New Mexico Career Prospects

Resources for Informed Career Exploration and Planning

Completing Resumes, Cover Letters, and Job Applications

Your resume, cover letter, and job application are important tools in your job search and may often be the first contact you have with an employer. The sole purpose of sending the resume and a cover letter or completing a job application is to land an interview, so it is important that you make a good first impression. Your resume should present your skills, experience, education, and achievements in a manner that captures the employer's attention and makes you stand out from the crowd. While there is no guarantee that a good resume will get you a job, a bad one is likely to eliminate you from consideration. A poorly completed job application may omit skills or experience that an employer seeks.

Resumes

No single resume layout will suit every jobseeker, but here are some standard resume categories:

Personal Information: Your resume must include your name, address, telephone number(s) and e-mail address if you have one. This information should be listed at the top of your resume and presented in a professional manner that excludes the use of nicknames and abbreviations (such as "St." for "Street"). Be sure to include an alternate or "message" telephone number if your home telephone is not connected to an answering machine.

Job/Career Objective: An effective objective is one that identifies the type of job you are seeking and the skills you can offer a prospective employer. Your objective should be brief and specific to enable the employer to immediately see how you would contribute to the organization's future success. The objective is an optional component of your resume and is most relevant if you are applying for a specific job or have a clear career goal in mind. If the objective seems too targeted and you want to emphasize a broader range of accomplishments, you may consider using a summary of qualifications instead.

Summary of Qualifications: Employers and recruiters typically spend less than ten seconds initially screening a resume, so highlighting your qualifications early on the page can greatly improve your chances of consideration. A summary of qualifications is a list of short phrases that amplify the most important parts of your overall resume and focus attention on key accomplishments.

Body of Resume: The education section of your resume need not be excessively detailed but should include any credentials that are required for the position you are seeking. You may consider excluding the education section if it does not support your job objective or if you lack the required educational credentials. If you are assembling a chronological resume, your work experience comes next with employment listed in reverse order (most recent first). Your resume should highlight the job skills you enjoy using and would want to use in your next job. Try to showcase your achievements rather than simply listing descriptions of the jobs you've held. Using a functional format requires that relevant skill category summaries be listed next, while the combination format includes both chronological listings and skill category summaries.

Additional Headings: Additional headings such as military or volunteer experience may be listed as separate sections and should be included in your resume if they provide evidence of your qualifications for the position. You may also choose to list activities with job-related professional groups or any formal recognition (awards, etc.) you have received for academic or professional achievements that further demonstrate your qualifications.

References: References should not be included on your resume but should be listed on a separate sheet that you can mail or fax to an employer and take to interviews. It is not necessary to state "references available upon request" on your resume, since it is assumed that you will provide them. Type your name and contact information at the top of the reference sheet, and list the names, titles, addresses, and phone numbers of several people that know your abilities as an employee, volunteer, or student and will speak highly of you.

As with layouts, no single format suits the needs of every jobseeker. Some common resume categories are shown below.

Chronological: The chronological resume lists employment and employment-related experiences from the most recent backwards. This is the simplest resume form and is most effective for those with a steady work record that includes a logical progression of jobs and assignments.

Functional: The functional resume organizes experiences into major skill categories to highlight accomplishments without identifying specific dates, names, and places. This approach may be advantageous for first-time job seekers, career changers, and those with gaps in their work histories.

Combination: The combination resume features a functional section to highlight accomplishments, along with a chronological section that lists employment, education, and employment-related experiences. This format enables the job seeker to emphasize skill areas but still satisfy the employer's desire for names and dates of employment.

RESUME TIPS:

- Be concise (1 to 2 pages)
- Be honest
- Use only 8 ½" x 11" white or off-white quality paper
- Use a simple, easy to read font
- Pay careful attention to spelling, grammar, and punctuation
- Use action verbs
- Emphasize relevant skills and accomplishments

COMMON RESUME MISTAKES:

- Grammatical errors or typos
- Long, dense paragraphs
- Personal information not relevant to the job
- Missing or inaccurate dates or contact information
- Unprofessional email addresses
- Elaborating more on older jobs than recent jobs

- **Electronic Resumes (e-resumes):** The electronic resume is designed specifically for use on and by computers. Good e-resume have some things in common, they can be sent as an attachment to an e-mail, posted to a job board on the Internet, searched for keywords, easily converted to other file formats, and printed as needed. Most information technology jobs now require e-resumes, and many companies like to use them as a way to determine if applicants have basic computer skills.

