

CREATING A BEST PRACTICE PROFESSIONAL RESUME

What is the purpose of a resume?

The purpose of a résumé is to get an interview. Create a clear, well-formatted document that shows how your education, experience, and skills match a specific job. Even with limited experience, emphasize transferable skills (course projects, leadership, extracurriculars, and volunteer work).

Formats & Length: Common Résumé Formats

- **Chronological** (*most common*): Best for steady work history or early careers. List jobs in reverse chronological order (most recent first). Include employer, title, location, dates, and bullet points (skills used, relevant tasks, achievements).
- **Functional/Combination**: Best for career changers, less continuous work histories, or those entering a new field. Highlights skills and relevant responsibilities first; jobs and dates follow briefly.
- **Length: 1–2 pages**. Only use 2 pages if you have at least 1½ pages of meaningful content. Don't just have a few lines at the top of a 2nd page.

Master Résumé versus Targeted or Customized Resume

Begin by creating a “Master Resume” template that features all of your work experience, skills, and certifications. This will be a primary résumé to store (and remember!) information about your knowledge, skills, experiences, and accomplishments from school classes and projects, jobs or internships, extracurricular/volunteer or other experiences. This will be a catch-all for key information about yourself.

When you get ready to apply for different jobs, create a duplicate copy of the “Master Resume” and edit and customize it to speak to a specific job and the skills and experiences needed for the role/position or company. You will edit and condense the master resume to customize and target this resume accordingly to align with the job posting to which you are applying.

For example, you might include a new SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS section at the top of each resume that speaks to specific things asked for in a job description for a particular job.

Core Sections (*What to Include*)

Contact (Header): Name (16-18 pt. font; larger than body text), phone, professional email (nothing cutesy), LinkedIn URL (optional), portfolio URL (if relevant). Address is optional (often not used or just use city, state). Do not include photos, headshots, or other graphics.

Summary of Qualifications

- Optional, but helpful to put at top of resume to highlight key words from a job description
- Use 3–5 bullets or 2–3 sentences tailored to the job

- Mirror keywords from the job description
- Don't list skills alone—put them **in** context (e.g., “Communication — delivered friendly, accurate service in a high-volume retail environment”)
- Other titles for this section could be: Career Profile, Highlight of Qualifications, or Resume Summary

Education *(most recent first, so for example start with SMCC)*

- School name & location
- Degree spell out: “Associate Degree in ____” or “Associate Degree in Communications & New Media”
- Major/Minor (as applicable)
- Graduation date or expected graduation date (Month, Year)
- Relevant Coursework or Key Coursework – list titles of courses in your major (not course numbers)
- Include any additional certifications/licensure, scholarships/honors/awards
- Include GPA (usually if 3.0 or higher)
- Include other college coursework from other schools. High school should be removed after two years.

Work Experience *(reverse chronological order by skill area)*

For each role (job, internship, project, volunteer, leadership):

- Title, organization, city/state, and dates (be consistent in date style)
- Bullets that start with action verbs; show skills used and results achieved.
- Prioritize relevant, transferable skills over listing every task or job duty from former job.
- Use past tense for past roles; present tense for current.
- Use metrics if possible (numbers, percentage, dollar amounts or anything else that shows achievement). Not always possible but quantify outcomes when possible.
- Be sure to highlight transferable skills that could be used at another job (for example: “Developed customer service and communication skills working with the public.” **OR** “Demonstrated friendly, courteous, and professional customer services skills.”)

Skills *(Optional but recommended. Actionable skills you know how to do)*

- Technical/Software/Tools (e.g., Excel, Photoshop, POS systems)
- Laboratory/Technical (if applicable)
- Languages (with proficiency level)
- Certifications/Training (with expiration dates if applicable)

Other Optional Sections *(Use as Relevant)*

- Relevant Projects / Course Projects (show applied skills and outcomes). **Note: Sometimes your schoolwork and class projects may be the most relevant experience geared towards a specific job!)*
- Training & Certifications
- Computer & Technical Skills / Lab Skills
- Volunteer & Community Engagement
- Leadership Experience
- Clubs & Organizations / Campus Activities / Athletics
- Military Experience
- Professional Associations
- Awards & Honors
- Portfolio / GitHub / Behance (for creative/technical roles)

Resume Appearance: Formatting & Layout *(Make It Easy to Read)*

- Beware of resume templates that use columns or chunked settings (*difficult to edit and may not be picked up by Applicant Tracking Systems which are robots that scan resumes*)
- Margins: ½"–1"; leave white space. Not cluttered
- Font: 11–12 pt body; common fonts (Calibri, Arial, Times New Roman, Cambria)
- Consistency: alignment, bold/italics, punctuation, date formats, abbreviations
- Top half of page = your most important info
- No first person ("I"). Be sure not to use sentences that start with "I"
- Save File name: FirstName_LastName_Resume.pdf

Two Examples of line styles:

Either layout is fine just BE CONSISTENT!

