

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO RESUME WRITING FOR NURSING STUDENTS AND ALUMNI

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INTRODUCTION

A human resources assistant at the hospital for which you would like to work has begun to check her email. She's received 100 this afternoon, all with resumes attached. Forty of the resumes are for the same nursing position for which you have applied. She'll also have to collect those in the mail and fax machine—close to 150 in all.

She is the first to review the resumes. Her job is to scan each one in a computerized database. She'll then query the database based on specific key words identified by the nursing supervisor. Those resumes that meet the requirements will be forwarded to the human resources manager for further review. Those who submitted resumes that don't meet the criteria will get a polite rejection letter—or hear nothing at all.

In other hospitals or health care organizations that do not use a database, a staff person will visually scan each resume to see if minimum qualifications are met. On average, he'll spend 10-20 seconds screening each one. In these organizations, your employment future depends on a favorable first impression from an overworked human resources staff member.

These scenarios are not unlikely. If your resume doesn't capture the immediate attention of the person or computer screening it, you may not be interviewed for the position—even if you have the required experience. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to increase the likelihood that your resume will get a second look. The purpose of this guide is to help you create a resume that keeps you in the running. That is, it motivates a potential employer to call you in for an interview.

WHAT IS A RESUME?

Of course, a resume is a marketing tool that sells a product—you! It must convince potential employers to learn more about you. They must believe that you have the skills to be a successful nurse. A winning resume generates a positive message about your experience and doesn't raise questions or confuse the reader.

The function of a resume has changed significantly in the past few years. It has gone from simply a listing of job responsibilities to a document that focuses on what you have accomplished. Your resume must describe what you can do. Have you treated critically ill patients? Can you demonstrate that you can work well under increasing pressure? Have you developed new health programs? The hiring manager has to see how your previous accomplishments are relevant to her needs. If she sees a link, chances are you will be called in for an interview.

TARGETED, REVERSE CHRONOLOGICAL RESUMES

Although there are many types of resumes, this guide will focus on targeted, reverse chronological resumes as they best communicate an individual's skills and accomplishments. This type of resume provides an overview of your background and also outlines specific accomplishments and experiences.

Remember, the person reading your resume has a problem. Your job is to demonstrate that you have the requisite skills to meet their needs. A targeted, reverse chronological resume is the best way to achieve this objective.

We recommend that you develop several resumes that are individually targeted to the positions you are seeking. Doing so will increase the likelihood that your resume will include related skills. It is more effective to have several targeted resumes that focus on specific positions than one that is too broad and vague. We recommend that you develop a template and adapt it according to the positions for which you are applying.

WHAT'S IN A RESUME?

Resumes should include the following:

Caption: This section includes your name, address, home telephone number and personal email address. The caption is usually centered at the top of the page. If necessary, include **permanent** and **current** addresses if you think that you might move during your search. Type your name in boldface at 13-14 points.

Objective Statement: A good objective clearly states what you want and what you can do. It is concise without being restrictive. Most importantly, it is specifically related to the position you are seeking. Here is an example of a poorly-written objective statement that does not communicate any helpful information about what the job seeker wants:

Challenging position where I can grow professionally and help others

Here is an example of a targeted, well-written objective statement:

RN position in pediatric critical care unit

You do not need an objective statement if you are not seeking a position in a specific care area.

Qualifications Summary: A qualifications summary--rarely used five years ago--has become very common. In 5 -10 lines, it describes broad skills and highlights how they relate to the position you are seeking. It is a teaser that encourages the reader to learn more about you by reading the rest of your resume. (Recent nursing graduates may choose not to include a qualifications summary. It may appear redundant if your qualification summary repeats the experience included in your education and professional experience sections.)

If you choose to include a qualifications summary, it should be brief and focused, and incorporate phrases that pique the reader's attention. When writing your qualifications summary, be sure to:

- Summarize your abilities in 3-5 categories or functional skill sets.
- Include only the skills you wish to emphasize for the position you are seeking.
- Write this section as a broad overview. Specific examples that demonstrate your abilities should be outlined in the **Professional Experience** section of your resume.
- Include key words (usually nouns) that can be incorporated in a search

For example:

- Nursing experience including clinical rotations in episodic care, maternal and newborn, pediatrics, medical/surgical, psychiatric, community health
- Extensive experience with children and adolescents as school teacher and youth group leader
- Managerial experience including small business ownership specializing in customer service

Heading: Following the qualifications summary, headings define information sections that describe your unique skills and experience. Headings for reverse chronological resumes may include, but are not limited to: **Professional Experience, Education, Professional Organizations, and Volunteer or Community Experience.**

All headings should stand out on the resume and be consistent, using same typeface, boldness or capitalization.

