

# How to Write an Effective Résumé

A guide for new nurses looking for their first—or next—job.

**ABSTRACT:** In today's health care job market, nursing students are aggressively recruited for jobs even before graduation. Employers want to see accurate, informative résumés that efficiently and honestly convey an applicant's education and skills and how they match up with the employer's needs. Although résumés remain essential tools for job seekers, in recent years requirements have changed: nursing students and new graduate nurses need to develop an employer-focused résumé geared toward a specific job. This article can assist these nurses in developing résumés that accommodate these latest trends.

**Keywords:** curriculum vitae, interview, job application, qualifications, résumé, résumé writing

Our nation faces an urgent need for nurses. Between 2021 and 2031, job vacancies for nurses in all health care settings are expected to increase by 6%, with approximately 200,000 new opportunities each year.<sup>1</sup> Many health care agencies are recruiting nursing students even before graduation. These employers are looking for accurate, organized, and informative résumés that efficiently and effectively convey the background and skills needed for their entry-level nursing jobs. According to the employment website Monster, for employers, a résumé is second only to an in-person interview in determining whether a candidate is a good fit.<sup>2</sup>

Although résumés remain an essential tool for job seekers, in recent years they have changed. An effective résumé now

- is more focused on posted job requirements for a specific job opening.
- is tailored for successful automated scanning by applicant appraisal and tracking systems.
- includes COVID-19 vaccination status (if you are vaccinated).
- uses metrics or numbers instead of words (for example, the number 15 instead of the word *fifteen*). Readers interpret numbers easier and faster than words, and numbers have more impact than words.<sup>3</sup>
- contains keywords from the job posting in relevant résumé sections whenever possible.
- is customized to each position you are applying for.<sup>4</sup> For example, if the position is in cardiovascular care, include specific experience such as,

“helped manage care for over 10 post-op heart valve replacement patients,” as opposed to just “experience with cardiac patients.”

Although the employment market is wide open for nursing students and recent graduates, an effective résumé is still key. This step-by-step guide is aimed at making sure your résumé gives you the best chance at getting that new job.

## PLANNING THE RÉSUMÉ

**Focus your résumé on the prospective employer's needs—not your own.** Traditionally, résumés have been developed with the candidate's job needs in mind, but this is the wrong approach. The purpose of a résumé is not to get you a job, it's to get you an *interview* for a job.

The traditional résumé is fine in many cases, such as graduate school applications, proposals to speak at a conference, or attachments to letters of introduction. But for a résumé to be effective in a job search, prospective employers must be able to see that you can do the work they need done—which they usually describe in the job posting or ad. This approach to developing a résumé uses the time-tested rule in writing of knowing your audience and writing for that audience. The audience for nursing students' and new graduate nurses' résumés is recruiters, hiring managers, and senior staff nurses; your résumé should be based on what this audience wants to know.

Frequently the résumé becomes the agenda for the interview. When that time comes, make sure you can talk in detail about your skills and experience.



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**Choose the most appropriate format.** A *résumé* (French for “summary”) is a brief description of a candidate’s educational and professional achievements. Those achievements can be organized in one of two basic formats: functional or chronological (or a combination of the two).

*Functional résumés* organize skills and work history according to skill sets, such as clinical work, project management, certificates, and leadership. These terms may in fact become subheadings in the functional *résumé*. Previous employers’ names, dates of employment, and job titles are deemphasized or even omitted. Functional *résumés* are rarely used in health care, though, except by very experienced individuals or consultants, and they are not the best format for nursing students, new graduates, or entry-level nurses.

*Chronological résumés* are the most used and readily accepted *résumés* in health care, particularly for nursing students, new graduates, or entry-level nurses. Most hiring managers and interviewers are familiar and comfortable with this format. In a chronological *résumé*, the candidate’s education, work, and other experiences are listed in inverse chronological order, with the most recent experiences first.

