



## CRAFTING A WINNING RESUME

These are the guidelines we use with our candidates to prepare winning resumes that help them stand out from the crowd. We recommend certain resume layouts, formats and language that has proven effective in capturing the attention of hiring managers and getting a candidate's foot in the door for the first interview. On our website, [www.pinnaclegroup.com](http://www.pinnaclegroup.com), we've displayed sample resumes that incorporate these suggestions.

### **Your Resume is an Advertising Tool – You're the Product to be Sold**

The main objective of the resume is to get an interview. The purpose of your resume is to market your background and experience to a firm by communicating your goals and objectives, as well as your value. In a competitive job market, your resume has to both stand out above the rest and be balanced with professionalism. Your resume is your calling card and your only chance to market yourself to a potential buyer. It not only tells your story, but it is also a representation of how you carry yourself professionally as well as your ability to succeed. No employer will be interested in hiring someone to persuade and influence others if he or she can't even sell him or herself!

### **Content and Layout Are Both Critical**

There are 5 criteria every employer uses to evaluate a candidate:

1. Analytical ability
2. Intellectual horsepower
3. Leadership potential
4. Communication skills
5. Accomplishments and results

Content includes the who, what, when, where and how essential to telling any story. There are three ways you can display those elements to an employer.

Through your:

1. Specific skills
2. Transactional or industry experience
3. Academic achievements

Equally important, although often neglected, is the layout of your resume. A successful resume must focus the reader's eye to the most important items on the resume. Directing the reader's attention is accomplished by using various typographical tools, including:

1. Font
2. Type size
3. Enhancements (**bolding**, *italics*, or underline)
4. Positioning of information on the page

To land the “audition” so to speak, you need to select relevant content and then visually display it for maximum impact. You don’t want to be like every other resume in the pile.

### **Catching the Interviewer’s Attention**

Your resume gets approximately 45 seconds of review time for the interviewer to decide whether to look at it in depth. You may not realize that when someone first sees your resume, they don’t actually read your entire resume. They scan it to get an impression of who you are and what you offer to them. If they see something that piques their interest, then they read your entire resume and make a decision whether to meet you. If the first brief scan of your resume doesn’t catch their interest, then your resume is set aside – the interviewer doesn’t read the entire resume just to talk themselves into seeing you. For that reason, it’s essential that your resume presents clearly what you offer that makes you the ideal candidate for the specific position for which you’ve applied. You want to catch the interviewer’s attention in the first few seconds that your resume gets. For that reason, the important, relevant information needs to be visually captivating and your resume needs to draw the reviewer’s eye to the important information.

### **Organization Makes You Stand Out in the Crowd**

Organization is extremely important if your resume is to get any attention. Think of yourself as the employer sifting through hundreds of resumes just to find one qualified candidate. Rarely is your resume the only one a recruiter or interviewer will see. It’s usually one of several the interviewer is comparing. If the interviewer has to work just to figure out where the important information about a candidate is, that resume is going in the trash. That being said, the last thing you want is to cut and paste together a mix of information like a scrapbook.

### **One Page or Several?**

There are as many opinions out there on how to write a resume as there are stars in the universe. Some may say that a resume should be only be a single page to guarantee the employer will digest all the information, while others claim that a couple more pages helps a resume stand apart from others. Others argue over the purposes of having a clear-cut objective, or a summary of skills as a marketing strategy. The best way to write a resume is to first understand that writing a resume is strategic. It must be carefully planned and well thought-out. It must be organized, concise, specific to the position you are applying for, and it must have a little personal flavor (but not fluff). We have found here at Pinnacle Group that a single page resume is typically the best approach – it offers the interviewer a good overview of your background and your skills without being overwhelming. For very senior candidates, a second page may be warranted but don’t fall into the trap of rolling into a second page without a clearly defined purpose and make sure you can fill the entire second page with relevant information.

## **Mechanics of the Resume**

Your resume must display:

- Contact information
- Relevant experience
- Education

It should also have a short section we call “Additional Information” to help the reviewer get a sense of you personally and how you will “fit” with the team.

## **Start with the Beautiful Basics**

Help the reviewer want to read your resume by making it look clean and streamlined.

The format we recommend has the visual impact of bookending the most important part of the resume, the content that is in the middle, and is often referred to as the “Harvard style” format.