  Your selection of keywords used in your resume is critical to the successful electronic search of your e-resume. Database systems use search engines to look for keywords associated with particular job openings. Keywords vary from one job opening to another, depending on what the job opening requires. Keywords in your resume are nuggets of information about technical and management skills, past projects and employment history, education and training, and other items of importance to the company.

Cover Letters

You should include a cover letter whenever you mail, fax, or e-mail your resume. The cover letter is your opportunity to express interest in the company and explain what you can contribute to the team. The letter should be written in standard business format and tailored to the specific position in question.

The following are basic guidelines for writing an effective cover letter:

- Limit the letter to one page or less.
- Use the same type of paper for both your cover letter and resume.
- Address the letter to a specific person rather than a generic title or office.
- Show that you have researched the company in advance.
- Describe the skills that qualify you for the position.
- Keep the tone of the letter completely positive.
- Ask for an interview and state that you will call to follow up.
- Thank the person for taking the time to read your letter.
- Sign the letter in blue ink to indicate it is an original.
- Ask someone to proofread your letter to eliminate any typos or errors.

1. **Make a personal connection**.
   Establish a personal connection with the reader of your letter as quickly as possible.

2. **Show personality**.
   Give the employer a sense of your personality through your writing style, direct statements about your character, or testimonial references.

3. **Initiate action.**
   Understand what you would like the employer to do as a result of your letter — and ask him or her to do it.

4. **Make it quick and easy to read**.
   Format your one-page letter using short paragraphs, bullet points, and white space to make your letter look quick and easy to read.

Job Applications

Most employers require that a prospective employee complete a job application. Application forms are generally designed to provide specific information of interest to the employer and usually contain questions about your background, education, experience, references, and reasons for leaving previous jobs. Some of the information on the application is used to evaluate you as a job applicant, while some of the information is useful to personnel managers for tracking and record keeping.

Here are some tips for completing an application form:

- Request two copies of the form so you can prepare a rough draft first.
- Read through the entire form at least once before you begin to complete it.
- Follow all instructions carefully.
- Be honest in your answers.
- Type your responses or print neatly using use blue or black ink.
- Apply for a specific position rather than entering "anything" or "open."
- Complete all sections; write "N/A" when the requested information does not apply to you.
- Provide reliable references.
- Sign and date the application.
- Check grammar, spelling, and punctuation before submitting completed form.
- Be sure the application reaches the employer by the closing date.

Pocket Resume

This information is often asked for at a job interview. Fill it out completely and take it with you for reference.

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Drivers License # _____

Social Security # _____

EDUCATION

School _____

Address _____

Major Subjects _____

Dates _____

- -

PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT

_____	_____
Name of Employer	Name of Employer
_____	_____
Address	Address
_____	_____
Phone Number	Phone Number
_____	_____
Job Title	Job Title
_____	_____
Dates	Dates

- -

REFERENCES

Get permission before using names.

_____	_____
Name	Name
_____	_____
Address	Address
_____	_____
Phone Number	Phone Number

OTHER SKILLS

Computer/Trade _____

Military Service _____
Branch and Dates

Pocket Resume - The Job Interview

PREPARATION

- ✓ Fill out this Pocket Resume and take it with you.
- ✓ Learn as much as you can about the company.
- ✓ Know what skills are needed for the job you want.
- ✓ Evaluate yourself and review your qualifications.
- ✓ Be prepared to answer questions.

QUESTIONS

The employer may ask you:

- Tell me about yourself?
- What are your career goals?
- Why do you want to work for us?
- Why would we want to hire you?
- What are your strengths/weaknesses?

You may want to ask the employer:

- How will I be trained?
- Who will I be working with and what do they do?
- Where will I be working?
- What career opportunities are available?

INTERVIEW

Your appearance:

- ✓ Well groomed—take a shower, wash your hair, shave, brush your teeth, use mouthwash/deodorant, comb your hair, trim and clean your nails.
- ✓ Wear clean, pressed, appropriate clothes.
- ✓ Evaluate yourself—would you hire someone like you?

Interview:

- ✓ Show up on time and alone.
- ✓ Have a positive attitude and be polite.
- ✓ Answer all questions truthfully and honestly.
- ✓ Maintain eye contact.
- ✓ Always shake hands before and after the interview.