

Building a Ministry Résumé

You may be new to the résumé process or a pro—regardless, a well thought out, crafted work can be an advantage in candidating for ministry. Don't overlook the importance of this tool as a resource to continually update your vocational/ministry experiences and personal and spiritual growth, always seeking to define and redefine God's call as you journey through life. You should anticipate change, either nuanced or major as you work through the various assignments of your practicum/internship.

A résumé is your personal advertisement. Its purpose is to emphasize your successes and unique strengths, communicating what you can do in light of what you've done. Your résumé should be clean, professional, clear, and precise. Rather than outlining your accomplishments comprehensively, the résumé should only serve as an introduction, causing an employer to want more. You must show creativity, initiative, sensitivity to the cause, related experience or trainability, and an all around enthusiasm for the particular position. Keep your résumé flexible so that it can be easily modified to fit a certain objective. Canned formats are easily recognizable and not at all impressive to knowledgeable employers.

So how should you begin? Start with a brainstorming session. Ask yourself good questions, such as:

What is my history?

- Why was I there in the first place?
- What kept me there?
- Why was I the best person for that job?

What jobs have I held?

What did I do in those jobs?

What skills do I possess?

What inner qualities drive my work ethics? (heart, initiative, creativity, dedication)

What are my strengths?

What is my education?

What degrees have I earned?

What accomplishments am I proud of?

What unique experiences have I had?

What do I want to communicate about myself to a potential employer?

How has my past qualified me for the position I am applying for?

This is an opportunity to apply your assessment results in a ministry context. A review of the inventories you have taken will focus on specific areas such as:

1. 16PF/CAQ. Emotional stability, personality style, interpersonal style, and strengths.
2. BarON. Emotional well-being, assertiveness/independence, problem-solving skills, stress management skills, and awareness of needs of others.
3. Myers-Briggs (MBTI). Personality preference that describes how you prefer to focus your attention and get your energy (E/I), how you prefer to take in information (N/S), how you prefer to make decisions (T/F), and how you prefer to deal with the outer world (J/F).
4. StrengthsFinder. Identifies your unique cluster of talents (Top 5 Signature Themes). When used appropriately, your strengths present themselves in spontaneous, recurrent patterns that result in high level performance, productivity, and fruitfulness. Review your StrengthsFinder material for further definition and applicability.

If you're having difficulty determining your strengths and accomplishments, have a friend or family member brainstorm with you. Once you know what you want to say, your task is to present it attractively.

Remember that a résumé must be crafted with the audience in mind. The right credentials are only an asset if they are presented well.

The most common type of résumé is a **Chronological Résumé**. This is the format that lists your education and experience in reverse chronological order. This is most commonly preferred among employers.

It is not unusual for a seminary student to have limited ministry experience. If you fall into this category, you might want to consider preparing a **Functional Résumé**. This format is designed to stress qualifications with less emphasis on specific employers and dates. The functional format is helpful when:

- your objective is very different from your experience
- you want to emphasize skills/abilities not used in recent work experience
- your predominate or most relevant experience has been unpaid, such as volunteer work or college/seminary
- your experience has been gained in different, relatively unconnected jobs
- older workers seeking to deemphasize a lengthy job history
- you are entering the job market after an absence

Résumé Content (Chronological)

The information below is divided by the various sections of the résumé and is listed in the order that it appears on the page, starting at the top.

Heading
Objective
Education
Work Experience
Volunteer Experience
Awards and Special Honors
Related Skills and Interests
References

Résumé Content (Functional)

The functional format also can work well for seminary students because it allows skills attained from experiences other than paid employment to be listed within the skills clusters.

Some employers like to know what you did in each job. One solution is to structure your resume in a mostly functional format but include a bare-bones work history in reverse chronological order, creating what is variously known as a chrono-functional, hybrid, or combination format. Such a work-history section need include only job title, name and location of employer, and dates of employment. You don't need to list what you did in each job because that information already is listed in your functional section.

To make your functional resume as reader-friendly as possible for employers, include as much context as you can within each functional description. That way, the employer has a better idea of which skill aligns with which job. In the above leadership-skills example, for instance, the student tells where he/she demonstrated each skill, thus making helping the employer connect his/her skills with the experience that produced those skills.

Heading

The heading is a simple way to introduce your basic information. It should include your name, address, phone, e-mail, web address, and any other contact information you choose to provide. This should be at the top of the page, so that employers can easily and quickly identify who they are dealing with. Your name should be

highlighted somehow, possibly in bold letters and larger than the other information. It should stand out, so that the potential employer is inclined to remember it. If you are in the process of moving, remember to provide both a current and future address.

William S. Land
11 Corner Street
Cara, NY 32105
923.781.5482
wland@net.com
www.land.com

(Adding a visual break between the heading and body of the résumé adds style and focus on the contact information.)

