

LAB 3: RÉSUMÉ PROJECT

A résumé is a heavily formatted document, and creating one will put all of your formatting skills to the test.

GUIDELINES

There is no end to the bad advice on what a résumé should contain and what it should look like. Your local library has numerous books on the topic, most of which can be taken with a grain of salt. Everyone has an opinion; everyone is an expert. As Donald Gannon said, “Where facts are few, experts are many.” With résumés, facts are few, indeed. There are only three, but three are all we need:

1. Your résumé is a form of advertising. That’s all.
2. In advertising, content doesn’t matter if the appearance isn’t right.
3. In résumé writing, as in all information management, we don’t give the customer what we think they should have; we give them what they need, when they need it, in the form that they need it.

These three facts underlie these ten common sense rules:

Rule #1: Make it perfect. Really, really good is not really good enough. When screeners read your résumé, they are looking for a reason to reject it. Good jobs get hundreds, even thousands, of applicants. The look of the résumé is the first cut.

Careless spelling, capitalization, grammar, and punctuation errors will bounce your résumé off the ceiling, off the file cabinet, and into the trash, with nothing but net. One of the most common errors is random capitalization, which some people pursue with Germanic intensity. Avoid abbreviations. For example, spell out state names, except for your postal address. Not everyone is clear that MA is not Maine, nor AK, Alaska. Io is between Jupiter and Europa, not between Minnesota and Missouri.

Foolish as it seems, some Human Resource (HR) professionals discard résumés if they are printed upside-down relative to the paper’s watermark.

It is, of course, amazing to consider that an HR staffer would reject a résumé from Einstein if it had a typo. The logic—to the extent that there is any at all—

is that if he wasn’t careful about his résumé, how careful would he be with the atomic bomb?

There is a better explanation, though. Interviewing candidates is tedious and time-consuming. Typically, HR will weed through dozens, or even hundreds of résumés, referring the three or four best matches for interviews. Now, let’s say that you are my HR person and you have referred three candidates to me. The first interview was fine, the second, interesting, but the third was a train wreck. I call you into my office and ask, “how in the world could you recommend this person? Why look at this résumé! It’s full of errors, yet you passed this clown on to me.” You would have little to say for yourself, and the blame for this fiasco would be placed in my mental file.

From that point on, you would never refer someone to me whose résumé was less than perfect, because of this ever happened again, and I asked “how in the world could you recommend this person,” you would say “well, the résumé looked fantastic.” You’d be right—and, most importantly, you wouldn’t be blamed.

Rule #2: Make it sizzle. There is an old adage in advertising: “Sell the sizzle, not the steak.” Most résumés do not sizzle. Reading most résumés is like reading the ingredients on a cereal box. Like any good ad, every line, every word, every syllable must work to sell the product—you. Strip the passive voice and fluffery. Use action verbs. You can omit most indefinite articles (“a,” “an,” and “the”) to add punch and clarity.

Use specifics and numbers—such as money saved or targets met—to demonstrate tangible results. If you can’t quantify it and document it, you didn’t do it.

A common problem making your résumé sound like a job description instead of a précis of achievement. If you list job duties, your résumé will look just like the one from that dope sitting next to you. Avoid any phrase that begins, “Responsible for....” or “Participated in....” or “Performed...” and so on. These verbs say nothing.

Differentiate yourself by demonstrating leadership, achievement, and tangible results. Past success is one

predictor—perhaps the best predictor—of future success. As in all ad copy, stress benefits, not features.

Your résumé is *not* supposed to get you hired. It is supposed to motivate a prospective employer to interview you. Anything more than that is gravy. Anything less is meaningless.

Rule #3: Limit it to one page. You can advertise a BMW on one page. You can advertise a house in one page. Unless you are in a field like academia, where curricula vitae are graded by weight, you can advertise yourself in one page, too. If you can't get their attention in one page, you won't keep it for two.¹

Many companies scan paper résumés into an optical character reader so that a computer can rank your suitability, based on key words that appear. One page may be all you get. If you have a long list of publications, patents, awards, or something similar, create a separate sheet and include it as an addendum.

Probably the best reason for this rule is that it imposes a certain discipline on the writer. If you limit it to one page, you might actually have to eliminate the passive-voice, pretentious adjectives, jargon, and half-truths that bloat most résumés.