Headlines: In the **professional experience** section of your resume, the headlines explain the where and when of your experience. In a reverse chronological resume, one should have several headlines under work experience--one for each relevant place of employment. For example, the headlines might be:

Child Life Intern, Mount Washington Pediatric Hospital, Baltimore, MD,
summer 1997

Loyola College of Maryland, Athletic Department, Baltimore, MD, September
1995-97
Student Trainer

The job title need not be first. Choose the information that you would like to emphasize. Whatever you choose, be consistent. If you start with a job title, always list the job title first. (However, don't start with years of employment; list that last.)

In the **education** section, consider the following format:

Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing, Baltimore, MD
Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree candidate, expected May 1999

Ripon College, Ripon, WI, 2000
Major: Psychology

Include undergraduate GPA if above 3.5 and graduate GPA if above 3.75. The education section should be listed before your professional experience if you are changing careers and your education is directly related to the position you are seeking.

If you have a **volunteer experience** section, consider this format:

Member, Board of Directors, Raisin Street Country Day School,
1994-pres.

Include your volunteer experience if it is related to the positions you are seeking, particularly if you have held leadership positions.

Professional Experience: Include all experience related to nursing in this section, such as internships, part-time nursing assistantships, research projects. Of course, you may have others. It is acceptable to include experience that is not paid since this section is called Professional Experience and not Work Experience.

A common mistake made by many resume writers is the inclusion of all work experience whether or not it is relevant to the nursing positions being sought. You don't need to include early positions if they are entry-level or not relevant to nursing.

Bulleted Statements: Well-written bulleted statements are a critical component of the professional experience section of your resume. They tell the reader what you have accomplished. When writing these statements, remember to:

- begin with action words (see page 13)
- emphasize skills/experience, type of patients, tasks completed

Bulleted statements, although they take up more space on a resume, are much easier to read than paragraphs. Remember to place the most relevant entries first. Often, the last few lines of a resume are not read at all.

Other relevant experience: If appropriate, you may choose to include other information. Consider the following headings: professional memberships, publications/presentations, security clearances, language skills, and volunteer/community experience. Focus on those that support your career goal.

Honors, Awards: Include honors and awards if they are unique, fairly recent, and ideally relevant to your education and career goals.

WRITING YOUR RESUME

Writing your resume should be one of the last activities of a thoughtful, personal career assessment. Only after you clarify your career goals can you write a concise, focused resume. If you are comfortable with your career plan and know what positions you are seeking, you are ready to begin your resume.

Preparation: Gather everything that you will need in a quiet, comfortable work place. Be sure to have: a pad of paper, pens/pencils, or computer--whatever is easiest for you to use; a dictionary and thesaurus; your most recent resume and job descriptions; and this guide. Prepare to work for a few hours.

Writing: Use the resume worksheets that follow as a guide. Make additional copies if necessary. Begin with the easy part--the caption. List your name, address, home telephone number and personal email address. List your places of employment next. Be sure to include job title, dates of employment and location.

If you want to include an Objective, write a concise statement that focuses on the type of position you are seeking and the environment

If you have a Qualifications Summary section, identify what functional areas you want to include. Which of your skill sets best match the requirements of the position you are seeking? Select three to five and provide an overview that broadly describes your skills in these areas. You may also want to include computer and language skills as well.

Now, begin to write your bulleted statements. List by employer the tasks that you have completed in each position. Continually ask yourself, "Is this relevant to the position for which I would like to be hired?" If you think it definitely does not match, do not include it. If you are not sure, leave it in. You can always edit later.

Remember to use action verbs in your entries. Terms like "responsible for" or "participated in" do not strengthen your resume. Select from the list of action verbs provided in this guide. Add others that are more appropriate to your objective. Once you have completed listing your entries, add your educational background, professional memberships, volunteer experience, etc.

When this is completed, you can now write a first draft of your resume. Use the template as a guide. To do this, simply reorder the resume work sheet that you have completed. This will be easy to do by computer, if not, then cut and paste.

Refining/next steps: Congratulations!! You have just completed the most difficult part of writing a resume. Now, you should plan to edit and refine your draft. It may be helpful to put this draft of your resume down for a day or two. Looking at it with fresh eyes may make editing it easier. This is a terrific time to have your resume critiqued by the SON career consultant. Half-hour resume critiques--which are free of charge to SON students--can be arranged. You can meet in person or, if more convenient, send us a copy of your resume, and we'll be happy to critique it by telephone.

Your resume will be reviewed and you'll be given suggestions regarding style, content, and organization. This step may mean the difference between getting a call for an

interview or receiving a polite rejection letter. You can arrange this by calling 410-955-7548 or emailing klambert@son.jhmi.edu.

