

# Your Resume: A Checklist for Today's Trends

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Does your resume work for you?

As the owner of a recruiting firm specializing in health information management, I critique hundreds of resumes each year. By employing the common sense ideas in this article you can enhance your resume, find the work of your dreams, and change your life.

There is no one correct resume format. I have included one sample resume for reference ([Exhibit 1](#)), but you can take the ideas and concepts presented here and adapt them to meet your personal needs. You may even choose to compose more than one resume to optimally present your qualifications for different types of positions. Your resume should contain both job history and reflect personal style. It must be easy to scan and interesting to read. Ultimately, you must create a resume that leads to an interview.

Keep in mind that in our culture people read from the top down and from left to right. For example, do not use valuable left margin space for dates, instead move dates to the right margin and use the left for information that enhances your candidacy. Follow this theme throughout. Start by presenting your strongest qualifications. If your strength is your experience, education or credentials, or even volunteer experience, lead with it. If your job title is more impressive than the company, list it first. Similarly, if your college is more impressive than the degree, then list it first.

## How Long Should Your Resume Be?

Resume length often creates a fair amount of discussion. Must my resume be only one page? Are three or even four pages too much? Again, apply common sense. In most cases, a one-page resume is preferred, unless your qualifications are extensive. The more focused your document is, the more likely someone will read it. Strive not to exceed 1-1/2 to 1-3/4 pages. Remember, your resume should not read like a job description. You do not need to recreate your entire history. A resume should stress your qualifications, skills, and achievements instead of your duties and responsibilities.

There are numerous ways to be brief and still present the depth of your qualifications.

Let's walk through a resume, line by line, section by section. Remember, every word and every line adds to the length.

Beginning at the top, the word "Resume" is not necessary. The style and format of the document indicates its function, and without this heading you save a line for more valuable information.

*When considering your resume's overall presentation, remember that less is more.*

## Getting Started

At this point you are still staring at a blank page. Many people have difficulty moving beyond this point into the true content of their resumes. Start with notes and develop them into a rough draft. Think back over your experience and jot down highlights of your life, education, and work experience. At this point don't worry about exact words or dates, concentrate on your accomplishments. As you record each positive point, it should provide you with confidence to proceed.

## Getting to It

In the top left corner of your page, place your full name and include any credentials or degrees you possess. For most candidates it is preferable to list your education and credentials at the top. Use word processing capabilities to highlight or draw attention to this and other key information in a way that matches your personal style.

Under your name include your full mailing address, including zip code. If you have one, you can include your e-mail address under the city, state, zip code line. Across from your name and address on the right margin include both your home and office phone numbers. Many people omit their office numbers for confidentiality purposes and therefore miss many employment opportunities. Almost all employers are sensitive to your privacy and will be discreet if they contact you at work. If you are unable to talk on the phone at work, explain this and make quick arrangements to speak later. If sharing a work number is impossible, I strongly recommend that you have an answering machine on your home line to receive messages.

## **Do You Need an Objective?**

In my opinion, No! Objective statements are usually written in such general terms that they are useless. Who doesn't want a position that is "challenging," or has "growth potential." Drop the objective and use this space to further describe your qualifications.

Sometimes, but rarely, an objective can be beneficial when applying for a certain position. By creating a targeted objective you can zero in on one opportunity. But even then I would caution that this can be self-limiting because if the position has already been filled your specific objective may eliminate you from consideration for other opportunities that may exist.

## **What's Next?**

The next section of your resume should provide an overview of your career. Following a left to right margin line of separation you should have a section titled Summary, Achievements or Accomplishments, or a similar word to reflect your style. Boldface this and all section titles to attract attention in a cursory review by your reader. The Summary section should contain your best-selling features. Include five to eight bulleted items that begin with action verbs, and begin each bullet with a different verb. To view a list of action verbs [click here](#).

In the sample resume the next section is Experience. This section should be the area that demonstrates your strongest qualification. For students it is often Education, for highly involved volunteers it may be Professional Activities. My advice is to write and polish each section. Then cut and paste the sections in an optimal sequence for the opportunity you are applying.

## **How Do You Show Your Work Experience?**

When describing your experience, always begin with your most recent position. Share the name of your employer, city, state, and ideally some brief information about the company. As in our sample, "500-bed, nonprofit, teaching hospital, managed 40 FTEs." This allows the reader to zero in and qualify your experience.

