

## Getting to Work – Tool #6: Putting YOU on Paper—The Resume

A resume is a summary of your qualifications for employment. It may be the only information a potential employer has to determine whether or not you will be interviewed, so it is important to make sure that yours stands out.

Resumes can be intimidating, but there is good news! If you have already gone through the "**Identifying Your Skills**" exercise, you have done much of the hard work of writing an effective resume. Now your task is to match *your* skills and experiences with those highlighted in the description of the job to which you are applying. These are the skills and experiences that you should highlight in your resume. After this, all that remains is to add your work experience and education, and decide on an order and layout.

### Resume essentials

Resumes have several components, but the most important one for you to focus on as a physics student is the detailed list of **the knowledge and skills relevant to the specific job** for which you are applying. Other important areas include your work experience and educational background.

**Warning: You should expect to write a separate resume for every single job application!**

This sometimes comes as a surprise to job seekers, but it is one of the keys to an effective job search.

### Notes on resume style and length

No two resumes are the same, and no two resume writing guides are the same. Experts have different opinions about resumes, and employers do too. The main questions you should ask yourself related to the organization of your resume are:

1. Is it effectively telling my story?
2. Is it an accurate portrayal of me and my experiences?
3. Is the visual layout easy to read, and does the layout reflect the different components?

For more specific guidance on the exact components that should be included in your resume, formatting, and style, visit your school's career services professionals.

Many experts think that the resume for a recent graduate should be only one page long. If you have had multiple internships, research projects, or other work-related experiences, then your resume could be longer. However, employers will not even glance at the second page if you have not caught their attention with the first one, so instead of focusing on the length, focus on including content that is **relevant, accurate, and presented well**. Use vertical space effectively to help the resume look more appealing visually if it does go longer than one page.

Clearly detailing your set of knowledge and skills may be the single most important part of your resume. For physics students, this can be challenging.

TOOL#6: PUTTING YOU ON THE RESUME

## Suggested sections on the resume

### Knowledge and skills

If you have done a careful assessment of your unique set of knowledge and skills (tool #5), building this section of your resume becomes much easier. However, the most important part is to carefully compare your list of skills and abilities to those mentioned in the job description. Then, select from your set of skills those that overlap with the job advertisement. On your resume for that particular job, you should **list the skills that appear to be most important to the employer first**. This list of skills should be directly tied to the information in the job advertisement. You should also highlight these briefly in your cover letter (tool #7).

Due to the rigor and expectations of earning a degree in physics, many students in physics have few relevant work experiences to describe, so the knowledge and skills section should probably be the focal point of the resume.

### Work experiences

Include any work-related experiences (jobs, internships, research), ordering those that may be relevant to this specific job ahead of those that are not. Each work experience should be accompanied by a brief statement highlighting specific accomplishments or tasks. Whenever possible, choose accomplishments or tasks that align with the description of the position you are applying for. Jobs that may at first appear unrelated (working at a fast food chain) may be excellent examples of your leadership or problem-solving experience, so spend some time writing thoughtful descriptions of your work experiences that offer readers insight into your skills. In fact, highlighting your transferable skills is one of the easiest ways to demonstrate to employers that you have what they seek in a candidate.

### Educational background

List where and when you got your high school diploma\* and bachelor's degree (or your expected graduation date), as well as any technical and online training courses you have completed. This might include certifications in software, safety, or other relevant areas. Use a reverse chronological order: start with the most recent date and work your way back. Include double majors or minors. You may include honors and awards (Cum Laude and Sigma Pi Sigma membership), and scholarships received, with very brief explanations of honors and awards since the reader may not be aware of what they are.

In most cases it is not necessary to include your GPA. If your GPA is above 3.0, you should consider including it because it demonstrates your academic ability. If the employer asks for GPA in the job posting, be sure to include it. If you do include a GPA, indicate whether it is a cumulative (total) GPA or a major GPA (demonstrating aptitude in physics and math). Inclusion of GPA is tricky, since course rigor and grading mean different things at different schools and your employer may not be familiar with your university.