TIPS FOR SCANNABLE RESUMES

Consider these guidelines as you write your scannable resume:

- Begin with a keyword summary or qualifications summary. Use nouns to highlight your qualifications. Once your resume has been scanned to a database, a search is performed using key nouns. Your keyword summary or qualifications summary should contain the selected words related to the position you are seeking.
- Avoid use of italics, underlined text, graphics, and shading. Use horizontal and vertical lines sparingly.
- Avoid fancy serif fonts. Instead use Times New Roman or Helvetica with a size of 11 points. Limit your lines to 70-80 characters per line.
- Use bold, capitalization and indentations carefully. Use bullets or dashes, not plus signs or asterisks, to emphasize phrases.
- Don't use acronyms unless they are spelled out the first time used.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

Consider these suggestions as refine your resume.

- Use a 1-inch margin throughout.
- Don't force your resume onto one page but don't go beyond two. Any more will not be read. If you use a second page, be sure to include your name and page number in the upper left-hand corner.
- Do not include irrelevant information. Employers do not need to know your weight, height, age, or marital status. Besides, it's illegal for an employer to ask these questions.
- Do not include salary information in your resume.
- Keep bulleted statements short and use them rather than complete sentences.
- Do not use "the", "a", "an" or other articles throughout your resume.
- Keep most important information along the left margin and closest to the beginning of each section of your resume.
- Use capitalization and bold throughout the resume to highlight important information. Don't overdo it - and be consistent.
- Proofread! Proofread! Proofread! Do not send out your resume if there are any typographical errors. That alone could eliminate you from further review.
- Use a high quality bond paper. (Crane's Crest is best). Be sure to purchase matching envelopes and personalized note cards as well. Reproduce professionally or use a laser printer.

- Never staple your resume. Use a paperclip instead.
- Never fold your resume. Use a 9"x12" envelope.

Action Verbs

Achieve	Define	Judge	Repair
Administer	Delegate	Lead	Represent
Advise	Deliver	Lecture	Research
Analyze	Demonstrate	Maintain	Respond
Answer	Design	Manage	Restore
Apply	Determine	Measure	Retrieve
Arrange	Develop	Mediate	Review
Assemble	Devise	Modify	Revise
Assess	Diagnose	Monitor	Revitalize
Assist	Direct	Motivate	Search
Build	Distribute	Negotiate	Select
Calculate	Edit	Obtain	Sell
Categorize	Eliminate	Offer	Serve
Chart	Establish	Operate	Simplify
Classify	Estimate	Order	Solve
Coach	Evaluate	Organize	Spearhead
Code	Examine	Outline	Speculate
Collaborate	Expand	Perform	Sponsor
Collect	Explain	Persuade	Study
Communicate	Formulate	Plan	Succeed
Compile	Gather	Prepare	Summarize
Complete	Generate	Prescribe	Supervise
Compose	Guide	Present	Supply
Compound	Handle	Process	Support
Compute	Help	Produce	Synthesize
Conduct	Identify	Promote	Teach
Confer	Illustrate	Protect	Test
Conserve	Implement	Prove	Train
Consolidate	Improve	Provide	Translate
Construct	Increase	Realize	Troubleshoot
Consult	Initiate	Receive	Tutor
Contact	Install	Recommend	Unite
Contribute	Institute	Record	Utilize
Control	Instruct	Recruit	Verify
Coordinate	Interact	Reduce	Volunteer
Copy	Interpret	Refer	Write
Correspond	Interview	Regulate	
Counsel	Invest	Relate	
Create	Investigate	Reorganize	

Chronological Resume Worksheet

Caption:

Name _____

Address _____

Home phone _____

Personal email _____

Objective

Qualifications summary

Education

Current degree program, name of school, year degree expected

Previous degrees, titles, years degrees awarded (in reverse chronological order - masters and bachelors degrees first).

Professional experience

Employer _____

Position _____

Location _____ Dates of employment _____

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Second most recent employer _____

Position _____

Location _____ Dates of Employment _____

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Third most recent employer _____

Position _____

Location _____ Dates of Employment _____

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

(List more if necessary)

Other information (choose those that are most appropriate)

Professional memberships, date of membership, office held (if appropriate)

Volunteer activities, name of organization, date of participation, office held, type of activities

Additional Resources

These books are available in the SON library and can be borrowed overnight.

Bozell, J. (1999). *Anatomy of a Job Search: A Nurse's Guide to Finding and Landing the Job youWant*. Springhouse, PA: Springhouse Corporation.

Cardillo, D.W. (2001). *Your 1st Year as a Nurse: Making the Transition from Total Novice to Successful Professional*. Roseville Publishing: Prima Publishing.

Case, B. (1997). *Career Planning for Nurses*. Albany, NY: Delmar Publishers. (This book is excellent – an amazing resource for nursing students and nurses alike. We recommend that it is on all nurse's bookshelves.)

Dunne, G.D., (2002). *The Nursing Job Search Handbook*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Newell, M. and Pinardo, M. (1998). *Reinventing your Nursing Career: A Handbook for success in the Age of Managed Care*. Gaithersburg, MD: Aspen Publishers, Inc.

Vallano, A. (1999). *Careers in Nursing: Manage your Future in the Changing World of Healthcare*. New York: Kaplan Books.