Resumes & Cover Letters That Work

Choosing a Format

Selecting the right resume format is an important step in telling your professional story. While there are many options, we'll focus on three key types: (1) Chronological format, (2) Functional format, or (3) Combination format. Understanding these formats will help you choose the one that best highlights your strengths and experience.

Chronological

Lists work experience in reverse chronological order, starting with the most recent job.

When To Use

- You have a strong, consistent work history.
- You are applying for a job in the same field as your previous roles.
- You want to highlight career progression.

Pros	Cons
• Easy for employers to scan. • Highlights steady employment and promotions. • Preferred by most recruiters and applicant tracking systems (ATS).	• Gaps in employment or frequent job changes are more visible. • Less emphasis on skills if your experience is varied or non-linear.

Functional

Focuses on skills and qualifications rather than work history. Work experience is listed briefly at the bottom.

When To Use

- You're changing careers or industries.
- You have gaps in your employment history.
- You have diverse experiences not tied to specific job titles.

Pros	Cons
• Emphasizes transferable skills. • De-emphasizes gaps or unrelated job titles. • Useful for career changers or recent graduates.	• Can raise red flags for employers unfamiliar with the format. • May be less ATS-friendly. • Lacks detailed context for how and where skills were applied.

Combination

Blends elements of both chronological and functional formats. Highlights skills at the top, followed by a chronological work history.

When To Use

- You want to showcase both skills and a solid work history.
- You're transitioning to a new role but have relevant experience.
- You have a mix of freelance, contract, or traditional employment.

Pros	Cons
• Balanced approach—skills and experience both shine. • Flexible and customizable. • Helps bridge career changes or non-linear paths.	• Can become lengthy or cluttered if not well-organized. • May still confuse some ATS systems if not formatted carefully.

Reflection

Before choosing a new resume format, it's helpful to take a step back and reflect on your current one. These questions are designed to guide you in thinking critically about how your resume presents your experience, strengths, and goals. Use them to assess what's working well—and what might need a fresh approach.

1. What does the format of my current resume communicate about my professional path and priorities?

2. How well does the structure support the message I want to convey to potential employers?

3. What aspects of the format feel effective, and what might benefit from a different approach?