Sales Cashier, Target — South Portland, ME (Sept. 2023–Present)

Boys and Girls Club, Volunteer / Biddeford, Maine / October 2024-May 2026

Writing Strong Bullets *(How to Show Impact)*

Formula: Action Verb + What + How + Result *(use numbers where possible)*

- Start with strong verbs: coordinated, managed, created, developed, analyzed, presented, supported, trained, assisted, demonstrated ability to..., developed skills in....
- Be brief, specific, and relevant.
- Use metrics: **numbers, hours, percentages, \$, frequency.**

Do / Don't Examples

- **DON'T:** "Talked to people at front desk"
- **DO:** "Demonstrated communication and customer service by assisting 30–50 walk-in visitors daily and answering multi-line phone system."
- **DON'T:** "Good team player"
- **DO:** "Collaborated with a 4-person team to process orders online and by phone, increasing order time by 15%."
- **DON'T:** "Closed the cash register"
- **DO:** "Assisted shift supervisors with register close; recognized for accuracy and attention to detail."

Achievement-style bullets

- "Employee of the Month (Oct 2023) for leadership and teamwork."
- "Promoted to train 6 new hires; reduced onboarding time **by 20%**."
- "Assisted manager in mentoring and training 5 new employees on job functions."

Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) & Customization

- Many employers use ATS to scan résumés for keywords from the job description.
- Mirror **keywords** from job posting honestly in your Summary, Experience, and Skills. Use the specific words used in the job posting for a strong ATS match.
- Always tell the truth—anything on a résumé is fair game in interviews and on the job.

Helpful Tools

- [Cultivated Culture](#) – [Bullet Analyzer](#): improve bullet clarity and impact
Resume Bullet Point Analyzer: <https://cultivatedculture.com/resume-bullet-analyzer/>
- Cultivated Culture – [Résumé Scanner](#): check keyword alignment
Resume Scanner: <https://cultivatedculture.com/resume-scanner/>
- [Jobscan](#): match résumé to job description
Jobscan: <https://www.jobscan.co/>
- [O*NET Online](#): research job rules and review job tasks/skills to describe roles accurately
O*NET Online: <https://www.onetonline.org/>
- WordClouds such as [classic word clouds](#) or [wordcloud generator](#) help signal keywords
Word Cloud tool: <https://classic.wordclouds.com/>
- Other AI tools such as [resumeup.AI](#) can also help find frequent keywords in a job posting that you can mirror back in your resume or cover letter.
<https://resumeup.ai/job-description-keyword-finder>

Template Guidance

Avoid fancy downloadable templates that break ATS. Use SMCC Career Development & Partnerships resume resources found on SMCC website, Brightspace, or MySMCC Sharepoint Portal “My Future” for downloadable Microsoft Word templates and examples.

Sample Mini-Outline

Name (Large)

Phone • Email • LinkedIn • Portfolio (optional)

SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS

- 3–5 tailored bullets highlighting hard/soft skills and achievements relevant to the target job.

EDUCATION

Southern Maine Community College — South Portland, ME

Associate Degree in [Major], [Month Year] (or “Expected [Month Year]”)

- Key Coursework: [Course 1], [Course 2], [Course 3] (optional)
- Honors/Awards (optional)

RELEVANT EXPERIENCE (*Internships, SMCC course projects, relevant jobs*)

Role/Project — Organization/Course, City, ST | [Dates]

- Action + skill + context + result/metric.
- Action + tool/tech + outcome.

WORK EXPERIENCE (*reverse chronological*)

Title — Company, City, ST | [Dates]

- Action + skill + result.
- Action + responsibility + outcome.

SKILLS

Technical/Software • Tools/Lab • Languages (with proficiency) • Certifications

OPTIONAL SECTIONS

Leadership • Volunteer • Clubs/Organizations • Athletics • Awards • Associations • Portfolio

Action Verbs (Trimmed, High-Impact Set)

Communication/People: collaborated, presented, communicated, facilitated, supported, advised

Leadership/Initiative: led, coordinated, mentored, trained, organized, delegated, spearheaded

Technical/Creative: designed, built, configured, debugged, illustrated, prototyped, implemented

Analysis/Results: analyzed, evaluated, audited, optimized, improved, verified, tested

Operations/Service: assisted, processed, resolved, maintained, monitored, operated

Achievements: increased, reduced, exceeded, improved, delivered, completed, recognized

Quick Resume Checklist Reminders

- 1–2 pages; meaningful content (no fluff)
- Clean layout: ½"–1" margins; 11–12 pt readable font; consistent styles
- Contact info complete; professional email; LinkedIn/portfolio (if relevant)
- Summary tailored to the job with keywords
- Education accurate; degree spelled out; recent first
- Experience bullets start with verbs, show skills in context, and use metrics
- Tenses correct (past for past roles; present for current)
- No "I" statements; punctuation consistent
- ATS-friendly (no tables/text boxes that break parsing; mirrors job keywords honestly)
- Grammar/spelling proofread; file name professional (Name_Resume.pdf)

Sample Resume 1

Jane Doe

(555) 555-5555 • janedoe2@gmail.com • www.linkedin.com/in/janedoe2

SUMMARY OF SKILLS

Customer Service – Developed communication and customer service skills and demonstrated professional phone and email communication etiquette as intern at insurance company.

