



# WHAT EMPLOYERS REALLY WANT:

A Guide to Standing Out  
in a Stack of Resumes



# INTRODUCTION

The resume is an essential tool for any job search. Although a lot of time, effort, and thought have gone into trying to crack the secret, the truth is there is no such thing as the “completed” resume. That doesn’t mean the effort and research that has gone into how to develop the “perfect” resume has been a waste. It has produced a lot of good information that you can use to help you build an effective resume that you can tailor for each job.

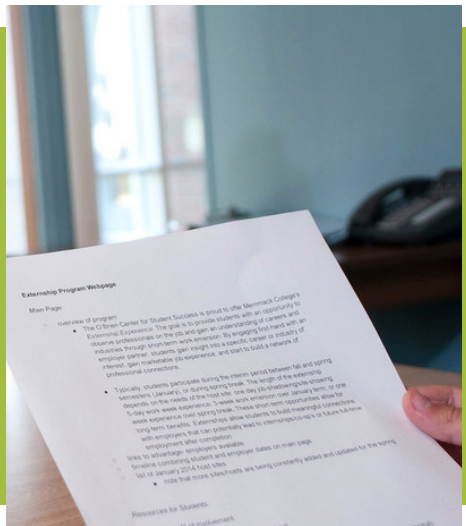
In fact, a resume is never finished or perfect. The main purpose of the resume is to help get you and interview or professional introduction. When developing your resume it’s up to you to convince the employer that you are worth an interview. Through your resume, you want to demonstrate how your academic, co-curricular, and work experiences connect to the job and offer the employer some evidence that you have the potential to be a good fit for the job and organization.

The following data demonstrates what employers in the Merrimack Valley and beyond are looking for in resumes from new graduates. This feedback can inform the decisions you make when creating and developing your resume.

Do you find the use of an “Objective” helpful on a resume?

**YES - 52.3%**

**NO - 47.7%**



## COMMENTS

The objective is a brief statement that appears at the top of the resume and expresses your career goal or desired occupation.

“As long as it is clear and not so generic that they could be applying for any job.”

- Paul Fragala & Associates

“I do find it useful, but most of the time it hurts the chances of the applicants if they do not make sure to tailor it to what I am hiring for.”

- Raising a Reader

“Objective should always reflect an angle into the company. I have seen objectives being a boiler plate to one that was more directed to another position. Both show no real passion for the position.”

- BAE Systems

# Do you find a profile section helpful on a resume?

**YES** - 78.5%  
**NO** - 21.5%



## COMMENTS

The profile section of a resume should include a brief summary of your work skills, experiences and goals as they relate to the specific job opening you are applying for.

“A profile of skills, especially for a more technical position, is great. If I’m looking for a Web Developer, I like to see if they have experience with different platforms and languages.”

- Beacon Health Strategies

“Suggest that students tailor it each time to the specific requirements/preferred skills & experience of the job to which they’re applying.”

- Cambridge Isotope Labs

“They should correspond with the job the individual is seeking and encompass not only professional experience and proven history but any aspects of the individual’s life experiences that make them a hiring asset.”

- All Care Hospice

# Do you like to see keywords or buzzwords used in a resume?

**YES** - 56.1%  
**NO** - 43.9%



## COMMENTS

Using the right keywords not only shows what you have accomplished in the past. They also help your job application materials get selected by the software and hiring managers who screen your documents. Developed, resolved, motivated and coordinated are a few examples of keywords used in resumes.

“As long as they are used correctly and appropriately - it’s nice to see whether a potential intern understands certain elements of a job so that we can train them appropriately based on the knowledge they already have.”

- Wenham Museum

“If it shows they have an understanding of what the position entails and have read the website/ more information about our program.”

- Americorps

“Words that relate to the job position that you are applying to really helps the company relate to the applicant.”

- uAspire Lawrence

# What are the most common mistakes you encounter on a resume?



**23.3%** - Grammatical/Spelling Errors

**20.8%** - Applicants not thoroughly proofreading

**15.2%** - Not changing the objective to be job specific

**11.3%** - Too much information

**9.5%** - Gaps in experience unexplained

**7.4%** - Other

**7.1%** - Overselling themselves

**5.3%** - Not cautious about formatting

## COMMENTS

“The resume is a marketing piece, not a chronology. Every time you write a resume, one should re-write it to make it sell where you are today.

- NaviSite Inc.

“Not finding skills that they have developed through clubs, volunteer work, church work, etc.”

- Aflac

# What are the THREE most important aspects you look for in a resume?



- 22.8%** - Experience
- 14.1%** - Education
- 13.5%** - Skills
- 10.8%** - Relate prior experience to the industry
- 9.9%** - Internships/co-ops held
- 7.2%** - Accomplishments
- 6.9%** - Neat and easy to read
- 3.9%** - Extracurricular activities
- 2.7%** - Accuracy
- 2.7%** - Consistency
- 2.1%** - GPA
- 1.8%** - Gaps between jobs/school
- 1.5%** - Other

## COMMENTS

“Co-curricular activities are very important as well. We look for balanced students/professionals.  
- First Investors Corporation

“Grammar and spelling are the most important, if you can't submit a resume that is grammatically correct don't expect a call back.”  
- Media Results

# What is your preferred way to receive resumes?

Email

59.5%

Through organization's website

22.1%

Web based system

6.9%

Other  
(Career Fairs,  
HR Departments,  
LinkedIn, etc.)

