

EFFECTIVE RESUMES

I. The Big Picture

Your Resume is A Marketing Tool

Because Career Services emphasizes personal networking as a means of marketing your SAIS degree and prior experience, your resume, combined with a cover letter, is usually the means you will employ to “introduce” yourself and your career goals to a potential employers or SAIS alumni. Your resume must clearly and concisely communicate why you are a strong candidate for a job and demonstrate how your professional experience is a good “fit” for the specific role. Alumni also want to see that you have taken the time to carefully prepare your documents. During informational interviews, they may offer constructive advice regarding resume content to strength your outreach and networking in their respective sector or field.

Your Resume is a Dynamic Document

Your resume is a dynamic document that will evolve over time as you continuously add new skills and knowledge to your professional portfolio. The content must always be tailored to present your strongest skill sets and fully document relevant achievements and outcomes specifically targeted for *each* position that you apply for. There is no shortcut to taking the time to thoroughly evaluate and think through how your resume presents your strongest case to each employer.

Critiquing your resume content on a regular basis is an essential aspect of the job search process regardless of the number of years you have worked prior to SAIS. This is particularly important since so many SAIS students are career-changers; for example, seeking to transfer skills and experience from years in the banking field to a microfinance position in the nonprofit NGO sector or within a multilateral organization. Following the three steps outlined below in Section II will assist you to organize and present your professional profile to an employer in a field different from the one you have already worked in prior to SAIS.

What Employers Look For

A writer for CareerJournal.com of the Wall Street Journal states: “*As a human resource consultant, I spend a lot of time making judgments about people on the basis of how they present themselves in resumes and CVs...my highest priorities are to cull the few from the many and help clients avoid pigs in pokes. My job description doesn’t include extending charity to job seekers and resume writers. On the contrary, I find I approach every resume with a certain impatient cynicism.*”

Among many key factors, employers will exclude resumes which:

- Appear over-qualified or under-qualified for the position
- Have typographical errors, poor punctuation or are too wordy
- Are poorly formatted
- Fail to clearly communicate why the applicant’s skill sets and experience are a good fit
- Lack essential skills or required experience asked for in job description
- Do not clearly convey accomplishments or demonstrate a pattern of high output

Employers want to find the best talent with the least amount of effort in a job search. Regardless of sector, they will pay close attention to – and look more deeply at – resumes which avoid the above

mistakes and most clearly provide evidence of professional experience which is explicitly suitable for the advertised position.

Your job in developing an effective resume is to make the first cut in a review process. A highly effective resume must clearly convey your strengths as a candidate to a reader who will spend only 30-60 seconds during an initial screening review. How to do that? We suggest the following three-step process.

II. Developing Effective Resume Content

Regardless of the resume style you use in your job search, the following steps will assist you in effectively framing the content of your professional experience and skills:

Step 1: Self-assessment

Many SAIS students are in the midst of career transitions which require further assessment and reflection about their past professional experiences. In this initial step of resume preparation, it's helpful to ask several questions: How can I make a convincing case that demonstrates how my overall experience is a good fit for a particular job? In which skills am I most proficient? What knowledge do I possess that will stand out in relation to the job requirements? A way to start is to write down a chronology of your educational, professional, and personal experiences. Think outside of the box and do not limit yourself to simple job descriptions. Write down your skills and accomplishments in descriptive form first, then identify the key points you wish to highlight later in the synthesis phase. Consider the feedback you may have received from former supervisors and colleagues in assessing your strengths and describing your accomplishments. Of course, a discussion with a Career Services counselor can be useful in helping you think more objectively about your professional background in this step.

Step 2: Market Assessment

In this step, your goal is to find out what skills, knowledge and aspects of your professional background are most appropriate for the job[s] you wish to pursue. To start, you may wish to review multiple job listings in the sector you're interested in to examine job titles and descriptions. Write down key phrases from position descriptions which interest you and also reflect your demonstrated expertise and skills. Informational interviews with SAIS alumni and other professionals in your field of interest are an essential means to gaining first-hand knowledge about qualifications needed to be hired in your chosen field or for particular positions. The Career Services handout on networking has more detailed information on conducting effective informational interviews. It is important to also perform extensive web-based research, review materials available in the Career Services Library, and meet with a counselor with expertise in your field of interest (who can suggest alumni contacts for informational interviews).

Step 3: Synthesis

In step one, you assessed what you have to offer an employer. Step two has informed you about the job market and hiring trends in a particular field and the audience who will potentially read your resume. In this step, you will pull together your research and background information to design a set of outcome or accomplishment statements – in a series of bullets below each job title - that clearly communicate to the reader, “I have the skills needed for this job in this field.” These bullet points (*See p. 5, “Creating Effective Bullet Statements”) are perhaps the most essential ingredients in crafting an effective resume. They tell the story of your career highlights, illustrate the strengths of your professional experience and demonstrate the fit of your experience for a particular job description.