Leadership & Collaboration – Able to work independently with minimal supervision as well as part of a team; named Employee of the Month for assisting supervisor with training new employees in retail position.

Computer Proficiency: Microsoft Office (Word, intermediate Excel, Powerpoint)

EDUCATION

Southern Maine Community College, South Portland, Maine

Expected Graduation: May 2026

Associate Degree in Applied Science Major: **Business Administration**

GPA: 3.2

Key Coursework: Introduction to Business; Financial Accounting; Macroeconomics; Microeconomics; Human Resource Management; Marketing; Statistics; Entrepreneurship; Quantitative Reasoning

RELATED BUSINESS EXPERIENCE

Disability Benefit Specialist Intern, UNUM, Portland, ME

June-August 2025

- Served as full-time intern/part-time employee at Fortune 500 insurance company as assistant disability claims specialist conducting customer service for in-bound and out-bound calls.
- Helped process primarily maternity claims; confirmed and gathered information from customer, healthcare professionals, employers, and other stakeholders.
- Learned process of approving or denying claims based on company policy with attention to detail.

Macroeconomics Group Presentation, Southern Maine Community College, South Portland, ME, Oct. 2025

- Learned economics concepts of supply and demand including business language and terminology and concepts of aggregate demand and aggregate supply and how to analyze macroeconomic issues.
- Discussed other topics such as role of scarcity, major goals of fiscal and monetary policy, the role of money and credit and relation to the U.S. banking system; overview of Federal Reserve.
- Collaborated on course project with team of three to research macroeconomic policies on international trade and created presented concepts and findings to class using Powerpoint and public speaking skills.
- Demonstrated career competencies in communication (oral and written), teamwork, and research.

Marketing Plan Course Project, Marketing Class, SMCC, South Portland, ME, April 2026

- Worked with two classmates to create a mock marketing/branding promotional campaign for a fictitious beverage client demonstrating all aspects of creating a marketing plan including market analysis, competitive analysis, organizational description, summary of growth strategies, and financials.
- Participated in class project on Point of Sale (POS) strategies to determine marketing strategies.
- Created and pitched concepts for marketing including logos, product shots, and premiums.

OTHER WORK EXPERIENCE

Merchandise Associate, TJ Maxx, South Portland, ME, May. 2025-Present

- Work part-time in retail setting providing sales and customer service, and answering product questions.
- Developed attention to detail in the organization and accuracy of handling money at register

CAMPUS ATHLETICS

SMCC Women's Soccer Team, Southern Maine Community College, Sept. – Dec. 2024/2025

- Developed organization and time management skills managing practice and games with academics.

Sample Resume 2

John Doe

(207) XXX-XXXX / john.doe22@gmail.com

EDUCATION

Southern Maine Community College (SMCC), South Portland, ME
Associates Degree in *Information Technology*

Graduated: May 2025

RELEVANT COURSEWORK:

Linux System Administration

Fundamentals of Network Security

Introduction to Discrete Mathematics

Project Management

Windows Server and Active Directory

Microsoft Client Operating Systems

Virtualization Fundamentals

Network Fundamentals

Computer Forensics

Scripting for IT

Routing and Switching Fundamentals

EXPERIENCE

Information Technology skills and qualifications developed in SMCC classes, labs, and course projects:

- Installed Windows and Linux operating systems and configured to specifications including updating and backing up software in remote environment.
- Learned to build and trouble shoot network and hardware as part of Network Fundamentals class.
- Developed ability to support IT help functions through course labs including configuring user names, passwords, tracking employee use, providing access points, opening and closing ports, creating Windows accounts, creating group policies, and other computer help functions.
- Developed a mock step-by-step online tutorial to walk clients through how to use PowerShell to use event logs and set up windows forwarding.

Senior Capstone IT Project, Southern Maine Community College, South Portland, ME Spring 2025

- Built a mock virtual lost and found website to help businesses in the City of Portland promote lost items and for people to search lost items.
- Learned how to work with a client on a project. Practiced project management and client relations skills with faculty conducting a mock “kick off meeting” to determine real-life work problem.
- Participated in brainstorming sessions with peers (and faculty mentor) to problem-solve how to address the work issue.
- Developed milestones and created break down structure for key steps and tasks.
- Learned and practiced project management steps: planning, setting up website, determining risk management, quality assurance (Q/A testing), and advertising (designing business cards and flyers).
- Learned coding and web design to create original website for use and functionality and aesthetics.
- Developed problem-solving and communication skills as a team, troubleshooting issues in creating a search engine and database.
- Demonstrated teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills and ability to flexible.

WORK EXPERIENCE

Clerk, Shaws, South Portland, Maine

June 2024– December 2025

- Developed customer service, communication, multitasking skills working in food prep department.
- Demonstrated leadership abilities helping managers train, support, and mentor new co-workers in learning essential job functions.