1. Choose a conservative font, such as **Helvetica**, **Arial** or **Times New Roman**
2. Use a font size between 10 and 12 points, depending on space limitations
3. First and Last name should be in upper case bold, centered at the top of the page
4. Mailing Address in upper and lower case, without bolding, centered below name, using type the same size as the main body of the resume
5. You may use a line to separate personal data from the rest of the resume
6. Phone numbers and email without bolding, entirely in lower case
7. Bold and left justify category topics (Experience, Education and Personal)
8. Left justify, without bolding, the chronological timeline
9. Right justify, without bolding, the location of your experience and education
10. Bold and left justify the name of your employer
11. Left justify, without bolding, but in italics, the title you held
12. Use bullets sparingly; their overuse dilutes their effectiveness
13. Always spell check your resume and have someone else proofread it, each time you make any change. You only have one chance to make a first impression.

## **Personal Contact Information**

Your resume, of course, needs your full contact information (believe it or not, it is too often forgotten). The contact information you use must be current and professional. Use the name to which you respond. If the only one who calls you Samuel is your grandmother or bill collectors, everyone else calls you “Sam” – put Sam on your resume. Otherwise, when the interviewer calls and asks for “Samuel” you’ll have an awkward pause where you’ll ask “Who’s calling please?” thinking that you need to screen the call. Use the name you answer to – it’s not a government document, it’s your resume!

Use a current address, not a PO Box. These are financial services firms and how likely would you be to entrust your firm’s financial resources to someone using a PO Box!

Use phone numbers and email addresses at which you can be reached – ones you check frequently and that are professionally answered. If you list a phone number or email address you don’t check often – you will miss opportunities. Not promptly returning a prospective employer’s call or email inviting you to interview is a certain way to miss an

opportunity. Similarly, be certain that the voicemail message on the phone number they call is a professional one, not a jokester message like “Hey it’s Sam, you know what to do!” or your children’s voices which leave the caller uncertain whether you’ll receive the message. I once called a candidate to schedule an interview and his wife gave me the third degree as if she thought I might be calling for less than pure reasons. Choose the number you leave as one that will give the interviewer confidence in you as a candidate.

A word of advice on email addresses – this is the time to use a simple, straightforward email address. Please don’t use either your current work email or a humorous personal email address – either of these send the wrong message. Using your work email has several disadvantages – it signifies that you’re using your current work time to look for another job (and says to your future employer that you’d do the same thing to them) and leaves you vulnerable to missing future contacts if you leave your current work abruptly (how likely is it that your former employer will forward a job offer to you after you’ve left?). Those “cutesy” email addresses ([toohotforyou@hotmail.com](mailto:toohotforyou@hotmail.com) or [jesuslovesme@yahoo.com](mailto:jesuslovesme@yahoo.com), etc.) are inappropriate. Create a simple email address [denise.palmieri@gmail.com](mailto:denise.palmieri@gmail.com) to use for your job search and that you will regularly check. Your resume is your first impression and an image of professionalism counts.

**When it Comes to Experience: This is the Table of Contents, not the Whole Book**  
Remember, your resume is a calling card, not your biography! It should only have the information that’s relevant to showing the interviewer that you can do the job for which you’ve applied. The interviewer doesn’t need to know your entire history, only that which is relevant. Sometimes a candidate will ask “Isn’t that deceitful to not disclose my entire employment history?” Our answer is that it is deceitful if you conceal your employment history in the interview process, but the purpose of the resume is to highlight your relevant experience so the interviewer can meet you and learn more about you.

### **Current Employer Experience**

Start your work experience section with your current (or most recent) position. List the information in the present tense if you are currently employed and past tense if you are no longer with your last employer. If you are no longer working, do not list “Present”.

#### *Proper Format*

**Company Name** - should always stand alone in bold upper and lower case

*Title & Department* – italics

The contrast between the bold type face and the italics creates an “eye catching” style like matching a great tie with an appropriate shirt.

Example:

**Morgan Stanley**

**Investment Banking Analyst – Leveraged Finance**

### **Tell The Reader How You Fit**

Every time you send a resume out, your resume should have been shaped and shifted for that specific position and that specific employer. I hear you groaning right now about how much work that is! Remember, this is your career. You can create a generic resume that is all things to all people and hope that someone who receives it does the work to figure out why you are the person they want to interview, and you can wonder why you aren't getting traction in your search. Or you can take your job search seriously and make your resume sing to the position you're applying for so the interviewer sees immediately why you are the right person for the job and wants to bring you in right away. The option you choose will really make a difference in your search. That may mean you have different resumes for each type of opportunity you are interested in. Do your research about the company before you apply. Your objective or summary should reflect what the company is looking for, so that they will recognize you as a match. Sending a resume to a private equity firm for an associate position that only shows how you've been a great trader will get you nowhere and fast! Pay attention to the specifics of the opportunity for which you are applying and learn everything you can about the employer. The company or firm may have an interesting focus that you have some experience in (even if it is limited) and they might be impressed to see that on your resume. If there are additional responsibilities that you have experience with that fit, your resume should reflect it. I know, it's work! But from that work, you will have greater likelihood of reaping the rewards; without it, you're one of the pack hoping to be recognized and brought in for an interview.