*Curriculum vitae* (Latin for the “course of one’s life”), also known as a “*vitae*” or CV, is another type of *résumé*. When applying for teaching or research positions at colleges, universities, or research institutions, candidates with master’s or doctoral degrees

are usually required to submit a CV. This is typically a longer document (frequently two pages or more) that provides a description of a candidate’s educational background and professional accomplishments in considerably more detail than a *résumé*. The inverse chronological format in *résumés* is also used in all CVs, regardless of a candidate’s profession, discipline, or industry, which makes converting *résumés* to CVs less time consuming.

Over time and with more experience, like many nurses in academia and scientific disciplines, you will want to convert your early *résumés* to CVs, so keeping detailed records of your work and related experiences is useful.

**Choose the right length.** *Résumé* length varies across disciplines, and it can generate big debates, as there are lots of opinions on the subject. Although some may suggest that there are rules regarding length, in reality there are only norms or conventions that vary among disciplines. For example, one-page-only *résumés* are common in journalism, whereas people with more than 10 years’ experience in management will often have two-page *résumés*. Senior executives’ *résumés* typically run to three pages or more.

In health care, though, the “keep your *résumé* to two pages” rule is now a myth and can be bad advice. Many hiring managers don’t care about length. Moreover, a one- or two-page *résumé* may be fine for a young professional, but it can shortchange an experienced and accomplished candidate and fail to

## Example of a Qualifications Summary

### Summary of Qualifications

Experienced nursing graduate with 120 hours of clinical rotation on critical care units with established and evolving competencies.

- **Assessing patients**—performing basic physical exams, taking histories, and measuring vital signs
- **Experience on 2 rapid response teams**—gaining awareness of the importance of recognizing changes in patients' status and knowing when to seek assistance
- Use of information technologies—documenting care in electronic record systems
- **Competent performing selected aseptic procedures**—15 urinary catheterizations, 10 intravenous infusions including infusion pumps, and 2 instances of tracheal suctioning in actual patients
- **Proficient in use of clinical technologies**—cardiac monitors, electrocardiographs, and intermittent pneumatic compression devices
- **Demonstrates respect for diverse cultural and socioeconomic perspectives**
- Experienced in establishing rapport with a variety of patients and families
- Contributes to discussions in patient rounds and multidisciplinary care planning

Note: Examples of keywords from the job posting are bolded for the purposes of this article. These keywords would not be bolded on an actual résumé.

fully explain their past work. A résumé should be as long as it needs to be to convince an employer that your qualifications make you a good fit for an open position.

**Find the right template.** Many word processing programs have résumé templates that use fixed formatting styles to organize and outline the content. However, these templates may limit your ability to alter the layout and look of the résumé. The best practice is to use these templates only if they allow customization.

The quality, clarity, and accuracy of the content in a professional résumé are critical. Several important elements can improve the résumé's overall look and appeal. For example, use white or off-white paper and black ink. Set one-inch margins on all sides; this adds white space to improve the look of the résumé and provides space for employers to make notes during interviews. Left-justify your text and write the résumé in an 11- or 12-point serif font, such as Times New Roman, which is considered easy to read.<sup>5</sup> You may be tempted to use fancy fonts or lots of bold, italics, all caps, or underlining—but these can make text look dense and hard to read.

A modest header or footer with your name and

page number in a small font is a good idea as it can help keep the pages in order if they are faxed or dropped.

**What not to include.** It is illegal for an employer to ask your height, weight, birth date, or physical health—and it's not relevant to the job in any case, so leave this information off your résumé.<sup>6</sup> Same for your marital status and number and ages of children. Keep your social security number and nursing license confidential until you are hired. And save salary requirements for the interview unless the employer has asked for it, in which case you can include it in the cover letter.

## WRITING THE RÉSUMÉ

**Begin with a contact header.** Entry-level job candidates must make a good first impression. A well-worded header at the top of the résumé guides the hiring manager or tracking system to find your information. A résumé header should include your name, degree, related credentials, and preferred contact information. For example, a nursing student's résumé might have a header like this:

**Jane Smith, CNA**

123 Main Street - Owings Mills, Maryland 21117

410-999-9999 - janesmith@gmail.com

COVID-19 Fully Vaccinated

A new graduate nurse might add "BSN" to their credentials.