Where possible, use the following “prove it” steps to develop powerful phrases that describe your past achievements:

- 1) Choose a relevant skill.
- 2) Place it into context.
- 3) Give it numbers.
- 4) State positive results.

For example:

“Managed health care training program in East Bhutan for 20 local volunteer workers, increasing number of villages covered by 20%.

Accomplishment statements like this should each have the same structure: start with an active verb; succinctly detail a specific outcome(s) of an assignment; and quantify the outcome (e.g.: this can include numbers of people attending a conference, budget size, number of staff supervised, etc.).

III. The Basic Parts of a Resume

The SAIS resume template comprises four principal sections: Contact Information, Education, Experience and Additional Information.

Contact Information

Your name and contact information should appear at the top of the page. Generally, it’s best to include just one address, but if you expect to be moving during the time of your job search, you can include a “local” and “permanent” address, or two addresses with dates indicating when they are valid. Be sure to include a home or cell telephone number. Include only the email address that you regularly check.

Example:

Carlo DeMarco

139 Cedar Avenue ~ Washington, D.C. 20749 ~ cdemarco@mailplace.com ~ (202) 555-4783

NOTE: For students who have a substantial amount of work experience prior to SAIS, it may be useful to place a **Summary of Qualifications** or **Professional Profile** at the top of the page above the Education section. It is a way to synthesize and highlight the most important skills you have and is especially appropriate if your professional background is varied, or you are seeking to switch sectors and seek to highlight key transferable skills. The summary usually appears as 6-10 sentences running across the page from margin to margin or can also be in the form of bullets. It can also be cited as a series of key bullet points. To be effective, such a summary should address the specific requirements of the job and be tailored to each position for which you apply.

Education

The most important content is contained in the Experience and Education sections. Most SAIS students will put Education first on their resumes, followed by work experience. This provides the reader with an accurate representation of their current commitment and direction. However, for students with significant professional experience prior to SAIS, they may choose to place Experience first, to highlight their key skills and accomplishments.

You can include information on “selected” course work at SAIS, but again, be sure the courses you include are relevant to the job for which you are applying. Scholarships, fellowships or other academic honors should appear in this section. Do not list the exact amount awarded with an academic scholarship.

In this section, you also should cite periods of study abroad or technical training undertaken during your period of study as an undergraduate.

Example:

EDUCATION

Johns Hopkins University
Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS)
M.A., International Relations

Washington, DC
Bologna, Italy
May 2003

- **Concentrations:** Economics and American Foreign Policy
- **Selected coursework:** Current Issues in Quantitative Global Economics; Congress and the Making of National Policy; Theory and Practice of Alliance Politics
- Editor, SAIS Review; GPA 3.7

Experience

This section can include not only full-time paid work, but also internships that involved substantive responsibilities where you can cite one or two solid outcomes or results. This content should be organized in the form of bulleted statements as in the examples that follow. These bullet points must reflect the outcomes or accomplishments most relevant to the position you are applying for. They are not meant to be descriptive or to repeat the functional duties and responsibilities you held. An employer – in a first scan of your resume – can quickly see why the results of your professional background support you as a strong candidate for a job or internship.

Students should exercise good judgment when listing accomplishments. A two month internship should not have the same number of bullets as a full-time job lasting for a year or more.

Creating Effective Resume Bullet Statements

The following example illustrates a flow of questions and suggested responses to help you craft a strong and focused bullet statement for each job position or internship on your resume:

Let’s assume you are creating a bullet statement for a role you held which was to “Manage a departmental budget.” Questions and answers that would logically follow to develop a substantive bullet statement based on the duties of this position are:

Who: For whom did you perform this task?

“I managed a budget for 15-person human resources department serving 400 people in the office.”

What: What exactly did you do?

“I allocated \$1.1 million in funds and expenses for department, approved spending, tracked expenses, ensured vendors were paid and alerted manager of overages.”

Where: Where was the work performed?

“I used an Access database that I created.”

When: When was the work done?

“I managed the budget for two years. I worked on it every week, and created monthly reports sent to the HR Director.”

Why: Why did you do it?

“In the long-term, I am interested in managing large HR projects and my Director thought having budget experience would help.”

How: How did you do it?

“I used one day a week as way to manage budget and still do other tasks. People knew what day was the ‘budget day’.”

WOW! What was the result?

“Using the Access database I created, I found where money was being spent excessively and made recommendations to the Director on where to cut so we could afford HRIS upgrade for dept.”

KEY TIP:

The goal is to turn the first person answers in each section above into a concise outcome or accomplishment statement. In the illustration below, based on the above responses, the individual does not include all of the above content in the bullet; instead, the statement succinctly cites items deemed most important to the employer. Working through the above analysis can also be helpful in preparing yourself to discuss interview questions directed at any area of responsibility cited on your resume.