4.6%

Hand delivered

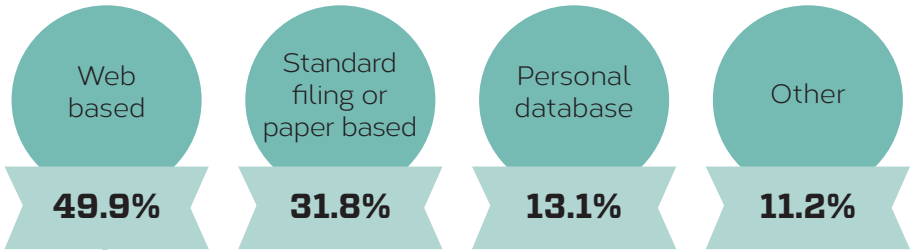
3.8%

Postal mail

3.1%



# What kind of resume application system do you have?



What problems have you encountered if you have used electronic resumes?

- 30.1%** - Format is altered
- 19.3%** - Attachment errors (forgetting to attach)
- 17.5%** - Errors opening the attachment
- 12.7%** - Other (Issues with fonts, did not use electronic resume, etc.)
- 10.2%** - Use of web services rather than Microsoft Word
- 6.0%** - Name/title of the attached document
- 4.2%** - Wrong file attached

## COMMENTS

- “Always name the file of your resume as ‘Your Name’ rather than ‘resume’ it helps HR to organize.”  
- Philips Healthcare
- “Students who send resumes via their mobile phone looks unprofessional.”  
- Mystic Valley Elder Services

# What is your preferred length of a resume?



ONE PAGE

**66.4%**



TWO PAGES

**8.4%**



NO PREFERENCE

**25.2%**

# How important are cover letters?

**37.4%**

Candidate must submit a cover letter for each position.

**19.6%**

Not important, I don't have the time to read them anyway.



NO PREFERENCE

**43%**



Does your organization conduct online media searches for candidates as part of your hiring process?



**YES** - 51.4%



**NO** - 48.6%

Sites they check:



**28.7%** - LinkedIn



**14.9%** - Search Engine  
(Google, Bing, Yahoo, etc.)



**12.6%** - Other  
(Instagram, YouTube)



**8.6%** - Facebook



**4.0%** - Twitter



**2.9%** - Blogs



# How important are internships and/or co-ops on a new graduate resume?



Extremely Important  
**38.3%**



Important  
**30.8%**



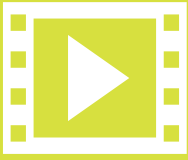
Moderately Important  
**15.9%**



Somewhat Important  
**12.1%**



Not Very Important  
**2.8%**



## Are you or your organization utilizing video resumes?



We do not accept video resumes and probably won't in the future

**52.3%**



We need to research the implications of video resumes before accepting them

**32.7%**



We currently accept video resumes

**7.5%**



We plan to accept video resumes in the future

**7.5%**



Do you look into any links referenced in a resume, such as links to the applicant's LinkedIn Account or e-Portfolio?



**YES - 54.2%**



**NO - 45.8%**

# ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

“Obviously if a candidate is applying to employers I would expect them to set their social media settings to ‘private’ unless they have nothing on their profiles that they wouldn’t mind a future supervisor to see. When I have received resumes via email or emails inquiring about posted positions, often time students and recent graduates don’t think punctuation or spelling is important in the body of the email. This reflects directly on the applicant, **it is truly your first introduction and you want to make as good of an impression as possible.**”

- All Care Hospice

“Include a cover letter **tailored to the position and update your resume accordingly.** Proof-read several times before sending it out. Send all materials mentioned and required in the job posting.”

- Concentric Energy Advisors

“Resumes should be built like a book report. If you do not read the book you have nothing to write about. Read up as much as you can regarding the company such as what they do, markets, community service, expansions, etc. **Look for ways to tie your resume to the specifics of the company and position.** Look for ways to separate your resume from others.

If you get an interview, get the names of those you will interview with. Research them on their company site or other web sites. Look for ways to tie yourself into being a good fit. You may find you have similar interests, hobbies, graduated from the same school, etc. Just learn as much as possible to help answer questions you may be asked.”

- Lawrence General Hospital

“Cover letters should be **simple and to the point.** If the candidate lacks experience, but has an interest in a position they should take the time to explain why with a few pertinent points that illustrate they understand the role. This may help them land an interview if they can provide a genuine explanation.”

- Talent Retriever LLC



## CONTACT US

**Stop by the O'Brien Center or visit us during Career Lab for resume assistance.**

### Career Lab Hours:

**Monday – Thursday:**

12 – 4 PM

Sakowich Campus Center  
Second Floor, Meeting Room B

**Friday:**

10 – 4 PM

Sakowich Campus Center  
Second Floor, Meeting Room B

**Monday Evenings:**

4 – 7 PM

Second Floor Sakowich Campus Center  
O'Brien Center for Student Success

**O'Brien Center for Students Success**

Second Floor Sakowich Campus Center  
Monday – Friday | 8:30am – 5:00pm  
careerservices@merrimack.edu  
(978) 837-5480



## **O'Brien Center for Student Success**

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*What Employers Want* data was compiled from a 2014 online survey of employers in the *Advantage* system. Employers from all industry categories were surveyed