Often I receive resumes that require me to research the employer to determine if they are a 50-bed or a 1000-bed operation, a Fortune 500 firm, or an entrepreneurial startup. Some candidates believe that including that they work in a 100-bed facility may eliminate them from consideration for larger facilities. Certainly this possibility exists. I maintain that incomplete background requires extra effort by the employer to determine your full employment history, and this extra effort may result in the employer moving on to the next resume.

Often resume writers assume that everyone knows that "Major Medical Center" is a large, teaching hospital in Largo, FL. Please remember that as you mail, fax, or e-mail your resume around the country or the world, your reader is likely to be unfamiliar with the particulars of your employers. Share this information in a brief manner so you may be matched to future opportunities.

Next in the Experience section, for each employer, include your job title. If you were promoted by this employer, list your final position and list this accomplishment as one of your bullets. Dates should be included on the right-hand margin in a summary fashion. Our sample includes dates in a year-to-year format to simplify presentation. You may choose a month and year format, but please do not include specific dates. Specificity of dates highlights gaps in employment and appropriately raises questions. Always be honest when sharing dates and all resume information. The year-to-year format will likely provide you

with a more personal opportunity to explain any potential breaks in employment. Make sure that your dates make sense. We often see overlapping dates that create confusion and question. If you have held multiple positions at the same time, explain this clearly on your resume or in a cover letter.

When listing your work experience, it is generally not necessary to go back more than about ten years. If you have been with the same employer for over ten years, then it is logical to list your previous position. On our sample resume we included the line, "Several Other Progressive Health Information Management Positions 1977-1982," to summarize this prior period. Remember, this is a suggestion to condense the length of your resume. You may choose to include additional experience if you believe it is pertinent. Generally, though, any experience from over ten years ago is outdated and wastes valuable resume space.

Under each employer, position title, and time frame, you should include a brief paragraph or a few bullets highlighting your experience. Again use verbs and statements. Include facts to authenticate results. For example, "Enhanced DRG reimbursement by increasing case mix from 1.21 to 1.53." List all your employment in a reverse chronological format.

## **What Is Important When Presenting Your Education and Credentials?**

It is critical to present your education and credentials in an accurate and complete fashion. When listing education, list your highest degree first. Follow this with lesser degrees and credentials. Share your degree, the year you received it (only if in the last 20 years to avoid age discrimination), the university or college, and its location (city, state). If you have college courses but no degree, list them in summary form. Be careful not to misrepresent yourself as possessing a degree. It is common to see a college and year listed, with no indication of whether this represents a degree or just coursework towards a degree.

## **Why Your Credentials Should Be Included**

Candidates often neglect to list credentials on their resumes. Most resumes logically indicate degrees in Health Information Technology or Management, but do not indicate credentials. Simply listing a degree does not automatically indicate that one possesses the ART or RRA credential. The only distinction potential employers can make on a resume is whether or not the credential is included. Write your resume for your reader. Include your credential number and the year you achieved it as proof of your success. This information will also facilitate credential verification in the employment screening process.

## **Are Volunteer Professional Activities Noteworthy?**

Absolutely! Experience as a professional volunteer demonstrates leadership, networking ability, and professional commitment. You may choose to call the section Professional Affiliations or Activities or you may choose to not include it at all. The sample includes activities at national, state, and local levels. If this is appropriate for you, do the same. If you have professional leadership experience in your work group, department, or facility, share this information with your reader. Recall any awards or special recognition you have received and include them here. This is also an appropriate area to include publications or presentations. Don't forget that resume length is a key issue.

If you have extensive professional activities, you will need to summarize them and maintain a separate list of accomplishments for provision upon request. Detailed lists of this nature are appropriate in a curriculum vitae (CV) format. A CV is basically an extended resume with full detail in the area of professional involvement, publications, and speaking engagements. Professional sections are certainly not limited to health information management activities, and you should feel free to include other professional associations in which you are active. This may include anything from the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS) to the American Cancer Society. The sample resume shows both leadership and membership roles. It includes some important dates and excludes others. Use your judgment on optimal presentation in this area. You may wish to view the ["Do's and Don'ts of Resume Preparation"](#).