Every word is there to sell you. Some place an Objective or Summary section near the top. Leave it out; it's a small mind indeed that doesn't know what it will say in advance.

Consider this: if you were applying to be an Account Executive, what would your Objectives section say? Stripped of the requisite adjectival jackassery, "My objective is to apply my creativity, education, charm, and years of experience to become the best Account Executive ever." If you were applying to be a ditch-digger, what would it say? "My objective is to apply my creativity, education, charm, and years of experience to become the best ditch-digger ever."

Of course, in each case, everybody else with half a brain is writing the same thing. HR-types may be stupid, but they're not *that* stupid.

Instead, lead with your best. Put your Education section first. It's the most important, most portable, and most verifiable credential you have. Include your major and minor, awards, honors, and leadership activities. In this era of grade inflation, your grade-point average is probably irrelevant.

Do not list schools attended, unless the experience resulted in, or will result in, a degree or certificate. Identify the year of graduation, not the years you attended. Graduates should replace the year of graduation with year the degree will be conferred.

Eliminate those chestnuts of yesteryear, like "Hobbies" or "Other Interests." These usually do more harm than good, unless those interests are clearly related to the job for which you are applying. On the other hand, if you can demonstrate achievement through your hobbies, include them. Achievement always sells. I know that some of this sounds like I just stepped out of a motivation seminar, but it's true: people want to be associated with winners, with passion, with enthusiasm. Success is magnetic; it attracts interest.

Don't list references. Neither put references on the résumé nor say "References available on request." Of course they are! When asked for references, supply them on a separate sheet of paper. Make sure that referees will support you enthusiastically. Most companies demand that supervisors limit references to verifying job titles, dates of employment, and little else, to protect themselves from lawsuits.

Rule #4: Keep it current, even if you are happy with your present situation. The time to update your résumé is not the night before you need it.

Standards for résumés change over time. Don't read books on résumés that are more than two years old. Including your picture once was in, now it's out. Functional résumés were in, now they're out. Narratives have been replaced with bullet points. And so it goes.

Rule #5: Use a traditional chronological format. List each item in reverse chronological order in your Education and Experience sections; that is, place the most recent item first, followed by the next oldest, and so on.

You may have heard of functional résumés, which break down your experience into functional categories instead of by employer. Do not use them. Functional résumés are for people with something to hide. Whatever you want to hide is unlikely to be as damaging as the perception that you are hiding something. Two thousand years ago, Marcus Valerius Martialis observed, "Conceal a flaw, and the world will imagine the worst." It's still true.

Just because you put things in order, with the most recent first, doesn't mean you have to put it all there.

Age discrimination is rampant in the job market. There is no reason to tempt fate. Drop off items as they age. Besides, it is unlikely that something you did 20 years ago is relevant to your next job.

Rule #6: Style counts. Remember, this is advertising. Proctor & Gamble doesn't put "Zest" in the same font and font-size as its ingredients in its ads. The most important—not necessarily the most logical—becomes the most prominent. For example, in a traditional business document, headings are the most prominent, because making them stand out aids usability. But, in a résumé, headings are the least important item. Why make them bold, or ALL-CAPS, diverting attention from the things that actually matter? Here are some other guidelines:

- Avoid abbreviations. Use state abbreviations in mailing addresses only.
- Don't use an ampersand (&) as an abbreviation for "and," except in an appropriate titles.
- Don't list full dates or months for education or employment. The year is adequate.
- Remove extraneous spaces, and never—*never!*—use the space bar to position text.
- Capitalize carefully, for example, capitalize "department" when part of a proper noun, such as the Accounts Payable Department.
- Respect intellectual property when referring to registered trademarks. The general rule is to place the ® following the company name when it is used as an adjective. For example, you own stock in Microsoft, but you use Microsoft® Word. Using superscripts for the registration marks makes them less intrusive.
- Limit text to one thought per bullet-point.

Rule #7: Remember your audience. Unless you are applying for a creative position, keep the tone conservative and business-like. Do not use "I," "me," "mine," which creates a conversational, unprofessional narrative.

The first person to see it is likely to be an HR-type with little training in your field. He or she is unlikely to be technically savvy. Minimize jargon—especially the dreaded TLA's²—that can cloak your accomplishments in an impenetrable veneer of terminology. If the screener can't see the match, no one else will get the chance. This presents a challenge for people with

backgrounds in science or technology, but it can be done.