You can add home phone or mobile phone numbers as well. Avoid using your student email address, which is often inactive after graduation. Be professional right from the start: don't use an email address such as partyguy@gmail.com; instead, open a new account with a more professional-sounding address.

Correctly labeling and positioning résumé headers sends a professional message. The header can be centered or left justified. Using 1.5-line spacing can add eye-appealing white space and improve readability. The contact header is the only section of the résumé where the font size for the name or the entire header can be slightly larger, such as 14 point, and printed in boldface. The remainder of the résumé should be 11 or 12 point. However, subheadings such as Education and Work Experience can also be bold.

**Vaccination status.** Note that the sample header above includes information about COVID-19 vaccination. Since the pandemic, most employers prefer to hire vaccinated candidates.<sup>7,8</sup> In an August 2021 ResumeBuilder.com survey of 1,250 hiring managers, 63% said they preferred to see a candidate's vaccination status.<sup>9</sup> In fact, one-third of respondents said they automatically eliminate résumés that don't include this status. According to Maurer, "Some experts are beginning to say that vaccination status is a must-have line item on

résumés and LinkedIn profiles as employers prepare for regulations that limit hiring to people who have been vaccinated.”<sup>10</sup> As Jeremy Worthington of Worthington Careers and Buckeye Résumés told us in an email, “Our main priority is that the client uses the hiring process to stand out to hiring professionals. When an applicant includes [their] vaccine status on [their] résumé, the need for recruiters to ask a difficult and sometimes sensitive question is eliminated.”

**List your credentials.** The header is the first résumé section where prospective employers see your credentials. Credentials include academic degree(s), accreditation, certification, or licensure, but they can reflect other achievements or competencies as well. The American Nurses Credentialing Center’s preferred order of credentials is as follows<sup>11</sup>:

- highest degree
- licensure
- state designations
- national certifications
- awards and honors

Education degrees are always the first credential listed because they are considered a “permanent” credential: they cannot be taken away except under extreme circumstances.<sup>12</sup> Only the highest academic degree is listed: if you list your BSN and in future go on to earn an MSN, you should delete the BSN and just list MSN after your name.

Never include a degree, certification, or license in your credentials until it is awarded. To do otherwise would be fraudulent, even though for the soon-to-be graduating or certified nursing student, the degree or certification may be only a few months away. Senior students close to graduation, however, can include their academic degree with the notation that this degree is anticipated at a specified date.

Nursing students with a second degree in another field—a degree in the physical or social sciences, such as biology or psychology, for example—should include this credential in their résumé header, as it may be relevant to the nursing job they are seeking.

After your education degrees, list your licensure and certifications, such as certified nursing assistant (CNA), followed by any honors or awards. Use commas to separate each credential. Do not use periods in the credential abbreviations. For example, you would write Jane Smith, CNA, not Jane Smith, C.N.A. Do not use unapproved or unfamiliar abbreviations without clarifying them in the résumé. When you have your license, delete the CNA credential, and list RN.

**Skip an objective statement and go with a summary of qualifications.** For decades, an “Objective” section followed the résumé header. Typically a one-sentence statement describing the type of job a candidate was looking for, these objective statements were often uninformative, trite, and in some cases a waste

of the reader’s time.<sup>13</sup> And, according to the Glassdoor Team, candidates who include a résumé objective instead of a summary tend to have little to no professional experience.<sup>14</sup>

New graduates or nurses who are soon to graduate are not without qualifications, they just need to communicate what they can do at this stage of their career in a convincing manner. Most candidates should include a “career summary” or “profile of qualifications” (or whatever name they choose) that lists relevant competencies, required skills, and what they think they can accomplish for the prospective employer.

