

Resume filtering

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1 Question

What do I look for in a resume?

2 Answer

Let's start by the things I don't look at in a resume for a position in which experience is expected:

- **Your university:** I couldn't care less where you've studied. While having a university may sometimes tell me you've been serious enough to go through the pain of university, I also know it's possible to go through university without acquiring any knowledge.
- **Your grades:** It's great that you have A+ in so many classes. However grades do not always generalize to an effective worker. Furthermore, most of the applicants will also have high grades, which makes it a noisy/useless signal. Do understand that I also do not have the time to fact-check your grades, so you might as well have written you had a perfect score in every class. Be careful with this, as some people will see it as something to probe you on during the initial interviews, and this could backfire on you.
- **Your extra-curricular activities:** Unless you are doing extra-curricular activities that are relevant to the position you are applying for, I am not filtering for people with whom I could do things with outside of work.
- **The list of all your publications:** I work in a scientific field, and while for some publications are badges of success, I see listing articles as filler into a resume. If I want to know all the articles you've published, I can look it up on Google Scholar. Instead, focus on listing the areas of research you're interested in and indicating how many papers in those areas you've published.

Here are the things I look for:

- **2-3 pages:** If you cannot summarize your accomplishments in less than 3 pages, then you don't know how to summarize. I don't want to know everything you've done in your professional life. I don't want to know every single paper you've published, every conference/workshop you've attended, every grant you've received, every honors you have.
- **Relevant work experience:** If you've been working in the same position for a different company, that will generally be a good thing. It means you already have prior experience in the field, you have seen how another company has accomplished what you might still do at your new job. It means you'll be easier to ramp up and may require less supervision/support during that period.
- **List what you did:** If you only list the title/position you had and the company, I have no clue what you did there. You might as well not have worked there. Clearly list the big tasks/milestones you've worked on and what was your contribution.
- **List clear and quantitative accomplishments:** "Increased sales by 200%", "Largely reduced operation costs" may sound great, but without the ability to compare against something, those accomplishments do not mean much.

- **List technologies you've used:** When hiring it is often common that you want your new recruits to already have some prior experience in the tools that are used at the company, especially if you need them to ramp up quickly. This is even more important when the set of tools used in your industry is common enough as it will communicate how in touch with the field you are.
- **How long you've worked at your previous jobs:** Are you the kind of person that will keep a job for a year then move to the next one? That's great! I'm not looking to work with people that have a short time horizon for their positions. I want to work with people that will go through the marathon with me.
- **Proper ordering of the sections of your resume:** It's a little thing, but the ordering of the sections in your resume will communicate a lot to me. It will let me know whether you know how to prioritize, which is a critical skill. This point goes in hand with the "2-3 pages" item, as they both show that you are able to critically assess the content you produce.
- **What you studied in university:** I expect people that apply to the positions I filter for to belong into a certain set of domains. This is generally not a very important criterion, but it gives me a better idea of your professional career.
- **When you finished your degree:** This is used to determine how recent your education is. I consider professional experience once the degree is completed, not while it is being completed.
- **Free of grammatical and syntactical errors:** Make sure your resume doesn't have major grammatical or syntactical mistakes. Those communicate a lack of seriousness and professionalism that I would expect in your future communication with others in the company. If your resume was initially written in a different language, make sure it is thoroughly translated.
- **Github account:** If you list one, expect me to look at it. If you don't contribute much (less than 20 contributions per year), then it's simply better not to list it.
- **Personal website:** If you list one, I will look at it as well. I have a background in web development, so I will use it as an additional way to evaluate it. Make sure it is online. A personal website that is down or for which the domain expired will lose you points.