Speaking of your audience, remember, companies don't read résumés, people do. If the advertisement tells you to respond to "W. Smith," don't. Nor should you begin a cover letter with "Dear Sir or Madam" or "Dear Mr. Smith." Call and find out the person's name and gender before you type a cover letter.

Rule #8: Avoid the forbidden topics. Various state and federal laws protect applicants from discrimination on the basis of age, race, religion, marital status, ethnicity, disabilities, or political affiliation. Omit all such references, unless they are clearly *closely* related to the position. For example, don't refer to your membership in Students for Republican Values, unless you are applying for work with the Republican National Committee. Some firms discard all résumés with *any* such references to protect themselves from potential legal action. For information on these topics, consult the U.S. Department of Labor:

<http://www.dol.gov/>

Rule #9: Make it readable. Your résumé's appearance is very important. The issue is more than aesthetics. A visually appealing résumé is also more readable.

Don't write narratives—paragraphs with sentences. They make the screener work harder than he or she must. In the first cut, your résumé gets a quick glance. That's all. Make it count. Use bullet-points to add a polished look, while drawing your achievements into sharper focus.

If you send a hard-copy, use high-quality white or off-white cotton or linen paper. The font color should be black, using Times New Roman or Arial font. Use 10- to 12-point for the text and 14- to 16-point fonts for headings. Remember, it is likely to be scanned by machines or by people over 40—and neither deciphers micro-type very well.

Never position text with the space bar; use tabs and indents. If you don't, the hard-copy may look worse—perhaps much worse—when printed than it did on the screen. If you transmit it electronically, tabs will be consistent on the recipient's PC, but spaces won't.

Don't try to nullify **Rule #3** (the "one-page rule") by reducing your page margins to .1 inch. Most printers cannot print documents with margins set less

than .4 inch. Even then, it may look like eight pounds of potatoes stuffed in a five-pound bag. As a practical matter, do not make the margins smaller than .8 inch.

Don't use headers or footers. If the recipient opens your electronic document in Normal view or a Word reader (commonly done to thwart viruses), he or she will not see the header or footer.

Rule #10: Demonstrate success. What should go on the résumé? The answer is obvious: Does it help sell you? If it does, consider including it. If it doesn't, leave it out. This is not rocket science.

Omit the trivial or irrelevant. I'm sure your parents are very proud that you can use Microsoft® Windows and Internet Explorer, but how does that distinguish you from others? If you actually consider surfing the Web to be a notable accomplishment, you need to get out more.

A solid record of achievement, a clear record of increasing responsibilities, plus training and/or experience in the field create a match. For young people who lack a track record, the temptation to exaggerate is great, especially after suffering rejection. It should go without saying, but don't lie. The truth is amazing enough. Lying is unethical, and possibly criminal. When the lie is discovered, nothing else will matter much. That doesn't mean your résumé has to tell everything. It is *not* a summary of your life; save that for your obituary.

For everyone—especially people entering the workforce—the importance of volunteer work and internships in one's field cannot be overstated. Leadership, initiative and success are always relevant.

If, during an interview, I asked you about an area where you have had success—genuine success—you would explode with enthusiasm for the topic. Passion cannot be contained. It's true in sports, in business, in the arts, in politics, or in ditch-digging: Where there is success, there is passion. If you have passion for a topic, you will talk about it with engaging enthusiasm. If, on the other hand, you are stretching it, you will respond awkwardly, subconsciously trying to change the subject.

That's the acid test: If you can't talk about something with confidence and enthusiasm, leave it off your résumé (and out of your life).

People often make the fallacious assumption that the résumé that worked for them in the past will work for them in the future. "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," is their mantra. That's fine, if you are applying for your current job—but you are not. You may have extensive skills in an extremely complicated field, but if they aren't clearly relevant to the position for which you are applying, you must leave them off your résumé. Save them for your biographer.

THE RÉSUMÉ WIZARD


Word has a Wizard that can create a customized résumé for you. It creates terrific looking résumés, but, given the Word skills you have at this point, you may find it difficult to manipulate the resulting document by hand. The point of this exercise is not to create a document, but to develop your skills. So why, you may ask, use the Wizard at all?


