Middle Tennessee State University

STUDENT GUIDE
TO THE PROFESSIONAL
RESUME

ACTION WORDS CONSISTENT PROFESSIONAL
QUANTIFY HIRING AUDIENCE
PROOFED
RESULTS FORMAT

CONCISE TARGETED
DYNAMIC SKILLS
BRANDING DESIGN

Career **Development** Center

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Guide

Introduction to the **Professional Resume**

A well–crafted, professional resume will open many doors and give you the best possible chance for getting an interview. Once you land the interview, then it's up to you to land the job. So, resumes don't get you the job, but they are a critical element of the job search that leads to an offer.

The staff at the Career Development Center at MTSU builds hundreds of resumes each year and also trains for resume writing by reviewing thousands of resumes written by professional resume writers. We also listen to feedback from recruiters and hiring managers. Although you'll find that just about everyone has a different opinion on how to write a resume, our goal is to help you create your own resume based on core principles so that you'll have a professional resume throughout the course of your career.

So what exactly is a resume anyway? Let's start with a basic definition. When you think about it, a resume is actually a marketing document that highlights your unique knowledge, skills, education, experience and achievements that meet your target audience's needs.

A well–crafted resume will accomplish several key outcomes for you:
1. Highlight who you are and demonstrate how you can meet your hiring audience's needs in simple yet dynamic language.
2. Create interest from an employer to offer you an interview.
3. Communicate your brand or what your competitive advantage is compared to other candidates.
4. Demonstrate motivation and professionalism through commitment to creating a high quality marketing tool.
5. Create a structure to help prepare you and the hiring manager for the interview.

Are there other applications where a professional resume is important? Yes!
1. Applications for graduate or professional school, fellowships, scholarships, proposals, grants and other academic merit awards.
2. Promotions or other performance based programs with your current employer.
3. Appointments to boards, panels and committees.

Three key elements that you will need to master in crafting a professional resume are:
1. **Content**: The actual word choice and phrasing should be concise yet descriptive and speak to the needs of your targeted hiring audience.
2. **Format**: How the information is structured or organized to best present your content.
3. **Design**: These elements include font type, font size, color, underline, bold or italic script, use of white space, graphics, and other tools outside of content.

Step 1 | Complete a Career Profile

The idea of a career profile is to gather as much content as possible for use in crafting your resume. Don't worry with any format/design concerns and don't focus on your word choice for now. Just work on collecting as much factual information about yourself as possible.

1.1 | Contact Information

Name (as it will appear on the resume):_____

Mailing Address (Street and Number):_____

City, State, Zip:_____

E-mail Address (needs to be professional):_____

Phone Number (needs to have some type of voice mail):_____

1.2 | Branding Section

Career/Education Summary (Usually 3-5 sentences or bullet statements that show core areas of expertise, indicate a career direction, and begin to describe unique qualifications that meet your hiring audience's needs. Start by reviewing 3-5 job postings that interest you and then highlight the core areas of expertise you have that are required by these jobs. Use these terms as a foundation for your branding section)**:**

_____

_____

_____

_____

Key Skills/Knowledge/Expertise (Again, using real job listings, develop a list of key terms of additional skills, knowledge, and/or expertise that fit your career goals and direction. Shoot for a list of 9-15 items)**:**

_____

_____

_____

_____

1.3 | Education Credentials

Exact Degree Title:_____

Exact Major(s):_____**Exact Minor(s):**_____

Projected Date of Graduation:_____

Cumulative GPA:_____**Major GPA:**_____

Achievements (Honors, Awards, Scholarships, Research)**:**_____

_____

Leadership/Activities (Leadership roles, Activities, Significant Projects)**:**_____

_____

Study Abroad/Fellowship/Internships:_____

Most Relevant Coursework (9-15 courses)**:**_____

_____

_____

Licenses/Certifications/Training:_____

*repeat above as needed for additional degrees

1.4 | Work Experience

For each position, first think of your duties and responsibilities. Then, begin to list your skills and the results you achieved with the group or organization. The more you can focus on skills and results, the more effective your experience section will be. Also, stay focused on your hiring audience's needs.

