

Resumes

How Many Do I Need?

Elyse Pipitone, LCSW

Most job seekers will revise their resumes numerous times during their work life. While all career experts agree that a strong resume is the key to getting noticed, there is ongoing debate about the number of resume versions – and number of pages – a job hunter needs.

One resume definitely does not fit all. In fact, you may need several different resume versions, depending on your career goals and professional background. Some experts suggest tweaking a resume for each individual job, as you would with a cover letter. While this is ideal, it may not always be possible. So, at the very least, a job hunter should have two resumes:

A “kitchen sink” resume, otherwise known as an all-inclusive resume.

This contains all of your work history in one place: every job, accomplishment, award or honor; every publication or research paper/project; every education, training, or certification; every license and professional affiliation; every volunteer experience; every language, population and demographic served; every therapeutic technique provided; and every computer program and technical skill.

Its main objective is to serve as a holding place all of your professional work experience in one place. Then, you can pick and choose which experience and expertise should be cut and pasted into the new resume to apply for that job of your dreams.

An up-to-date resume containing your most recent employment and other relevant work history.

This resume should be culled from the “kitchen sink” version and focus on the skills and experience that employers are looking for. Ideally, you should include keywords that match those appearing in the job listing you are applying to. If the employer’s qualifications match qualities that you have, they should be highlighted in your work experience.

This resume should not list every job you ever held, unless you are a recent MSW graduate. However, if social work is your second or third career, you should focus on the jobs in your work history that describe skills and experiences that are transferable to social

work. For instance, if you are a mid-life career changer with previous experience in grant writing, you may want to highlight your excellent writing and editing skills, which are highly sought-after in the social work field.

Most importantly, your resume should not be a reprint of your company’s official job description that you probably received when you were first hired. It should instead focus on your professional accomplishments and successes, and it should include quantifiable information when possible. For instance, what was your caseload size and the population served? What therapies and strategies did you use to help them? Did you create or improve upon a process or service? Did you increase positive client outcomes? How?

You might also consider adding a “Skills” section at the top of your resume, which accentuates the expertise and specialties you bring to the field. This is a short, bulleted list that employers can skim quickly while encouraging them to keep reading. Fact: hiring managers take an average of six seconds to skim a resume deciding if the applicant is a good fit for the job!

As far as resume length goes, the debate is endless. Some career experts insist on one page, while others argue that a two-page resume is necessary to capture the depth and breadth of experience and expertise. One thing is certain: three pages or more is a no-no, unless you have a PhD and are seeking positions as a college professor.

No matter what you decide, the final resume should be a document that narrates your employment story, your accomplishments, and your skills. Most importantly, it should be one that you feel represents you as a social work professional. 🌐

Do you have a job search question you would like answered? Need help with your resume, cover letter, or job search? What other career topics would you like to see addressed in Social Work Voice? Let me know at epipitone.naswma@socialworkers.org.



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