

FOCUS on Students: Writing a Résumé

By Robert W. Vallin

A résumé is a listing of your education, skills, activities and achievements. It should be a concise history (two pages, maximum) which shows why you are qualified for a particular job. Note that a curriculum vitae (CV) is not the same as a résumé. A CV is typically used when applying for an academic or research position. Just to show one difference, a CV starts at two pages and can go on for much longer. (We will discuss how to write a CV in a future article.)

A strong résumé is important. A weak résumé will get your application thrown in the garbage bin and you will never be considered for the job.

Writing about yourself can be difficult for someone about to graduate from college. Yes, you did spend the past three years working at the library, but you fail to see how this will get you that actuarial job. To make matters worse, you just got a sample résumé from the Job Placement Center on campus and the woman in this sample was the perfect student, ran most clubs on campus, volunteered for charity work, and will probably be running a multi-billion dollar company in two years while you're working your way up to the mailroom.

Okay, now take a deep breath and relax. You can just write a functional résumé rather than an experiential résumé. That is, talk about what you know rather than what you've done. So forget about her and let's concentrate on your résumé.

The basic ingredients for a résumé are (not necessarily in order) contact information, objective, skills and experiences, and education. Contact information should include your name, regular mail and email addresses, and phone numbers. Include your personal web page URL only if the site shows off your skills related to the job. "Objective" specifies what job you are looking for. The rest is about why you should get the job. The goal is to produce a focused account alerting employers to who and what you are.

The objective should be one sentence. Make sure that it is worded clearly and is not about what you want. Instead you should be showing prospective employers what you will do for them. This is where you make your first pitch, showing them that you are who they need to hire. The objective "To obtain a job where I can teach math to middle school students" pales in comparison to "Teaching mathematics at a middle school where creativity and the ability to motivate students is needed."

If you have been interning and working in the industry, then you have the experience and should put your jobs out in front and emphasize them. That makes an experiential résumé. If, on the other hand, you don't have much relevant work experience, then you should emphasize what you've learned to do even if you haven't had a chance to take your skills out for a spin. That is a functional résumé. So tell your future employer that you took two classes in Operations Research and you can solve problems in Linear and Dynamic Programming, Queuing Theory, Game Theory and Transportation Problems, and that you are well-versed in using different software packages to find the answer to various modeling applications. This type of résumé will represent you just fine.

Writing about your education is straightforward. List your degrees in reverse chronological order (most recent first). You should include the degree, name of the institution, location of the school, major, minor, and dates attended. Only if higher than a 3.0 should you bother to include your grade point average. When you are coming right out of college, education is usually the first item on your résumé after your objective. However, as time goes on and you gain more experience, education tends to work its way down the page.

Little details can have a big (often negative) impact. Use normal margins. Making them narrow so your information will fit on one page won't fool anyone.

Nor will making them wide so the typing fills more of the page. Choose an easy-to-read font rather than a fancy one. Make sure the paper is professional. Putting your résumé on pink paper will certainly stand out: it will be the prettiest thing in the trash can.

Distinctive things (you speak a foreign language, made the Dean's list, or participated in the Mathematical Contest in Modeling) should find an appropriate place if they relate directly to the job or are a special skill or honor. The fact that you are a marathon runner should be included if you are applying to be a personal trainer. It is not important if the job is research assistant. One exception to that rule: Many employers are interested in community service. If you are involved in charity work, list it.

Reading that your email address is cutiepuppyie@hotmail.com will not have a positive impact. Open up an email account just for your job search.

Don't bother listing references. They take up space, and you don't have much. If an employer wants references, you will be asked to provide them. Two more things about references: Make sure you ask ahead of time. No one likes a surprise phone call telling them they have been listed as a source. Also, make sure this person will be a good reference. Just because you loved Dr. X's class does not mean he remembers you or that he has a favorable impression of you. Just one statement like, "When he showed up he was very attentive," or worse, "Who?" and you are sunk. Once your reference agrees to help you, a simple note or email reminding him or her of what classes you took and how you did will help jog the memory.