## **Should You Include a Personal Section?**

Information such as marital status, age, weight, height, hobbies, and interests generally have little relevance to your qualifications for a position. In fact, this information can work against you. It may trigger a conscious or even unconscious bias in the hiring authority. And although discrimination is illegal, it still occurs.

A personal section in a student's resume often compensates for an understandable lack of professional experience, and at the same time, communicates that you are a well-rounded, active, interesting candidate. It may also be an icebreaker in an interview.

## **Why Students Face a Special Challenge**

To overcome minimal professional experience, students should emphasize their strengths. Students should draw attention to academic excellence, volunteer work, leadership roles, internships, computer expertise, previous employment, ability to travel or relocate, foreign language skills, and any other attributes of this type.

## **Do You Include References in Your Resume?**

No, reference information should be kept on a separate sheet of paper. The statement "References furnished upon request" is wasted space that may have been used to further describe your qualifications. Candidates under consideration will be required to furnish references, and it is assumed that they are available.

Your sheet of references should be professional references, preferably previous supervisors. Include each person's name, title, telephone number, and your working relationship. My firm typically checks three references but prefers five to be listed in case some references are unavailable. For your best presentation, it is wise to make sure that each of your references is positive.

## **What Are Finishing Touches?**

They are the distinctions that make your resume stand out such as different type styles, sizes, graphics, etc. You should use a word processor and a high-quality printer to produce your finished product. Typewriters are no longer an acceptable instrument for resumes, and you may even consider professional typesetting. It is my opinion, however, that the standard 300-600 DPI printer is of acceptable quality relative to the additional cost of professional typesetting.

When considering your resume's overall presentation, remember that less is more. Surround your best qualifications with empty or white space to attract attention. It is more effective to present a few easy-to-read highlights than to force a lot of information onto a page.

## **Do You Need a Cover Letter?**

Cover letters complement your resume. They are documents personalized to the reader or organization and should leave a strong, positive impression. A cover letter should be about four paragraphs long and concisely address each of the following areas.

The first paragraph should open with an introductory statement that grabs the reader's attention. Strive to be upbeat. The second paragraph should briefly summarize your background and your credentials for the position. The third paragraph should indicate why you are interested in the position, company, product, or service. Stress what you can contribute to the company. The final paragraph should emphasize your desire for an interview and your intention to follow up with a phone call. Then do it!

Do not underestimate the strength of a well-written cover letter. It can very easily influence a potential employer or even a recruiter to read your resume and act on it.

## **Summary**

This article presents one general method for resume preparation that is both straightforward and logical. These common-sense concepts will allow you to prepare a resume for maximum effectiveness. Most people already have a resume so there is no need to reinvent it. Take what you have, apply these ideas, and feel proud of the result.

## **Acknowledgments**

Thanks to my wife, Nancy, and my writing mentor, Angela Picard, for their thoughts, insights, contributions, editing, and support in the writing of this article.

## Resume Writing Resources and References

1. Fournier, Myra, and Jeffrey Spin. *Encyclopedia of Job-Winning Resumes*. Ridgefield, CT: Round Lake Publishing Co.
2. Spina, Vicky. *Getting Hired in the '90s*. Chicago: Dearborn Financial Publishing, Inc., 1995.

### Exhibit 1

Chris Prince, MA, RRA

9242 Palace Place  
Clearwater, Florida 34111

Home (555) 581-3691  
Office (555) 586-6989

#### SUMMARY/ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Motivated, energetic, self-starter with 20-year record of achievement in management, quality improvement, and consulting in the healthcare industry.
- In-depth knowledge of ICD-9-CM and CPT coding resulting in \$1.3 million of optimized reimbursement.
- Expertise as a system consultant in HIM functions in development of an electronic patient record.
- Implementation of quality improvement systems in hospitals resulting in full Joint Commission accreditations.
- Articulate and persuasive in written and verbal communication with customers, staff, and professional peers.
- Proven ability as an independent problem-solver and negotiator, and in follow-through to meet deadlines.

#### EXPERIENCE

Major Medical Center, Largo, FL (500-bed, nonprofit, teaching hospital, managed 40 FTE) 1991-Present

Director, Health Information Management Department

- Spearheaded the design and implementation of a advanced computerized record management system.
- Created a merged utilization review, coding and quality improvement program.
- Reduced accounts receivable from \$3 million to \$300,000.
- Managed functions of Quality Improvement, Utilization Review, Infection Control, and the Health Information Management Department.