Objective

This is an important feature as it's your one chance to make a good first impression and communicate that you are a goal-oriented person with strong intention. The objective should be brief (one sentence) and states your present career goal as it relates to the position you are applying for. Be smart, professional, and most of all, be precise. The wording should focus on what you hope to give to the position, not what you hope to receive from it. A vague, general objective communicates a lack of direction.

Example 1:

OBJECTIVE: To serve as a pastor, providing Christ-like leadership, preaching, counseling, and shepherding.

Example 2:

OBJECTIVE: To encourage believers toward maturity in Christ by providing a cohesive Christian Education program in a church setting.

Your objective may need tweaking for a specific position. In fact, you should regularly review your objective to insure it's applicable to the employer's stated needs and correctly states your true ministry direction and proven skills.

Education

Next on the résumé is your educational information. This section should include the name of each institution you have attended (college and onward), location of the institutions (optional), the dates of attendance, the degree earned there, and the degree's emphasis (if pertinent).

Example 1:

EDUCATION:

Pearson College (1986)

BA, English Literature

Reynolds Scholarship Recipient (Academic Excellence and Leadership)

Example 2:

EDUCATION:

Bethel Seminary (2000)

(If you are currently in school, you may indicate your expected graduation date)

Bethel Seminary (2008)

Masters of Divinity (emphasis in World Missions)

Work Experience

This is the most important section of your résumé. It tells the employer what you've done in a professional setting. Carefully wording and accurately describing your work history will be a great asset to your résumé. This section may require hours of work and many revisions, but it's worth it. You'll never regret maximizing the potential of your résumé.

This section should include your work experience in reverse chronological order, beginning with your most recent experience. Specifically, you should include job title, company, dates of service, the location of the job (optional), and a description of the work you did. In terms of the layout, it is very important that each job listed is visually separate from the others. With only a glance, employers should be able to identify the various work experiences you have had. The title of the job, company, and dates of service should be set apart from the description by underlines, italics, bolding, etc. However you choose to highlight the information, make sure that your methods are consistent across all the work experience listed.

This is also the time when you reflect on your reasons for leaving prior workplaces. This does not go on your résumé but will come in handy when you have to fill out those required employment applications—you know they're gonna ask!

3 KEYS TO WRITING SUCCESS

Action Verbs

Your description of each position should be carefully worded using action verbs. Your résumé should tell a potential employer that you are a person of action who takes initiative and makes things happen. The right verbs can provide unquestionable professionalism and confidence to your résumé. Use them to your advantage. However, don't sacrifice the flow of your résumé just for verbs. If they don't sound natural and flow easily, leave them out. Action verbs are a subtle asset that should complement your achievements, not detract from them. Avoid using the same verb twice in your résumé. Below are several examples of appropriate language you could use.

Accomplished	Instructed	Problem solved	Understand priorities
Achieved	Identified	Results-oriented	Good listener
Budgeted	Listened	Set priorities	Need to excel
Cared for	Organized	Decision maker	Courage of convictions
Conducted	Planned	Successful with people	Professional attitude
Counseled	Revised	Leadership ability	Inspires others
Designed	Solved	Expense-minded	Simplified procedures
Developed	Succeeded	In charge of	Eliminated bottlenecks
Evaluated	Supervised	Enjoy getting involved with	Developed subordinates
Guided	Wrote	Excellent work habits	Set priorities

Details

It is also important to include detailed information regarding your past performance, number served, percent accomplished, etc—anything to give the employer direct descriptions of your previous successes. Past performance is an excellent prediction of future performance. If you can specifically display to employers that you have a history of successes, you will become that much more attractive to them. Details are NOT expanded and exhaustive experience, but short, concise employment highlights strategically designed to illicit further conversation in an interview setting.

Transferable Skills

As you describe your tasks, focus on your transferable skills – the skills you possess that directly relate to the open position. Ask yourself, "What does the employer want to see when he/she reads my résumé?" If you emphasize pertinent skills, the employer will naturally regard you as a match when reading your résumé. This does not mean that you list skills that the employer desires that are not currently in your skill set. Rather, you should focus on the desired qualities that are within the skills you already possess.

Example 1:

Youth Pastor, Grace Evangelical Church, Seaton, AL, 1986-1990

Planned and directed all youth programming for 75 students, grades 7-12. Taught weekly Sunday School and Wednesday Bible study, with studies in Romans, Proverbs, and the Gospels. Established and developed a Youth Leadership team, mentoring 20 students one-on-one. Launched a Youth Missions Initiative, providing monthly opportunities for youth to serve in cross-cultural contexts.