### **Relevant Skills**

In your previous position, you will have developed certain skills which are generically applicable to the position for which you are applying.

These skills should be organized together in the same part of the resume. The most common resume includes an introductory paragraph illustrating the skills you have developed. Most of the people who will interview you know you have developed these skills. They will be concerned with how you have used these skills on the transactions in which you have participated.

*Examples of these skills, with various wording include:*

- Developed and analyzed financial statements
- Performed extensive financial valuation work
- Performed qualitative and quantitative acquisition alternatives
- Performed discounted cash flow analysis
- Provided merger analysis
- Interacted with senior management teams
- Conducted due diligence

- Performed comparable company analyses
- Analyzed IPOs and follow-on equity offerings, public company buy-side and sell-side opportunities, and exclusive sales
- Developed and enhanced financial models
- Interacted with senior management
- Drafted offering memoranda and prepared investor presentations
- Developed financing models to reflect industry trends
- Developed innovative alternative capital structures for company management

### **Get To The Point**

Always keep your resume detailed but concise. It matters less how many pages your resume is than if it gets to the point when it needs to get to the point. No employer is going to read a six page resume that never gets to the point. On the other hand, if your resume hardly fills up a page, you likely haven't put enough explanation into additional skills and experience that is pertinent to your next career move. For those of you who have only had one relevant experience, don't create fluff to fill up your resume. One relevant opportunity is better than filling the page with things that make the interviewer wonder why you've told them that information or which makes them question whether you're the right person for their firm.

The best way to keep your resume concise is to decide what information is important. This will most likely depend on the industry and the company or firm to whom you are interested in submitting a resume. Focus on the most recent education or experience more than the last, since recent experience is most relevant. Don't add an irrelevant position you had working a cash drawer at the mall to pay for college when you now have two years of experience in your field. It is ok to have one position on your resume. What matters most to an employer is what work you did while you were there that will demonstrate that you will succeed in your next role.

For the more experienced professional creating a resume, resist the temptation to creep into two pages unless everything on page two is crucial. Listing every position you've held, just to show chronology doesn't help the reader to get a view of how you will add value in this new role and, worse, it could identify you as missing a clear direction in your career path. Only list the positions that demonstrate your clear ability to do the job you're applying for and concentrate your transactional experience to guide the reviewer to the conclusion that you're bringing something special to the role for which you are being considered.

### **Transactional or Industry Experience**

This section of your resume is essential. Most of the interviewer's focus will be on this section. Tailor your resume to reflect transactions that will be most appealing to the reader. This is an area where understanding your target audience is crucial. Sending a resume highlighting industrial transactions to a firm specializing in healthcare will give you no traction unless you can show how the transactions you have participated in are

similar to those they handle. That might mean concentrating attention in the resume on the similar size of deals, industry sector, distressed segment of the market, etc.

Prospective employers want to know:

1. Who were the participants (if publicly announced)?
2. How important was the role you played? Did you source the transaction?
3. Did the deal happen or not? If it did not happen, why not?
4. Was the deal a successful one?
5. What did you learn from this deal whether or not it closed?
6. How has the transaction performed since the deal closed?

Only list the deals about which you can knowledgeably answer questions. Include transactions that you worked on which may not have closed. Be sure not to disclose information regarding any transactions that might compromise confidentiality. Use a phrase to set this section apart, such as:

- *Selected transactions include:*
- *Representative transactions include:*

Utilize enhancements such as italics, bullets or bold print as tools to add visual interest to this area, but be cautious not to overdo the enhancements. You want to draw attention to the specific points the reader should note.

If you are a young candidate and you finished at the top of the Analyst/Associate class or have been the Analyst/Associate recruiting coordinator for your undergraduate/graduate school, you should include this information after you have covered the skill set, product experience and deal sections. *Use italics to highlight this information.* As you progress in your career, the Analyst/Associate portions of your experience can be dispensed with or at least bear only minor mention.

### **Make It User Friendly**

Never add fluff or use words that you don't fully have ownership over. Too much fluff can make you look unfocused or unprofessional. Plus, if you don't fully understand what you are saying about yourself, they will see right through it and, most likely, put you aside. Also, don't try to cram in things that don't matter. When a candidate stretches the margins to the max or uses tiny font, just to "get it all in one page" it sends the message to the interviewer that the candidate can't tell what's important and is unable to convey information in a concise, analytical way. It's better to only put in what's relevant. No one reads a resume that is too verbose or which creates eye strain.