Company Name:_____

Company Location:_____

Brief Description of Company (Size, Industry, Products/Services):_____

_____

Job Title and Location:_____

Dates of Employment:_____

Description (Describe your role in one to two sentences):_____

_____

Accomplishments (List your accomplishments. Focus on the skills you used, the results you achieved, and any projects you completed along with key problems you solved. Ask yourself if you did anything to increase revenue, reduce expenses, or make anything more efficient. Were you commended for doing anything well? Take a look at any annual performance reviews for positive feedback about your results.):_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Company Name:_____

Company Location:_____

Brief Description of Company (Size, Industry, Products/Services):_____

_____

Job Title and Location:_____

Dates of Employment:_____

Description (Describe your role in one to two sentences):_____

_____

Accomplishments:_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Company Name:_____

Company Location:_____

Brief Description of Company (Size, Industry, Products/Services):_____

_____

Job Title and Location:_____

Dates of Employment:_____

Description (Describe your role in one to two sentences):_____

_____

Accomplishments:_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

*repeat above for each position

Step 2 | Build your Document Structure: Format and Design

Format

Take a look at the principles below to give your document effective format and design. Format has to do with the way your information is organized, while design deals with the many elements that will give your resume visual appeal. Format and design choices should be intentional and speak to your hiring audience. We like to use the word principles rather than rules because resume writing is a subjective process and many opinions exist. Our advice is to always consider your hiring audience first and then utilize resume guides for tips and examples of how the professional resume is created.

Principle #1 - Resume length.
Consider limiting your resume to one page if you can describe your relevant and persuasive content within that frame. If you have a lot of content or you're a seasoned professional with years of experience, you may need more than one page. What you don't want is a partial page as this communicates an inability to be concise or that you lack content.

Principle #2 - Eye catching name and contact information.
You want your name and contact information to get your readers' attention and be easy to read. However, try to avoid using large graphics, photos, and gaudy font color.

Principle #3 - Start your resume with a branding section.
A branding section should come after your name and contact section. The focus should be on how you meet your hiring audience's needs in dynamic and concise language. The top third of your first page is critical in getting your reader's attention and encouraging them to read the rest of your resume. There are many ways to construct a branding section but a proven method is to include a narrative summary of your career/preparation and a list of core competencies/knowledge/skills.

Principle #4 - Follow your branding section with an education section.
For an upcoming graduate or recent graduate, it's best to follow your branding with education rather than experience. Even if you have significant experience, listing the education section first gives context to your present status.

Principle #5 - For experience use a reverse chronological format.
For the vast majority of resumes, an experience section listed in reverse chronological format will work best. You may choose to have two experience sections, one with related experience that highlights your relevant skills and accomplishments. The second experience section will show additional employment history that may not be as relevant.

Other sections you might include in your format:

1. Research
2. Internships
3. Volunteer Work
4. Leadership
5. Laboratory Skills
6. Publications
7. Professional Memberships
8. Presentations

Design Elements

Design can give your resume instant visual appeal and is critical in getting your readers' attention. Design includes a cohesive strategy that seeks to maximize the use of font size and type, borders, margins, color, headings, white space, graphics, shading and other elements. All the design choices are in service of your hiring audience's preferences. So, consider the industry, company culture, and type of position you're targeting.

Principle #1 - Define your container first.

We suggest you define your document margins to be ½ inch to no more than ¾ of an inch all around the document with even borders. The reason is that you will need plenty of space to add content that is specific enough to be meaningful and not feel too crowded or text heavy. Many resumes with wide margins often have bullet statements that are too short or general and simply do not add any value for the hiring audience in terms of specific skills or results.

Principle #2 - Select a font and font size.

For the main body of your resume, you will want to use a sans- serif font. These fonts are easier to read on a computer monitor or tablet device where your resume will likely be read first. You might consider a serif font for your name or headings but keep in mind that some fonts don't work well together and that certain fonts may not fit the message you're communicating to your audience.

Start with a font size of 11 point for your main body and 16-24 point for you name. Be careful not to use too many font sizes which will give your resume a cluttered look.