- First, it introduces the idea of templates, which we will develop later.
- Second, it provides an idea of what a résumé should contain and what it should look like.

USING THE WIZARD

Step 1: From the pull-down menu, select File, New.

Step 2: On the Other Documents tab, open the Résumé Wizard icon.

Step 3: Answer the questions and click  to continue.

Step 4: When the Wizard is done, click .

Step 5: In the completed document, the Wizard provides placeholders for personalized information. Click within the placeholder, and type the relevant information.

Step 6: Save the document, and then print a copy.

The Wizard generates a regular—albeit heavily formatted—Word document. You can edit it, just as you would a document that you created from scratch. Some of the tools—text boxes, for instance—may be beyond your skill level now, making complex changes difficult.

The Wizard saves the information that you type, so if you need to use it later to create another version, you can

start the Wizard, and it will remember your name and address, in addition to the content you selected previously. This can save you a lot of time if you rely on the Wizard.

CREATING A RÉSUMÉ

Creating a résumé without the Wizard puts all of your formatting skills to the test. Let's look at some of the special problems presented.

THE INDENTING PROBLEM

One popular résumé format lists years of service on the left, with the work that you did in that period indented, as shown in Figure 262.

2010-present	Worked for a large state institution in the design and fabrication of aluminum vehicle identification tags
1999	Self-employed in the pharmaceutical field
1996-98	Supervised staff of maintenance workers along several major Texas highways
1994-96	Self-employed in fashion accessory business; specialized in appraisal and procurement

Figure 262

The chronological format lists each job, by year, with the most recent first. Here's the problem:

Step 1: Start a new document.

Step 2: Type:

2010

and press **↵** Tab .

Step 3: Type a description that is more than one line long.

- It should resemble Figure 263.

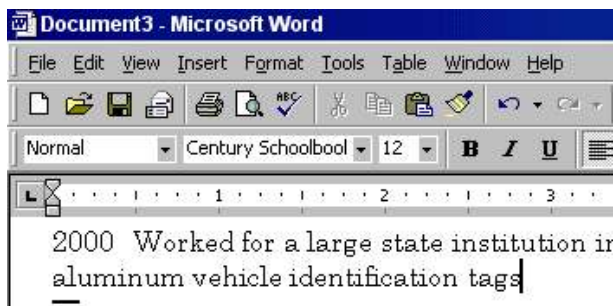


Figure 263

Step 4: Press **↵** Enter .

As you can see in Figure 264, Word has done something that you perhaps didn't expect!

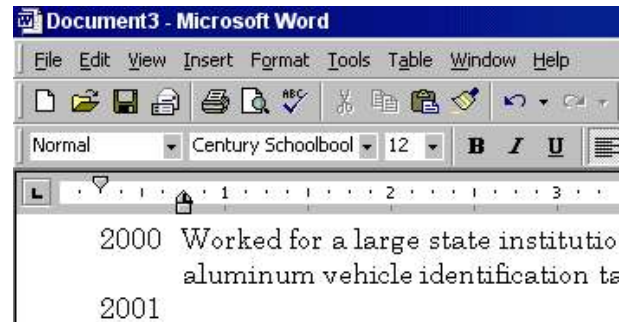


Figure 264

When you type a number, followed by **↵** Tab , Word assumes you are creating a numbered list, starting with that number—in this case, 2000. This is often helpful, but it certainly makes a mess of our résumé!

TURN OFF AUTOMATIC NUMBERING

To turn off the Automatic Numbered Lists feature:

Step 1: From the pull-down menu, select **T**ools, **A**uto-Correct.

Step 2: On the AutoFormat As You Type tab, deselect the Automatic **N**umbered Lists check box, as shown in Figure 265.