Medium-sized Hospital, St. Petersburg, FL (300-bed, for-profit, Fortune 500 company, 19 FTE) 1985-1991

Director, Medical Record Department

- Enhanced DRG reimbursement by increasing case mix from 1.21 to 1.53.
- Reengineered department, which reduced FTE from 26 to 19 while maintaining performance.
- Promoted to manage the combined functions of Medical Records, Quality Improvement, and Utilization Review.

Brand New Hospital, Milwaukee, WI (290-bed, teaching hospital, 27 FTE) 1982-1985

Director, Medical Record Department

- Coordinated opening of Medical Record, Utilization Review, and Quality Assurance operations.
- Lead multidisciplinary team to educate and facilitate the implementation of the prospective payment system.

Several Other Progressive Health Information Management Positions 1977-1982

#### EDUCATION/CREDENTIALS

- MA, Health Care Administration, 1983, Central Michigan University, Mount Pleasant, MI
- BS, Medical Record Administration, 1978, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
- Numerous training programs resulting in expertise in adult education, quality measurement, electronic communication, computerization, software applications, etc.
- Registered Record Administrator, ID # 25555—1978

#### PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

- American Health Information Management Association—House of Delegates, several committee memberships, facilitator roles, and position papers.
- Florida Health Information Management Association—Distinguished Member Award 1996, President 1994, Board of Directors 1990-96, numerous other capacities.
- Other—Numerous roles in local HIM associations, clinical affiliations, and college advisory boards.
- HIMSS (Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society) member since 1994.
- Dozens of presentations and articles written at local, state, and national level.

### Exhibit 2 Action Verbs

accelerated  
accomplished

implemented  
improved

produced  
proved

arranged	increased	provided
assembled	initiated	received
collaborated	installed	reduced
completed	instituted	reorganized
composed	instructed	restored
conceived	investigated	retrieved
conducted	launched	revamped
consolidated	maintained	revitalized
constructed	managed	selected
controlled	manipulated	served
coordinated	mastered	simplified
created	mediated	solved
defined	monitored	spearheaded
designed	motivated	streamlined
determined	negotiated	succeeded
developed	obtained	supervised
devised	operated	synthesized
directed	organized	trained
eliminated	originated	translated
established	participated	united
evaluated	performed	utilized
facilitated	pinpointed	verified
formulated	planned	volunteered
generated	prepared	wrote
identified	presented	

### Exhibit 3

#### Do's and Don'ts of Resume Preparation

##### Do's

- Create a document that is clear, concise, and easy to read
- Strive to limit the length to one, no more than two pages
- Emphasize your strongest qualifications with placement toward the top and left margins
- List your degrees and credentials following your name
- Facilitate communication by giving both your home and office telephone numbers
- Highlight your strengths by beginning with a Summary/ Achievements/Accomplishments section
- Use bulleted statements with action verbs and stress supportive facts and figures
- Expedite resume review by the reader by sharing your recent job experience first; list positions in reverse chronological order
- Support your education and credentials with institutions, dates, and identification

##### Don'ts

- Refrain from the title "Resume" and the ending "References Furnished Upon Request"; they waste valuable space
- Avoid the use of an "Objective Statement"; they are generic in content and self-limiting
- Steer clear of overlapping dates of employment, without providing statements of clarification
- Refrain from sharing your salary history or reasons for leaving previous employment
- Do not stretch the truth! Misinformation or untruthful statements will inevitably come back to haunt you
- Shy away from providing more than 10-15 years of previous work experience; it takes space, will date you, and is likely no longer pertinent
- Avoid personal sections, activities, and memberships that are not business related

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|--|---|
| <p>numbers; avoid dates past 25 years to minimize age discrimination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Presentation is critical -- use word processor, spell checker, graphics, etc.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fight the tendency to allow your resume to become outdated; you never know when opportunity may knock and you want to be prepared</li></ul> |
|--|---|

**Article citation:**

Ellie, Perry E. "Your Resume--a Checklist for Today's Trends." *Journal of AHIMA* 68, no.1 (1997): 24-29.

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