

Evaluating a résumé or curriculum vita

Amy Patrick <am-patrick@wiu.edu> and Bradley Dilger <cb-dilger@wiu.edu>
Department of English & Journalism, Western Illinois University

This handout is designed to help you evaluate your resume or vita. Additional materials you may find useful are on the department web site: <http://www.wiu.edu/english/profdev/>

Format

- Hold the document at arms length. Is the design visually appealing?
 - ✓ Are margins at least $\frac{3}{4}$ inch on all four sides?
 - ✓ Is there a clear hierarchy, with primary and secondary focuses (e.g. subheads)?
 - ✓ Does the document have a strong, consistent visual alignment?
 - ✓ Does spacing keep items which should be grouped together, and make the division between sections clear?
 - ✓ Are a limited number of fonts used (no more than one serif and one sans-serif)?
 - ✓ Is white space on the resume not “trapped”—that is, does document alignment ensure that white space is contiguous?
- Does the document use no more than two readable fonts, between 10 and 12 point?
- Are printing and paper quality good?

Organization

- Is the résumé or vita organized using reverse chronological order (newest items first), functional order (using functions or skills), or a consistent combination of both?
- Is information for each item consistently organized and developed?
- Are categories easy to understand?
 - ✓ Do categories follow the usual conventions?
 - ✓ For vitae, is the general pattern of research, teaching, and service discernable?
 - ✓ Are they consistently applied?
 - ✓ For the information being presented, do the categories used make sense, or would other categories be more effective?
- Does organization highlight the writer’s most impressive qualifications and skills?

Development and clarity

- Is contact information complete and accurate:
 - ✓ For the writer?
 - ✓ For references?
- If an objective is used:
 - ✓ Is it less than two sentences long?
 - ✓ Is it specific, focusing on the type of job the writer is seeking?
- For résumés tailored to a job description:
 - ✓ Are most, if not all, aspects of the description addressed?

- ✓ Are employer's specific interests and needs recognized?
- ✓ Is the language clear, specific, and appropriate for the job, internship, or application?
- Does the writer successfully emphasize his or her qualifications?
 - ✓ Work experience?
 - ✓ Education?
 - ✓ Writing and communication skills?
 - ✓ Other skills: foreign languages, computer skills, leadership, etc?
 - ✓ Are desirable qualifications clearly part of the writer's background?
- Are descriptions of skills specific and detailed, yet not overly verbose?
- Is the resume or vita content well-considered?
 - ✓ Appropriate for the section or category?
 - ✓ Understandable out of context, but not too long or detailed?

Writing style

- Is the word choice clear, economical, and accurate?
- Does the writer use past tense for past experience and present tense for current experience?
- Does the writer use active, specific verbs?
- Does the writer set up information following parallel structure? (That is, do items of equal importance use the same grammatical forms?)
- Are there any grammar or spelling errors?
- Is the punctuation correct and consistently used?
- Are abbreviations and acronyms used consistently?

Overall

- Are there any errors in punctuation, spelling, or in contact information? (Yes, this is repeated—this material needs to be double checked!)
- Is your overall impression of the résumé positive? (Is the candidate worth interviewing or accepting? What's your impression of the writer?)