Spell-checkers are very nice. Most will even correct simple things as you type. However, they will not know that you didn't really mean "tow" but you wanted "two." In addition, your computer will not indicate that you are being altogether too complicated and should eschew

obfuscation. You should be concise. You do not want long sentences or extra or complicated words clogging up the paper. The solution: Use other people. At least two people, if not more, should be reading anything you send out, checking for typos, misplaced punctuation, and any of the myriad mistakes we all make.

Do not forget to write down any professional organizations to which you belong. These show a commitment to your career. If you're new to all of them, just list the names. If you have been a member for a long time, show your commitment by putting in the years. Groups you may be interested in joining include the Mathematical Association of America (MAA), the American Mathematical Society (AMS), the Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics (SIAM), the Association for Women in Mathematics (AWM), and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM).

Finally, résumés are not a “one size fits all” object. Since you are selling a product (yourself), you need to tailor each résumé to the prospective buyer (employer). Tailoring is easier than ever, since most workplaces have a web site you can browse. If you determine the specific responsibilities of the business or department you are applying to, you can make sure your résumé sells you as the person for that job.

There are lots of resources out there, both online and in print. Help writing your résumé can be found at:

Purdue University's online writing lab résumé workshop
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/workshops/hypertext/ResumeW/>.

Monster.com page of samples
<http://content.monster.com/samples/home.aspx>.

This is the first in a series of short articles for students. The overall title for the series will be **FOCUS on Students**. Some of these articles will be for undergraduates, others for graduate students, and many for all students. These articles will also be posted in the Student section of the MAA web site.

Distinctive Documents' portfolio of sample résumés
<http://www.distinctiveweb.com/samples.htm>.

Use them so you can put together the package that best fits you and gets you that job. Good Luck!

Robert W. Vallin is the MAA Associate Director for Student Programs. He welcomes questions and comments by email at rvallin@maa.org.

Attend ICME-11 in Monterrey, Mexico

The Eleventh International Congress on Mathematical Education (ICME-11) will be held in Monterrey, Mexico, on July 6–13, 2008 (see <http://www.icme-11.dk/>). Contingent on the funding of a proposal now pending at the National Science Foundation, travel grants will be available and awarded by the close of 2007. These grants will be available only to U.S. citizens and will support travel expenses to ICME-11 that include hotel accommodations, meal costs, and conference registration. They also can be used toward air transportation (on American carriers only). Travel grant awardees under this program may not use funds from other NSF programs to supplement their international travel (airfare to Mexico or subsistence at ICME-11).

The International Congresses are held every four years and offer a unique opportunity for mathematics educators from the United States to discuss issues related to mathematics education with international leaders from developed and developing countries. Grants will enable



participants to listen to world-renowned scholars in mathematics and mathematics education, and to take part in small, focused discussion groups on a wide range of topics. These topics include a special emphasis on educating students from diverse cultures, mathematics education for second language learners, the relationship between research and practice in mathematics education, the professional development of mathematics teachers; closing the achievement gap, and information and communication technology in mathematics education.

A selection committee will review applications and award the grants for ICME-11 travel. The committee will include representatives from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, the Mathematical Association of America, the American Mathematical Association

of Two-Year Colleges, the American Mathematical Society, and the U. S. National Commission on Mathematics Instruction.

Elementary, middle, and high school teachers and graduate students are strongly encouraged to apply. Questions can be directed to Gail Burrill, burrill@msu.edu. The travel grant application and selection criteria are available on the NCTM Web site at <http://www.nctm.org/icme.aspx> or from Margaret Iding, 116 North Kedzie, Division of Science and Mathematics Education, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824; telephone (517) 355-1708, ext. 105; fax (517) 432-9868, e-mail idingm@msu.edu. The application deadline is September 30, 2007. Notifications will be made by December 30, 2007.