphs are not skim-friendly. It’s a lot easier for the recruiter to process information quickly with bullet points. • In fact – if the recruiter sees multiple paragraphs of text throughout the resume, it’s possible they may decide to toss the resume aside.	
Dates	• Employment dates • Certification/license dates for when it expires (if it’s the type of certification that expires)	• Dates of education (attendance or graduation) • Dates of certification attainment
	Comments: • Dates are the easiest way for the recruiter to figure out how old the applicant is. When they know how old someone is, they can make negative judgements about their abilities and work ethics. • This is one of the reasons why we recommend only including up to 15 years of employment history (for most situations). • What matters isn’t when they took a class, or graduated, etc. – what matters is whether they still have the skills the recruiter is looking for. • Adding the date of certification/licensure is the only relevant date. It doesn’t matter when it was first attained; it just matters that it’s still active.	

Type	Do's (Include)	Don'ts (Avoid)
Certifications	- Currently active certifications go into the certifications/education section - Non-active certifications that have already expired can be added to the specific employment experience it's related to - Certifications that DON'T expire	List expired certifications in the certifications/education section
	Comments: Only current certifications should be listed in the certifications section.	
Content	Use the keywords from the job posting in your resume – especially if you really want the job! - In the summary - In the skills section - In the employment job duties	Ignore the words and phrases used in the position description
	Comments: - ATS will compare your resume against a set of criteria that was provided by the recruiter. A score is placed on the resume that represents how well it matches that criteria. It is looking for specific keywords. The best way to make sure you use those keywords is to use the language that is in the position description. - There can be several ways to describe the same exact job duty or skill, and you want to use the word or phrase that is used in the position description. - Chat GPT and other AI can be very useful for picking out keywords and phrases to use.	
Format	Use headings to add style	No style or differentiation between sections or employment experiences
	Comments: Make it as easy as possible for the recruiter to find specific sections and each employment experience – this way they can scan more information in those first few seconds.	
Format	Make employment dates easy to spot (preferably, aligned on the right)	Employment dates are lost in the rest of the employment information
	Comments: Make it as easy as possible for the recruiter to find the employment dates. Recruiters look at the employment dates to get a sense of the applicant's job stability so it's one of the first things they look at.	
Format	Mix serif font title and section headings with sans-serif font body. Example: SKILLS <i>Job Title Employer, Sacramento CA</i> List of job duties and achievements	<i>No related don'ts.</i>
	Comments: Helps to add style, increase “class”, and create visual hierarchy.	
	If there's extra space to fill – References section	Take up needed space with a references section

Type	Do's (Include)	Don'ts (Avoid)
References Section	Comments: - References section isn't expected anymore in a resume. - References are asked for later in the application process. However, it's okay to add this section if there's a bunch of empty space to be filled.	
Format	Adjust font size and spacing to create the right balance of text and white space. Comments: - It can look like the applicant didn't put much effort into the resume - Not enough information included - Prime real estate is wasted - Visually looks unbalanced	Lots of blank white space
Format	.75" – 1" inch wide margins on all sides Comments: - Having the margins too narrow makes the resume look too crowded - Having the margins too wide adds too much blank space and takes up valuable space	- Under .75" margins - Over 1" margins
Format	Left aligned body text for all sections Example: Reliable and hardworking individual with over three years of experience in high-volume environments, specializing in team coordination, safety compliance, and efficient task management. Dedicated to maintaining a clean and organized workspace while providing exceptional support to senior staff and ensuring all daily operational goals are met with precision and a positive attitude. Comments: Left aligned text is visually easier to read.	Justified alignment Example: Reliable and hardworking individual with over three years of experience in high-volume environments, specializing in team coordination, safety compliance, and efficient task management. Dedicated to maintaining a clean and organized workspace while providing exceptional support to senior staff and ensuring all daily operational goals are met with precision and a positive attitude.