When your ministry experience is limited, you may expand the above style by using layout options:

Youth Pastor, Grace Evangelical Church, Seaton, AL, 1986-1990

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- Established and developed a Youth Leadership Team, mentoring 20 students one-on-one.
- Launched a Youth Missions Initiative, providing monthly opportunities for youth to serve in cross-cultural contexts.

Example 2:

Associate Pastor, First Presbyterian Church Woodland, ME, 1990-1996

Developed and coordinated a cohesive Christian Education program for all ages. Preached twice monthly and taught an Adult Sunday School class weekly. Introduced and supervised a counseling program for those experiencing divorce. Assisted senior pastor in visitation, budget coordination, and missions efforts.

Volunteer Experience

This information is optional, but it's good to include if you have done relevant or interesting volunteer work. Make sure to maximize this section by showing the employer how the work has developed you and how it relates to the work you're applying for.

Example 1:

After School Tutor, Inner City Ministries, Chicago, IL, 1992-1993

Mentored five 7th graders weekly, developing their academic and leadership skills.

Example 2:

Chaplain, Oak Hill Nursing Home, Cleveland, OH, 1998-1999

Created and led weekly worship service. Cared for and counseled elderly patients. Fostered community among the residents.

Awards and Special Honors

Include here any awards or special recognition you've received. Make sure to explain the award, if the honor is not readily evident. School-related awards could be listed here or in the education section above.

Example 1:

Smithson Award, Cancer Foundation (Awarding Leadership and Service)

Example 2:

Volunteer of the Year, 1992, Bayview Chamber of Commerce

Related Skills and Interests

Include here additional experiences or qualities that you feel contribute to who you are and who you could be as an employee. For example, if you're outgoing socially, note that you have "excellent interpersonal skills." If you've traveled widely, are fluent in a foreign language, or have lived in other cultures, these deserve mentioning. Computer skills are especially important to note. Having hobbies also communicates that you are a well-rounded person with a variety of interests and experiences to bring to the position. **Keep in mind that an employer does not want to know too much personal information about you. Include only the type of hobbies that are somewhat related to the position.**

Example 1:

Dedication to task, organization, and time management

Example 2:

Active interest in reading, travel, and the outdoors

References

It is often preferred, though not mandatory, to mention the availability of references. Simply note, **"References available upon request."** Perhaps set this apart by centering or italicizing it.

Résumé Presentation

Layout

The layout of your résumé is key. The right credentials are only an asset if they are presented well. It is essential that your résumé appear clean, concise, and professional. Experiment with bolding, italics, underlining, tabs, margin settings, bullet points and other symbols, etc. to find the most neat and consistent arrangement of your information. Make sure that you skip lines between each section of your résumé. This will provide open space on the page that contributes to an overall neat and appealing presentation. A messy, crammed, disorganized page immediately communicates a message (whether true or not) about the kind of worker you are. Remember, keep your audience in mind. Tailor your résumé to each position that you are applying for. Ask yourself: How has my past qualified me for this particular position? How can I emphasize these qualifications?

Writing Style

Your résumé should be concise and to the point. Employers don't have time to read lengthy and overdone descriptions. Give them a fresh, honest look at who you are. Your résumé will be strengthened by carefully chosen words that accurately and specifically capture you and your experience. Say a lot with a few words. Be sure to include as much specific information regarding your past performance as possible – number served, percent accomplished, etc. Employers appreciate seeing these tangible proofs of previous successes.

Font

Your font should be clear and easy to read. An intricate font will only discourage an employer from reading about you. When an employer picks up your résumé, it should appear clean and professional.

Paper and Printer Choice

Your résumé should be printed on paper that stands out. Choose a heavier stock than normal printer paper, white or a subtle color. Do not use bright colors—this will only make your résumé hard to read. **A classy, but subtle gray or beige is appropriate.**

Number of Pages

A résumé is usually around one page. As you progress in your career, a 1-2 page résumé is fine. Only exceed one page if you legitimately have information that is essential for the employer to read. Don't move to two pages just to include the baby-sitting jobs or lawn work that you did as a teenager.

Proofreading

Proofreading your résumé is absolutely essential. Errors will badly damage your credibility before an employer. Have several people review your résumé for any mistakes. In addition, have a friend read it to determine if it accurately reflects you, your skills, and experiences. It is also a good idea to **have your résumé reviewed by someone in a field related to the one you're applying for.**

Prepare the Way

Before you send your résumé, establish phone contact with the employer, if at all possible. Tell them that you are interested in working for them, and that you are sending your résumé. When an employer can attach a previous conversation to the résumé he/she has just received, your chances of being considered increase. You are somewhat "known," not a random stranger sending in a résumé. Sending one résumé to an employer you have spoken with is more effective than sending your résumé to twenty employers you have never talked to. Be willing to do the hard work and take initiative.