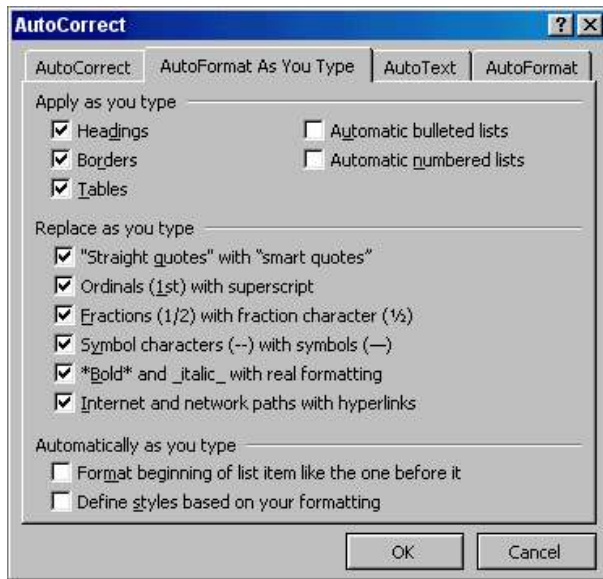


Figure 265

Step 3: Click  to apply your change and close the dialog.


TRY IT AGAIN

Now that the Automatic numbered lists feature has been turned off, let's try it again:

Step 1: Start a new document.

Step 2: Type:

2010

and press .

Step 3: Type a job description that is more than one line long.

- As before, it will look vaguely like Figure 266.

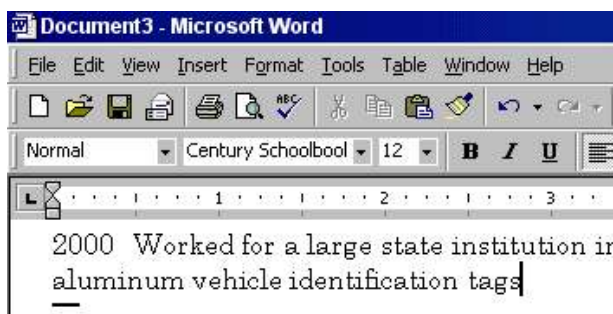



Figure 266

Step 4: Press .

- This time, you just go to a new line.

Step 5: Type:

1999

and press .

Step 6: Type another description of your duties.

Step 7: Press .

- Don't worry that the results don't look very good—we will fix things later.

Step 8: Continue in this fashion, entering several dates and duties, as shown in Figure 267.

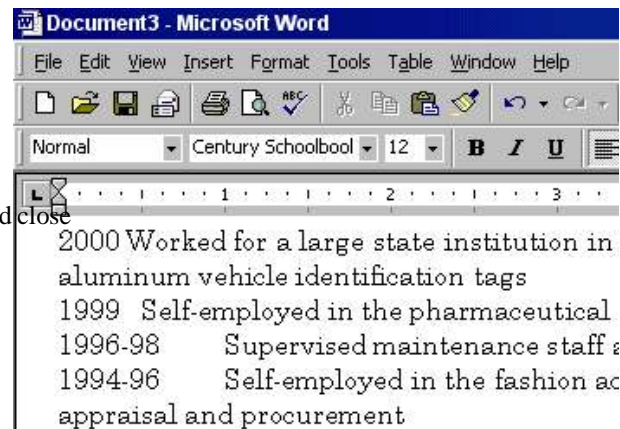



Figure 267

INDENT THE REGION

This solved the automatic numbering, but the indenting is still a mess. You see, when you pressed , you indented the text to the next tab stop—which might have been the 1/2" mark or the 1" mark. In either case, the second line of the text wrapped all the way to the left. As you compare Figure 267 to Figure 262, you can see that this is not what we wanted.

Still, we can solve this by applying the proper indentation to the existing text:

Step 1: Select the region of text that you have typed, as shown in Figure 268.

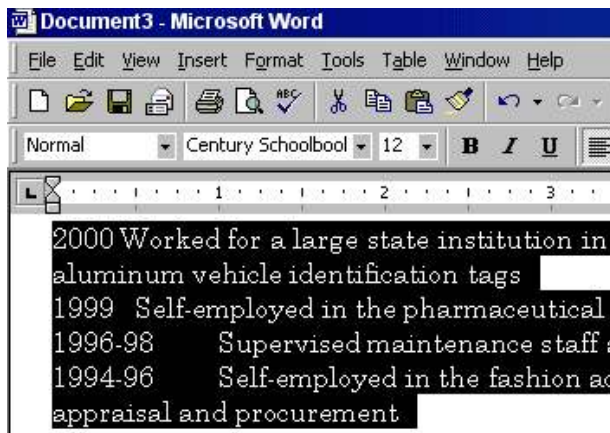


Figure 268

Step 2: Click and drag the Hanging Indent marker to the 1" mark, as shown in Figure 269.

