

What's Wrong with Resumes of Recent Graduates?

CONVENTIONAL WISDOM: Work history is the core of all resumes.

NEW THINKING: Graduates should highlight their education, not their part-time jobs.

New graduate resumes shouldn't look, or even try to look, like the resumes of people with work experience. Why? Unless you plan to have a career in retail, fast food, or filing and copying, employers don't care about most part-time jobs, except to show that you had the energy and work ethic to help fund your education.

When this statement was shared at a conference for journalism students, one young man asked, "What about my work at the book store?" Our response was, "Do you plan to have a career in retail or publishing?" He admitted he did not. "Then, why would you want to highlight your work at the book store on your resume?"

The problem with most new graduate resumes is they try to look like resumes for experienced people with years of work history. The graduate thereby misses out on highlighting their new education and the promise for their future. Employers are primarily interested in a graduate's potential—knowledge, skills, and leadership capabilities. Thus, new grads will want to showcase their education, leadership, and educational achievements rather than part-time employment that normally isn't even relevant to their career choices.

Five Steps to a Great New Grad Resume

When writing your resume, keep in mind that your resume is being read through the eyes of the recruiter or hiring manager. A good education isn't enough. You have to stand out compared to other candidates who also have a good education. You do this by being specific about your courses, your projects, your leadership activities, and your awards.

1. Credential yourself as well as your college and the program you were enrolled in. Did you graduate with honors? List your GPA (if it's a good one), your major, and even a sentence or two about the school you attended. For example, if you attended the number one engineering school in the country, show that under the name of the school. Or, your school may not be well known, but the music department is world class. In this case, credential the program. Also include your thesis work, capstone project, internships, and externships.
2. List relevant courses, about half a dozen. Choose the ones that are really going to make a difference to the people who are going to hire you. For example, if you are applying to work for a human resources department, you may want to list a course on employment law or multicultural leadership.
3. List organizations that you were a part of. These include honor societies, subject-specific societies (such as the Math Club), student government societies, and social and cultural clubs. Answer the question, *What organizations did I belong to that credential me professionally?*
4. List extracurricular and campus leadership positions under the title of "Leadership," such as "Editor of the School Newspaper," "President of the Debate Club," or "Captain of the Tennis Team."
5. Last but not least, list your in-school work experience. Start with stuff that matters, such as "German Department Teaching Assistant" or "Marketing Assistant," and then include brief information on jobs that aren't relevant to your career.

Resume Structure for Major Career Change

If you have gone back to school to redirect your career into a significantly different field, you should use this structure for your resume too. Your education should be presented at the beginning of your resume to highlight your new educational credentials, followed by your work experience. In most cases, your work experience will be more important and valuable to the new role compared to an inexperienced new graduate, so this section will be more comprehensive and should still tie to the new direction as much as possible. We also suggest that you list your degrees and schools at the end of the resume because that is where recruiters or computers will be looking for it.

When all is said and done, your resume should highlight what the employer cares about—your potential, the quality of school and educational work, and the competencies you bring to the opportunity.

Excerpted from *Be Smart: Sail Past the Hazards of Conventional Career Advice*, available on Amazon in paperback and Kindle versions. You can contact the authors at:

Paula Asinof | www.yellowbrickpath.com | 214-526-8690

Mina Brown | www.positivecoach.com | 972-733-9963