What Are Employers Looking For?

Below is a list of traits and abilities that employers are looking for. Which ones describe you? Emphasize your best qualities throughout your résumé. Here again is an opportunity to review your StrengthsFinder themes for successful patterns.

communication skills	leadership	teaching ability
energy	intelligence	planning skills
organization	analytical ability	conflict resolution skills
direction	initiative	vocational skills
self-confidence	responsibility	decision-making ability
fiscal management	supervisory ability	willingness to accept
self-knowledge	mentoring skills	interpersonal skills
visionary outlook	imagination	flexibility

Cover Letter

Do your research before you contact a prospective employer. Most ministry and parachurch ministries have their own web sites that contain very useful information about demographics, staffing, programs, vision statement, etc. Take the time to look at the broader geographical area for a sense of growth potential and targeted Christian outreach. When you've never spoken with the employer, a cover letter is absolutely essential.

Use it to concisely and informatively introduce yourself. Never send the résumé alone. When you've spoken with the employer, use the cover letter to remind the employer of your conversation. Reiterate why you want the position and why you're qualified for it. Thank the employer for any previous time they have given you to talk over the position. The cover letter can be briefer in this instance.

Ten Mistakes People Make When Writing A Résumé

Watch for these common mistakes.

1. Providing too much personal information (age, weight, health, marital status)
2. Discussing salary
3. Citing reasons for leaving past jobs
4. Using the word "I"
5. Conveying a passive tone
6. Stating phrases in the negative or in the past. Example:

"Fired staff and removed privileges, as needed," instead of "Initiated all disciplinary measures"

Example:

"Finished a First Aid training course", instead of "Hold status of Certified First Aid Technician"

7. Providing irrelevant data that doesn't communicate accomplishments or skill set
8. Overlooking errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling
9. Choosing a layout, paper, or font style that is hard to read
10. Choosing a layout that lacks consistency

Résumé FAQ's

Should I include work experience that was unpaid? Don't ever hesitate to include ANY work experience, paid or unpaid, that has contributed to who you are and who you could be as an employee. If your unpaid work experience is related to the position you're applying for, your résumé should reflect this. You could include it under a section called "Volunteer," or include it with your paid work experience and title that section "Relevant Work Experience."

Should I include work experience that is unrelated to the position I'm applying for? All of your work experience has developed you in some way. Therefore, none of it is "unrelated" to the position you're applying for. However, some work experience may be more related than others, and it is this "more related" experience that you want to focus on. As you describe your previous work, highlight your skills and experiences that are transferable. Ask yourself: How has my previous work displayed the qualities that the employer is looking for? Show them that you're the perfect fit. If there is space, include the work experience that you feel is "less related." Again, intentionally seek out your transferable skills and experiences as you describe the position. This style is recommended for a **Functional Résumé**.

What are some other options for heading titles?

(Chronological)

- Objective:
 - Purpose Statement
 - Goal
 - Position Objective
- Education:
 - Educational Background
- Work Experience:
 - Professional Experience
 - Experience
 - Related Work Experience
 - Pastoral Experience
 - Ministry Experience
 - Employment History
- Volunteer:
 - Related Experience
 - Other Experience
- Awards and Special Honors:
 - Awards, Honors and Activities
- Related Skills and Interests:
 - Other Skills and Hobbies
 - Technical Skills
 - Additional Abilities

(Functional)

- Objective (optional)
- Summary:
 - Background Summary
 - Qualifications
 - Profile
 - Ministry Summary
- Work Experience:
 - Accomplishments
 - Professional Experience/Highlights
 - Pastoral Experience
 - Ministry Experience
 - Employment History (optional)
(list business, city, ST, and years worked)
- Volunteer:
 - Related Experience
 - Other Experience
- Awards and Special Honors:
 - Awards, Honors and Activities
- Related Skills and Interests:
 - Other Skills and Hobbies
 - Additional Abilities

Whatever headings you choose, make sure that each heading is consistent with the others on the page.

If I was promoted, and held two jobs within the company, should I include the original position on my résumé? Absolutely. This shows the progression of your successes, as well as your growth as an individual. It sends an excellent message, telling employers that you produce the kind of work that gets rewarded.

How many references should I have? Employers may specify the number of references they would like to have. Usually, 3-5 references, each representing various relationships with you, is good (work, friend, family, church, etc.). Have written references prepared in advance, so that they are ready to send as employers request them.

Need a visual? Use the internet to search for résumé options. Several sites offering free examples are:
<http://jobsearch.about.com/od/resumes/p/resumetypes.htm> (variety)
http://www.epistemelinks.com/Edge/Resume/center_5.asp (functional)
If you're interested in online design, formatting and internet uploading, see
<http://www.pastorresume.com/>