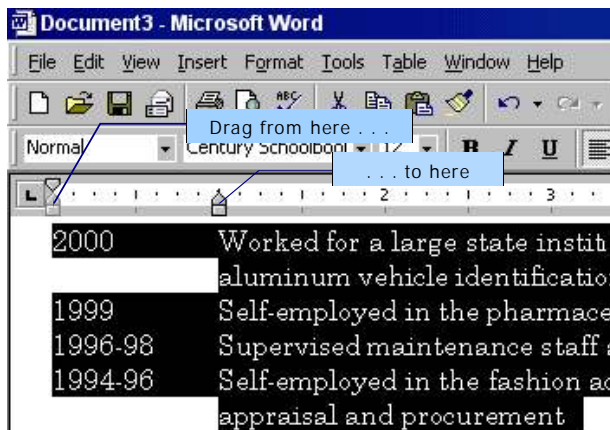


Figure 269

We can also add vertical spacing between the paragraphs:

Step 1: From the pull-down menu, select **Format**, **Paragraph**.

Step 2: On the **Indents and Spacing** tab, increase the **Spacing After** spinner control to 6 pt, as shown in Figure 270.

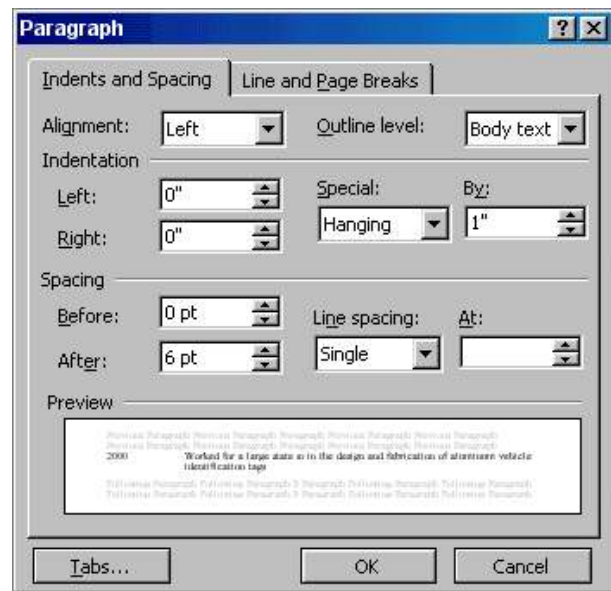


Figure 270

Step 3: Click to apply the new spacing and close the dialog.

SPELL CHECK

Of course, spelling in a résumé must be perfect, so, of course, check the spelling of your document.

Your résumé will undoubtedly be full of proper nouns and regrettable jargon. You have probably identified those words and added them to your Custom Dictionary. But what if you transmit your résumé electronically, say, as an attachment to e-mail? The person who receives the document will not have identified those words, and the result will be a screenful of red squiggles. To prevent this, use the trick we learned on page 78:

Step 1: Press to select the entire résumé.

Step 2: From the pull-down menu, select **Tools**, **Language**, **Set Language**.

Step 3: Select the **Do not check spelling or grammar** check box.

Step 4: Click .

Now the recipient will see a squiggle-free document.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

When you use a trademark in your résumé, be sure to identify it properly. There is no rule for how to do this. You can go to each firm's Web site and research the preferred reference. (There will usually be a hyperlink to legal matters on the organization's home page.) To save yourself some grief, the rule of thumb is to put the ® notation after the first mention of the trademark in an article.

Keep in mind that the "proper" way of referring to a product changes from time to time, but don't be overly concerned. Employers do not expect perfection as much as they expect that you demonstrate an understanding and respect for the concept by making a good-faith attempt at identifying trademarks. After all, the firm that hires you depends on intellectual property. Why should they hire someone who handles it carelessly?





To add the registration mark, simply type

(r)

followed by a space or punctuation. The AutoCorrect feature should turn this into ®. To convert this into a less obtrusive superscript:

Step 1: Select the ®.

Step 2: Open the Font dialog by either either:

-  press   ; or,
-  from the Home ribbon, expand the Font section.

Step 3: Select the Superscript checkbox.

Step 4: Click  .