



## From C.V. to Résumé

By [MARGARET NEWHOUSE](#)

If you are exploring careers outside academe, one of your first steps is to convert your C.V. into a résumé. What's the difference between the two, and how do you make the transformation?

Think of a résumé as a compelling introduction of your experiences and skills as they relate to a particular career or job. By contrast, a curriculum vitae displays your academic credentials and accomplishments in great detail.

A résumé indicates to employers your seriousness of intent. By the time you are actually seeking jobs, your résumé -- along with a cover letter -- is essential for getting an interview, unless you have managed to network your way to an interview.

Although they provide incomplete information, résumés are typically your only means of persuading an employer to take a risk on a career changer. Therefore, you need to tailor your presentation of skills, experience, and motivation to fit the requirements of the job you are seeking, while making the entire "package" irresistible.

Erin Keay (a pseudonym) asked for help in converting her C.V. to a résumé. A Ph.D. candidate in neuroscience and a columnist for *The Chronicle's* Career Network, Erin is considering alternative careers in science journalism and publishing, public relations, and industrial research. We present her [C.V.](#) first, and then the annotated [Résumé](#) we created for science writing and editing jobs. (She would submit a slightly modified C.V. for industrial-research positions.)

In general, note that résumés require you to be both more concise and more general than C.V.'s. Your résumé will emphasize the experience and skills most relevant to the new career and probably play down your academic credentials and experience, as does Erin's.

Here are some common-sense rules for creating a résumé:

- Try to keep a résumé to one page, particularly for business and media fields. (There is a rough rule of thumb that more than 10 years of experience warrants a second page.) If it goes to a second page, make sure the first page contains essential information and the second page includes your name. Often you can present the second page as an addendum listing publications and similar material, as Erin does.
- Make the résumé visually effective to communicate professionalism and clarity. Make it easy for the eye to scan, using capital letters, bold print, underlining, and spacing to highlight your strongest credentials. Don't make it too dense, busy, or cute. Use a white or cream bond paper (the same as for your cover letters).
- Be consistent in your use of grammatical structure and style, and make sure your grammar and spelling are perfect. Proofread your résumé several times and then have someone else proofread it

as well. Use accurate, accessible language; be judicious about abbreviations and jargon -- even those of your targeted career.

- Be aware that information presented at the beginning of a section, at the left-hand margin, or in a column gets extra emphasis; therefore, it is generally not advisable to put dates in the margins. (Note, however, that dates in the margin appear to be standard for résumés in business fields.) Present information in order of its importance; for example, if you happen to have substantial experience or want to de-emphasize your doctorate, put Experience before Education. Or consider putting a Skills summary first if that is your strongest point. Erin places Education first because it is important for a job in science publishing and writing, and because she has relatively little relevant experience.
- One increasingly common beginning for a résumé, which Erin has adopted, is a Summary or Highlights of Qualifications section. Here you summarize the qualifications most relevant for a particular career or job, including experience, credentials, and skills. In general, avoid "Job Objective" statements, because they usually sound vapid or canned and can limit you.
- Select the best format for your qualifications and experience: reverse chronological, functional, or a combination. The reverse chronological, starting with the most recent and working backward, is easiest to construct. Functional formats are most appropriate for people who have little work experience or whose capabilities have been demonstrated in non-professional situations. The functional résumé categorizes your experience (including paid and unpaid work and personal achievements) by skill, followed by a brief section listing employment history. Functional résumés are harder to pull off successfully, partly because readers wonder if you are hiding something. For that reason, a modified chronological résumé (items described in reverse chronological order within different categories of experience) is often more effective for career changers. In Erin's case, it allows her to emphasize the experience most-closely related to the field she hopes to enter.
- Personal information such as age, marital or health status, and race or ethnicity should be omitted. Although information about citizenship or visa status is not required, it might be wise to include a reference to U.S. citizenship or permanent resident status if your nationality is ambiguous.
- References and even the phrase "References furnished upon request" are usually omitted. However, before you go on the job market, you should line up your references -- preferably a mix of academic and non-academic ones. Explain what jobs you are seeking and prime them (with a typed list, perhaps) to emphasize your skills and traits appropriate for that work. For the job interview, you might prepare a list of references with contact information, in case employers ask for names.

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Source: Chronicle of Higher Education