> **Insider Tip:** You can choose from thousands of fonts. Just remember to save your final resume file as a document file and also as a PDF before submitting your resume. Always submit the PDF version of your resume unless directed otherwise. Saving as a PDF "bakes" the fonts you use into the document so it doesn't matter if the recipient has those fonts on their machine or not.

2.1	Suggested fonts			
Sans Serif:		**Serif Font:**		
Calibri	Trebuchet	Garamond	Century Schoolbook
Arial	Tahoma	Georgia	Palatino
Lucida Sans	Myriad Pro (Mac Native)	Book Antiqua	Minion Pro (Mac Native)

Principle #3 - Use color effectively.

When deciding whether to use color or not, you should first think about the position, company and industry. Consider the world we now live in with graphics, color, photos and videos. This is a very visually rich environment and black text on a white background has considerably less visual appeal. Think about using color for your name, headings and bullet symbols as a subtle way to add visual interest without overwhelming the content.

3 Samples to Consider:
1. RGB= 32, 73, 125 Blue (Conservative, Calming, Stability)
2. RGB= 55, 121, 52 Green (Growth, Environment, Freshness)
3. RGB= 148, 54, 52 Red (Energy, Excitement, Risk)

> **Insider Tip:** In Word, from the "Home" tab, click the "Font Color" drop down tab and choose "More Colors". From there, choose "Custom Colors" and enter the RGB values.

Principle #4 - Use white space.

Make sure you use white space effectively to enhance the readability of your document. Ample white space between sections will keep your resume from looking too text heavy and crowded. White space allows your reader the visual space to pause and process your information. Too much white space will give the impression that you're lacking in related skills and experience.

Principle #5 - Apply style to your text in a consistent manner.

Use bold, underlined, or italicized fonts and indent your text in consistent ways to add emphasis and improve the readability of your resume. All caps, horizontal lines, borders and tables can also be used to highlight your content.

Principle #6 - Use bullet point symbols.

Bullet symbols are a great way to highlight content in your resume such as achievements or other items that might be in a short list. You don't want all of your text to be bulleted though as this will diminish the effect and the resume will lose readability and sense of flow. You can use the "bullet" drop down box in the Paragraph tab in Word to help keep your use of bullets consistent. Additionally, you can choose to use the "Wingdings" font to use other bullets and manually manage your spacing.

- Diamond Bullet
- Box Bullet
- Diamond Dot Bullet
- Circle Bullet

Principle #7 - Avoid Widow and Orphan Lines.

Although you will not have large blocks of text, you still want to eliminate any widow or orphan lines on your resume. In the typesetting and publishing world, a widow line is a line of text at the end of a paragraph that begins on a new column or new page. An orphan line occurs when the beginning of a paragraph appears on one column or page with the rest of the paragraph on a separate page. Although you won't likely have multiple text columns on your resume, the same principle applies. You don't want to have one-word or two-word lines because this wastes valuable space on your resume that you need to be using for relevant and persuasive information. Consider reworking your text so that you're not wasting valuable space.

Step 3 | Develop Your Content

Principle #1 - Create an effective branding section.

The modern professional resume includes a branding section rather than an objective statement. This is the most important section of the resume and, unfortunately, is usually the most difficult to write. A well-written branding section includes a narrative summary of your career that describes your core areas of knowledge, skill and expertise. The branding section also includes a listing of knowledge, skills and expertise that focuses the hiring audience on some of the key reasons you meet their needs. Branding sections usually don't need a heading and may or may not use a branding title.

The difference between a branding section and its predecessor, the objective statement, is that the branding section focuses more on how you meet the employer's needs and the objective statement was more about you and your career goals. Objective statements also lacked substance and failed to describe specific knowledge and skills that are relevant to the hiring audience.

Insider Tip: If you're struggling to put your branding section in to words, do a quick search and print 5 current job postings that fit your interests. Then highlight the skills/knowledge/expertise that you have that match the needs of the job postings. Make sure you work these qualities into your branding section.