New graduates often include a brief "Relevant Coursework" section on their resume as a way to demonstrate knowledge or familiarity with a concept or idea highlighted in the job description if they do not have any hands-on experience yet. In some cases it may be useful to list the authors of the textbooks used, but only when the employer is likely to be very familiar with the authors (for example, when applying for academic jobs). Depending on the position to which you are applying, a "Relevant Coursework" section may or may not make sense to include.

**Note:** Because of the importance of getting the hiring manager's attention quickly, you may choose to put your educational background information at the end of your resume. What is most important is that this person *immediately* sees that you have the same skills that are included in the job description.

\*Note that typically, high school education is dropped from a resume by the end of the second year/beginning of the third.

### Other information

You may want to include other information on your resume that provides evidence of your relevant skills, interests, or accomplishments. This may include affiliations with organizations and societies, extracurricular activities, especially if you had a leadership position (e.g., captain of the tennis team), and relevant hobbies.

### Individualize your resume to the job

You will increase your chances of receiving an interview if you take the time to make your resume specific to each position for which you are applying. When you apply to a new position, take out your skills list and modify an existing resume to better match that specific job ad. Make it easy for a potential employer to see why you are right for *this* job by highlighting your skills and experience most relevant to those listed in the description first and in the most detail.

### A word about describing your abilities

Writing a resume is about selling yourself, but it is important to be honest about your abilities. For example, when writing about computer software, many students use "proficient" when their skill level is merely adequate or less, i.e., they got a "C" in a computer science course. While bolstering your ability may help you get an interview, it could lead to real trouble on the job. In addition, candidates may be asked to demonstrate their skills in software or other areas through content-related questions or proficiency tests. It can be tricky to choose the appropriate word to describe your skill level because many of these types of words are inherently vague. The better course is to describe your experience. "Two semesters of C++" is much more meaningful than "proficient" or "adequate." Even more meaningful would be something like, "Daily use of LabVIEW to take materials characterization data for 10-week research project."

### A word about asking for references or recommendations

You do not need to include personal or professional references on a resume, but often an employment application requires a list of references. Sometimes there is a request for a letter of recommendation or a letter of reference. Before you list anyone as a reference, ask permission. It is a good idea to provide all of your references with a copy of your resume (specific for the job to which you are applying) and information about the company to which you are applying, including the job description. If you need the recommender to do something other than wait for a phone call, provide specific written instructions. Do not make the mistake of making an informal "ask" without providing details about what you want, when you need it, and where it should be sent. It is a good idea to provide an addressed, stamped envelope if you are requesting a letter that needs to be sent via regular mail.

## Exercise - Tool #6: Building the “Knowledge and Skills” Section of Your Resume

⇒ **This exercise should be done for each job!**

⇒ Carry over a position description and the relevant key words from exercise #5. Choose one that aligns well with your skills, abilities, and interests and complete the first two columns below

# EXERCISE#6

<b>Key words or phrases describing what the company is looking for in a candidate</b> (from exercise #5)	<b>My related “Tell it” bullet points</b> (from exercise #4) (If you don’t have one for this key word or phrase, create one following the guidance in exercise #4 or, if it does not apply to you, leave this space blank.)	Priority
<b>Key words or phrases describing the responsibilities of the position</b> (from exercise #5)	<b>My related “Tell it” bullet points</b> (from exercise #4) (If you don’t have one for this key word or phrase, create one following the guidance in exercise #4 or, if it does not apply to you, leave this space blank.)	Priority

⇒ Go back to the job description and identify which key word or phrase seems to be most important to the company. Put a “1” in the priority column next to this key word. Repeat this until you have prioritized the entire list. (Note that you should have one running priority list that includes the key words and phrases in both sections—do not restart at “1” in the second section.) Skip any key word or phrase for which you do not have a good bullet point.

⇒ In the boxes below, rewrite your top 5–8 list of “Tell it” bullet points in order of priority.

<b>My related “Tell it” bullet points in order of priority</b>

⇒ The “Knowledge and Skills” section of your resume is now done for this position! If you were applying to multiple positions, you would repeat this exercise for each position to create a version of resume specific to each job. The hard work of writing the bullet points in exercise #5 sets you up to easily create different resumes targeted for each position that interests you.