The Art of the Résumé

What is a résumé, also known as a curriculum vitae or CV?

A résumé is a brief but detailed synopsis of your high school activities, interests, and community involvement that tells how you spend your time, what skills you have developed during high school, and what you can contribute to a college. A good résumé can, in a few minutes, give the reader a snapshot of you.

When is a résumé used?

A résumé is most useful as part of a job application or interview. It is also helpful to have one for a reference when you fill out college applications (helps you remember everything you have done) or have college interviews (can serve as the basis for interview questions) or are applying for an internship. Give anyone you've asked to write a letter of recommendation a copy of your résumé. It will help them write a letter that reflects who you are.

Elements of a Good Résumé

Contact Information: The first section of the résumé should tell the reader (college representative, scholarship committee, prospective employer) how they can contact you. Center at the top in bold:

Name
Home Address
Phone Number(s)
Email Address

Education: List the high schools you have attended in reverse chronological order. (Begin with the school you are currently attending.) Include the school's address. List rigorous courses you have successfully completed or are enrolled in, such as Pre-AP, AP, IB, dual-credit, and honors courses. Include your GPA if it is a 3.0 or above. For example:

Martin Luther King High School, 5500 Foxborough Road, Anytown, TX
12th grade: AP English, AP Calculus
11th grade: AP English, AP U.S. History

Honors and Awards: Brainstorm honors and awards you have received during high school. Use your college crate to access information. Include distinguishing details, such as "out of 400 applicants." Categorize the honors and awards if you have more than one in each category. Be sure to include any scholarships you receive.

Academic Honors and Awards
Top Ten Percent: 11th, 12th grades
Principal's List for 3.5 GPA and above: 9th, 10th, 11th grades
Perfect Attendance, 11th grade

Sports
Scholar Athlete, 11th grade
State Championship Volleyball Team, 11th grade
Most Valuable Player, 10th grade

Scholarships
Optimist Club Scholarship, 12th grade
Martin Luther King PTO Scholarship, 12th grade

Clubs and Activities: Brainstorm clubs and activities you were involved in during high school and list them in chronological order.

Clubs and Activities
AVID Club: 9th, 10th—Secretary, 11th—Vice President
Student Council, 10th grade
Drill Team: 9th, 10th grades

Community Service: List the organization or events you volunteered for, grade(s), a brief description of what you did, and total hours you volunteered.

Community Service
Girls and Boys Club: 10th, 11th grades (Peer Tutor), 5 hours per week for 36 weeks
Anytown Church: 9th, 10th, 11th grades (Sunday School Class Assistant)
XYZ High School Christmas Food Drive: 9th, 10th, 11th grades (organized and distributed donations)

Sports: If you have more than two entries under this category, list it as a separate category. Include high school sports activities and any city leagues you participated in. Also include any recreational sports you enjoy, such as surfing, riding dirt bikes, hiking, etc.

Summer Activities: Did you participate in any summer activities that help you succeed in college? For example, some universities offer summer activities on campus that give students a focused experience.

Summer Activities
Teen Summer Program, ABC College, 10th grade
Exploration in Engineering, ABC College, 9th grade

Employment: Include your work history. List the name of the companies you worked for in chronological order, with the most current first. Include where the company is located and your job title or duties. If you have not had any work experience, omit this category.

Employment Experience
Delicious Restaurant, Anytown, Florida, January 2012–June 2012
Hostess: Greeted customers, checked on seat availability, seated customers

Personal Interests and Special Talents: List your hobbies, interests, and talents. Include languages you speak other than English, computer skills, etc.

Tips for Organizing Your Résumé

- The format of your résumé will depend on what you have done and your interests. For example, if you don't play intramural or recreational sports, you won't have a "Sports" category to complete.
- Your educational résumé can be longer than one page. It's important to have all the information and details you need to complete applications. (Work résumés are usually limited to one page, however.)
- The chronology should go from most recent to the oldest.
- Use bold-faced type and bullets, indentations, or dashes at the beginning of lines to delineate a particular category or activity.
- Put the most important information first. You will notice in the examples that the activity/award is listed first, then the grade(s). The reader's eye will go to what you did (more important) and then when you did it.
- Provide explanations for your activities. These explanations will help you add detail to college and scholarship applications.
- Avoid abbreviations that only an insider would understand.