## **Work Experience During College or Summer MBA Internships**

This section is important for the analyst or business school student because it will most likely be an interview topic and its content could demonstrate a level of ambition and initiative. It is an opportunity to show how you are different and did not slack off for the summer. What did you do, what did you contribute, how does that translate into what you did or want to do after graduating. If it is accretive then highlight it, if not then de-emphasize it. If you had a unique internship, make certain you demonstrate what you were specifically able to learn or contribute in that position and how it applies to the position for which you are applying. References to internships should drop off the resume after you have secured a subsequent full time position following the internship.

## **Education**

This Education section of the resume should **always** be below the experience of your resume, unless you are currently enrolled in or graduating from an MBA program. Each educational entry should contain only one or two pieces of important information per line and have layouts similar to the following:

### **UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS**

*Bachelor of Science in Economics, 2001*

*Minor in Computer Science*

- SAT Math: 720; SAT Verbal: 800; GMAT: 760
- Cumulative G.P.A.: 3.9/4.0
- Graduated with High Honors

Include your GPA and SAT/GMAT scores, if they were impressive. If they were not, then leave them off and let the recruiter either wonder or have to ask. If they ask, then you will be able to provide some background as to why they are what they are (other than partying too much). Do not list distinctions between cumulative GPA and GPA in major. A single point of reference as your cumulative GPA is what matters.

Optional items could include honors and leadership activities but be thoughtful about whether they are meaningful to the role you are seeking and demonstrate intellectual horsepower or leadership ability. Here is another example:

### **Columbia University**

*MBA, May 2007*

*Author: **The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Geopolitical Battle of the World's Most Precious Resource –Water***

*Leadership Activities: Vice President, Fundraising, 2007 Private Equity Conference*

Do not separately list schools from which you did not obtain a degree or where you simply spent a semester abroad or just took coursework. It complicates the education section of your resume and makes you appear academic.

## **Make Them Want To Meet You**

Your resume also needs to have a personal touch at the end. Many people choose a title of “Additional Information” or “Personal” as the caption to this section to list a few

personal things. This section of the resume is beneficial in terms of landing a position that will be a good cultural fit. Both employers and candidates say “fit” is the most important part of a successful hiring decision. Remember, you are not the only candidate applying for this opportunity and, all other skills being equal, an interviewer will choose a candidate who seems to “fit” better as the successful candidate.

When crafting your resume, remember this is your **professional** personal ad, so if it’s unnerving or too peculiar, don’t put it in. You should help the reviewer to get a sense of who you are and what you’re like, but remember what you list sends a message about you. Saying your hobby is “reading” is boring – how about listing the most recent book you read that interested you? Or “travel” – how nebulous! What about listing the two most interesting cities or countries you visited and that you traveled by bicycle or camel? Alternatively, saying you like spending your free time with your 3 children might come across as sending the unwritten message that you won’t plan to work late. Listing political or religious affiliations on your resume send other subtle messages that might work for or against you depending upon the interviewer’s slant. Think about what you list and why you’re telling the interviewer that information.

Only list language skills if you are fluent enough to transact business in the language and intend to use the language in your next position. Listing fluency in a language and being unable to answer the interviewer if he asks you a question in that language will impair your credibility. Likewise, listing native fluency in a language may trigger a question about your immigration status or desire to return to that country

You should include three or four interests or accomplishments. Here are a few of my favorites:

Hiked the complete Appalachian Trail. Struggling golfer. Completed Boston Marathon (2005). Julliard trained violinist. Hemmingway aficionado. White House Fellows Program (2007). Chair, Wharton Private Equity Alumni Fundraising Committee.

### **Your Resume Should Open the Door to a Dialogue**

If you think about your resume as the opening to a conversation, a way to engage the interviewer in a dialogue, instead of your biography or the whole conversation, you’ll see that it opens many more doors for you. You open the conversation with your resume as an introduction to things you both have in common and offer a glimpse of why continuing the conversation will be beneficial to you both through an interview. It shouldn’t create uncertainty, nor should it be a “tell all” book. Think of it as the New York Times book review, it tells you some interesting features that “hook” you and make you want to know more.

We’ll look forward to being helpful to you in your search. If you need help shaping your resume, let us know and we’ll be glad to help you craft one that will help you get those dialogues going or help you focus your search on the sectors of the industry that will be more interested in you as a conversation partner.