3.1 | Sample Branding Sections

Sample #1

SOFTWARE ENGINEER/PROGRAMMER

C++, Perl, Object Oriented Design/Development, Windows, Unix

Information systems graduate with four years of programming and application development experience. Skilled in creating error-free programs and identifying and solving system problems. Software design and development in C++, C, Java, Perl, and PHP in Windows, UNIX and Linux.

Core Strengths:

⬩ System Analysis and Design	⬩ Program Logic Development	⬩ Database Design
⬩ Web Design and Development	⬩ User Training	⬩ Software Testing

Sample #2

COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST

A self-motivated communicator who energizes teams and organizations to achieve positive public relations using effective interpersonal communication skills, project management skills, and social media outreach strategies. Strengthens client relationships through blogging, special event promotions, and engagement on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

SKILLS AND TECHNICAL PROFICIENCIES

• Microsoft Office and Publisher	• Basic HTML skills	• Press Releases
• Emma marketing program	• AP writing style	• Event Planning
• Final Cut Pro video editing	• Public Speaking	• Photoshop

Principle #2 - Fully develop your academic content.

If you're an upcoming or recent college graduate you may not have a substantial body of work experience to highlight. If that's the case, focus on developing your educational content as much as possible.

- Include your GPA if it is 3.0 or higher
- List scholarships, awards and academic achievements
- List research and presentations
- Include campus leadership and involvement
- Include study abroad experiences
- Include a table (usually 3x3 items or longer) of related courses

Make sure you have your exact degree title, major, minor and concentration (if applicable) listed correctly. If you have extensive content in one or more areas under your education section, you may need to create a separate section for that content.

Principle #3 - Develop content for your experience section.

Write your experience section with the focus on skills used and results achieved rather than just listing duties. Make sure you're being descriptive when conveying the results you achieved or projects to which you contributed. Quantify whenever possible.

Ask yourself these questions:

- What problems did you solve?
- What revenue did you generate?
- What expenses did you reduce?
- What projects did you complete?
- Did you make any improvements to operations?
- Did you develop new ideas that were successfully implemented?
- What were you commended for doing well?

There is a definite art to writing effective content about your previous experience. It needs to be dynamic, results-focused and descriptive enough while still being efficient.

If you have space, you might include a one-line or two-line description of the employer and a one-line or two-line description of your role at the company. This approach will help you focus on skills and results for your bullet points.

Principle #4 - Write with dynamic rather than passive language.

Avoid phrases that are focused on duties and use more dynamic action verbs to describe your experience.

Passive	Dynamic Action Words
Responsible for	Planned and implemented
Duties included	Designed and launched

Principle #5 - Quantify when possible.

Use any numbers or metrics you can to show your performance and results.

Sales, profits, expense reduction?   Percentage increase in measurable?   Performance goals met?

Comparison to peers or competitors? Project outcomes and timelines?   Annual review metrics?

250+ Key verbs you can use to add more dynamic language to your resume and career correspondence

3.2 | Key Verbs

Accelerate	Accomplish	Achieve	Acquire
Advance	Advise	Advocate	Align
Alter	Analyze	Anchor	Appraised
Approved	Architect	Arrange	Arbitrate
Articulate	Assess	Audit	Augment
Author	Balance	Back	Brainstorm
Brief	Budget	Capitalize	Centralize
Chair	Champion	Change	Charter
Coach	Collaborate	Compel	Compose
Consolidate	Construct	Consult	Continue
Contract	Convert	Coordinate	Counsel
Craft	Critique	Cut	Define
Deliver	Delegate	Design	Detect
Determine	Develop	Devise	Diagnose
Direct	Discern	Discover	Dispense
Display	Distinguish	Distribute	Diversify
Double	Downsize	Draft	Drive
Edit	Educate	Effect	Eliminate
Enable	Enact	Encourage	Endeavor
Endorse	Energize	Enforce	Engineer
Enhance	Enliven	Entrench	Equalize
Establish	Evaluate	Examine	Exceed
Execute	Exhibit	Expand	Expedite
Export	Extricate	Facilitate	Fashion
Finance	Focus	Formalize	Formulate
Foster	Fund	Further	Gain
Generate	Guide	Halt	Handle
Head	Help	Hire	Honor
Identify	Illustrate	Implement	Improve
Increase	Influence	Inform	Initiate
Innovate	Inspect	Install	Institute
Instruct	Intensify	Interview	Introduce
Inventory	Investigate	Judge	Justify