- **Managed budget of \$1.1 million; created innovative Access database to manage all budget activities including expense tracking, vendor payments and spending patterns resulting in Director’s approval of new budget allocations to allow for much-needed department software upgrade**

Examples:

**Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Montenegro
Consular and Legal Affairs Officer**

**Podgorica, Montenegro
1997 - 2000**

- Represented Foreign Ministry at international conferences and meetings attended by diplomats, international organizations and business leaders in Montenegro.
- Arranged the issuance of approximately 10 visas weekly for public servants.
- Reviewed and analyzed relevant articles in world press and prepared Ministry’s Weekly Information Bulletin for review by senior officials.

**Business Council for International Understanding
Program Officer**

**New York, NY
2001-2002**

- Facilitated over 40 industry briefings on political, economic and commercial issues with US and foreign government officials. Raised over \$150,000 in corporate sponsorship.
- Represented organization at international conferences including meetings of African Development Bank in Spain and Ethiopia attended by 1,500 finance ministers and policy-makers and business executives.
- Established and maintained relations with US and foreign embassies, local missions to the U.N. and US government agencies

**World Bank Liaison Office
Intern**

**Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan
June-August 2001**

- Advised local entities undertaking Bank projects on procurement procedures under IBRD loans and IDA credits
- Interviewed representatives of Ministries to assess their technological needs
- Coordinated seminars attended by 100 local officials on procurement procedures for Bank loans and provided interpretation services (English-Turkmen)

The examples above speak to the direct outcomes of an assignment and stress transferable skills which can be used in a dynamic way to discuss accomplishments of past experience in a job interview. Note that each sentence begins with an active verb and wherever possible, outcomes are quantified. This adds substance and increased credibility to the statement.

Additional Information

To round out the picture of your skills, character and commitments, it is important to include information on other relevant skills or experiences. Obvious examples of this content are language and computer skills. You may also include information on volunteer or community service, professional affiliations, leadership, athletic or other achievements that demonstrate character and service to the community.

Language skills should appear **first** in this section and be quantified according to your level of proficiency. We recommend citing your skill as follows: “Basic,” “Intermediate,” and “Advanced” or “Proficient” to give the employer an accurate sense of your skills. Depending on job requirements, it may prove useful to describe separate proficiency levels for written and oral skills. Be careful when using the word “fluent” unless you are a native speaker, comfortable in all aspects of the language and can demonstrate this in an interview setting if required to do so.

Example:

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Languages: English, Italian (Bi-lingual); Mandarin (Intermediate).
Computer: PowerPoint, Excel, SASS, Front Page.
Leadership: Member, SAIS Student Government Association, 2002-03; Member, Women In International Security, current;
Interests: Soccer coach in youth league, 1994 – 1997.

IV. TYPES OF RESUME FORMATS

Chronological Format

This type of resume lists work and educational history chronologically, always starting with the most recent. Employers, job titles, location and dates are listed, followed by succinct bulleted outcome or accomplishment statements. Most employers prefer this format and are most accustomed to reviewing this style.

Functional Format

This format focuses upon achievements and accomplishments and is most used when past experience has been project-based (as with consulting firms or on government-sponsored development projects). It is useful for experienced students making a dramatic career switch; the format focuses less attention on the chronology and more upon the direct accomplishments in selected functional categories – regardless of when they were performed.

Curriculum Vitae (C.V.)

A C.V., while not commonly used for U.S. employers, continues to be used in more traditional environments (e.g., academia, EU institutions, UN, etc.). Increasingly, European recruiters are moving to accept a chronological resume format. Much more comprehensive information is provided in a C.V., with more detail about education and job history, publications, references, scholarships, etc. More personal details are also included, including those relating to marital status, age, date of birth or number of dependents (**NOTE:** this personal information should **not** be included on a resume in the U.S. because it is illegal for employers to review such data as part of the hiring process). A photo is also usually required.

FURTHER RESOURCES

The Career Services library has several guides to resume writing, including:

Developing a Professional Vita or Resume, Carl McDaniels

The Global Resume and CV Guide*, Mary Anne Thompson

Government Job Applications and Federal Resumes, Anne McKinney Career Series

Killer Consulting Resumes, *Wet Feet Press (found in the gray file cabinet)

Resumes in Cyberspace, Pat Criscito

There are several Web sites on the Internet with copious advice about resume writing, including those at www.wetfeet.com, www.vault.com and www.monster.com.

***Also access the password protected Wet Feet Insider Guide Library (go to Career Resource Guides) on our home page to find numerous documents relating to resume writing for specific industries, including Thompson's Global Resume/CV Guide**