

A Modern Job Search Checklist

A resume doesn't need to be perfect — it needs to be compelling enough that a recruiter or hiring manager immediately understands your value and wants to keep reading. Most resumes fail not because the person lacks qualifications, but because the document buries their strongest points under generic language, missing numbers, or a layout that's hard to scan in the 6-10 seconds a recruiter typically spends on a first pass.

Rather than a fill-in-the-blank template, this checklist walks through the factors that consistently separate resumes that get noticed from resumes that get overlooked, so you can evaluate — and strengthen — your own resume section by section.

Professional Summary

- Opens with a clear statement of who you are professionally and the value you bring — not just a job title.
- Names your target role or field, so a reader doesn't have to guess what you're looking for.
- Includes one or two standout accomplishments or areas of expertise, not a generic list of soft skills.
- Is 3-4 sentences or fewer — long enough to orient the reader, short enough that they'll actually read it.

Quick check: If someone read only your summary, would they know what you do well and what kind of role you want?

Achievement-Focused Content

- Every bullet leads with what you did and what happened as a result — not just a task or duty.
- Numbers appear wherever possible: revenue, percentages, team size, budget, time saved, customers served, error rates reduced.
- Bullets use strong action verbs (led, built, reduced, launched, negotiated) instead of passive phrases like "responsible for" or "worked on."
- Each role includes 3-5 bullets focused on your most relevant and impressive contributions, not a full task history.



Example transformation:

- **Weak:** "Responsible for managing customer service team."
- **Strong:** "Led a 15-person customer service team, improving response time by 22% while maintaining satisfaction targets."

Quick check: Could you defend every bullet with a specific example or number if asked about it in an interview?

Tailoring and Keyword Alignment

- Language mirrors the terminology used in your target job descriptions — not just synonyms you assume are equivalent.
- Your most relevant skills and experience appear in the top third of the resume, where both recruiters and ATS systems weight content most heavily.
- Keywords are used truthfully and in context, never stuffed in a way that misrepresents your experience.
- The summary and top bullets shift slightly for each serious application to reflect that role's priorities.

Quick check: If you compared your resume side-by-side with the job posting, would the overlap in language be obvious?

Formatting and Structure

- Uses a clean, single-column layout that both a human and an ATS can read without confusion.
- Sticks to standard section headings: Summary, Experience, Skills, Education — avoiding overly creative labels.
- Avoids text boxes, tables, columns, headers/footers, or graphics that can cause ATS systems to misread or drop content.
- Uses one consistent font, size, and bullet style throughout, with generous white space rather than a cramped page.
- Fits on 1-2 pages for most professionals; only exceeds that with a strong reason (e.g., extensive executive experience).

Quick check: Does the resume look clean and easy to scan even before anyone reads a single word?



Skills Section

- Lists skills that are genuinely relevant to your target role, not a catch-all of everything you've ever touched.
- Balances technical/functional skills with the specific tools or platforms named in your target job descriptions.
- Is easy to scan — a simple list or grouped categories, not paragraphs of prose.

Quick check: Would every skill listed survive being asked about directly in an interview?

Consistency and Polish

- Dates, job titles, and formatting are consistent across every role.
- Verb tense is consistent: past tense for previous roles, present tense only for your current role.
- No typos, inconsistent punctuation, or formatting slips — read it aloud or have someone else review it before sending.
- Contact information (name, phone, email, LinkedIn URL) is accurate, professional, and easy to find at the top of the page.

Quick check: Would you be comfortable if a hiring manager scrutinized every line for accuracy and attention to detail?

The Overall Test

Before you consider a resume finished, step back and ask:

- Does the top third make a strong case for you within seconds?
- Does every bullet show impact, not just activity?
- Does the language connect clearly to the role you're targeting?
- Is it clean enough that nothing distracts from the content?

A compelling resume doesn't try to say everything — it makes a focused, confident case for the specific opportunity in front of you.