3.2 | Key Verbs

Launch	Lead	Leverage	Liaise
License	Listen	Locate	Lower
Maintain	Manage	Map	Market
Master	Maximize	Measure	Merge
Minimize	Model	Modify	Monetize
Motivate	Navigate	Negotiate	Network
Nourish	Obtain	Observe	Operate
Orchestrate	Organize	Optimize	Orient
Outsource	Overcome	Overhaul	Perceive
Perfect	Perform	Persuade	Pinpoint
Pioneer	Plan	Position	Predict
Prepare	Present	Process	Produce
Program	Promote	Propel	Propose
Prospect	Provide	Publish	Purchase
Qualify	Quantify	Question	Rate
Ratify	Rebuild	Receive	Recognize
Reconcile	Record	Recruit	Recycle
Redesign	Reduce	Reengineer	Regain
Regulate	Rejuvenate	Render	Renew
Renovate	Report	Reposition	Represent
Restructure	Retrieve	Revise	Revitalize
Save	Schedule	Screen	Serve
Settle	Shape	Shepherd	Slash
Solidify	Spark	Speak	Start
Stimulate	Streamline	Strategize	Structure
Succeed	Suggest	Summarize	Supervise
Supplement	Synthesize	Target	Teach
Test	Total	Track	Train
Translate	Troubleshoot	Unify	Upgrade
Upsize	Use	Validate	Verify
Watch	Win	Work	Write

Step 4 | Final Review and Conversion to Web Ready Format

Principle #1 - Proofread by multiple people.
Find two or three people and have them review your resume before you send the final version to an employer or contact. Have them critique your content for effectiveness. Also look at the details of spelling, grammar, punctuation and the consistency and appeal of the format/design.

4.1 | Final Checklist for Resume Quality

☐ Is your resume visually appealing and easily readable in just a few seconds on the first pass?
☐ Are you clearly communicating who you are and your core skills relative to your hiring audience's needs?
☐ Review actual job postings of interest one more time.
☐ Is there any important content that's missing?
☐ Is there any content that needs to be deleted or reorganized?
☐ Is the design consistent and the format well-organized?
☐ Is the Experience section focused on skills and results rather than job duties?
☐ Is the resume specific and descriptive while still being concise?

Principle #2 - Save two copies, a Word document and a PDF.
Save your final copy as a Word document but do not submit this to an employer or contact unless specifically requested to do so. Instead, save another copy as a PDF file. This will eliminate most compatibility issues across platforms and applications. Additionally, this allows you more fonts to work with since the PDF saves the fonts to the file, which means that your reader's computer or tablet does not have to have those fonts in order to be viewed as you intended.

Principle #3 - Create a text only resume for submission to web based applications.
Many job listing databases and company applications are now available on the Web, which is great. However, when you submit your resume in whole or part to a text box on the Web, you'll need to have a "text only" resume ready to go. This means that all your hard work on the design elements of your resume will now be stripped out!

Follow these steps and you'll be ready to cut and paste your text resume to online databases quickly and efficiently.

1. Open the final version of your Word document file. "Select All" then choose the "Copy" command.
2. Open Notepad on your PC or TextEdit on your Mac. Then choose the "Paste" command.
3. Review the resume and remove any unusual characters and fix spacing and format problems.
4. Add blank lines to improve the readability.
5. Use keyboard characters to deliver "text only" formatting. This might mean ALL CAPS for headings or using characters like ∗∗∗, (___), >, <, #, +, ˆ to help highlight your content.
6. Save this "text only" version of your resume and have 2-3 people proofread for you.

For individual assitance with your resume, contact the

MTSU Career Development Center Peer Career Advisors at *pca@mtsu.edu*

For resume examples see our website: *www.mtsu.edu/career*