Instead of going line by line through each résumé, many hiring managers will look for the career summary to determine whether they should keep reading. In our experience, it typically takes readers one to two minutes to scan résumés. A good summary can quickly give a hiring manager an overall idea of your current and evolving strengths and how your past experiences have helped you develop into a well-qualified candidate. A summary section typically includes

- a brief paragraph (three to five sentences or three to five bulleted points).
- content that functions similarly to an abstract in a journal article.
- keywords from the job posting.
- a concise overview of critical skills and competencies that match those required in the targeted job.

You may need to rewrite the summary section to address a new position every time you submit your résumé. When keywords from the job posting are used in the summary, it can be compelling (see *Example of a Qualifications Summary*).

Qualifications summaries can be difficult to write, and it usually takes several drafts to develop the final text. Some nursing students and new graduates find it easier to write this section last—after they have finished writing the rest of the résumé. That way, the student can cut and paste and then edit the salient parts of each section into a summary rather than develop this section from scratch.

**Use keywords and action verbs throughout your résumé.** To be most effective, your résumé should include keywords and action verbs. Action verbs (such as *executed*, *initiated*, and *attained*) show what you have done and can do if hired. (The Muse website lists some action verbs you can use in your résumé: [www.themuse.com/advice/185-powerful-verbs-that-will-make-your-resume-awesome](http://www.themuse.com/advice/185-powerful-verbs-that-will-make-your-resume-awesome).)

Keywords, in this context, are nouns that reflect the skills and experience sought by a potential employer. You can find them by reviewing the job postings and job descriptions for the position you want and taking note of the terms that routinely pop up on these job listings.

Ask yourself these questions:



- How does the employer define the position and its responsibilities?
- What specific language do they use to describe the core competencies for the role?
- Do I have these same skills, competencies, and experience?

If you've done this type of work before or possess those qualifications, describe them in your résumé using similar keywords. However, do not duplicate or cut and paste portions of the job posting; a Career-Builder survey found that 44% of 650 hiring managers would "automatically dismiss" a résumé or cover letter that appeared to duplicate the job posting.<sup>15</sup> "Nobody likes to see their work plagiarized," the survey report says, "including human resource professionals."

Place keywords throughout your résumé in the work experience section and wherever else they appropriately fit. If you're unsure which keywords to use, Amanda Augustine at TopResume offers some advice: "Start by collecting three to five job descriptions that represent the type of position you're pursuing. Then, copy and paste the job description into a free word and phrase frequency tool like Online-Utility.org's Text Analyzer to identify the terms that are regularly used throughout your desired positions."<sup>16</sup>

**Establish your education background.** The education section immediately follows the qualifications summary. Although résumés outside of health care may begin with the work experience section, health care employers want to see a candidate's educational achievements first. Don't include high school education. It's assumed if you are currently enrolled in college or newly graduated, you've completed high school. Include all college work in the appropriate inverse chronological sequence.

List both nursing and nonnursing degrees and education, beginning with the most recent. Include the graduation year and list the degree-granting institutions, including city and state (no street addresses). If you're currently enrolled in a program, indicate the anticipated degrees, date of graduation, and institution:

#### Education

2018–present Bachelor of Science in Nursing—Anticipated Graduation, May 2023  
Sandra R. Berman School of Nursing and Health Professions, Stevenson University, Owings Mills, MD 21117

Candidates should include coursework at any two-year institutions they attended before earning a four-year degree, not only for completeness but also to avoid surprising prospective employers who may see the two-year degree on a college transcript. Some nursing applicants may think that a

degree in a nonnursing major or another field is not relevant and omit it from their résumés. But, in fact, a background in another field may have some relevance to the targeted new job. Also, it can distinguish you from other candidates with less education.

If candidates have unfinished college work that may be of interest to the desired job, a mention of this can be included in the education section with a statement as to why the degree wasn't earned, as in this example:

2016–2019 University of Maryland, Biology Major—Completed 3½ years of degree program before accepting a nursing assistant job at Johns Hopkins Hospital

*When to add your GPA.* Including your grade point average (GPA) on your résumé can either help or hurt your chances of getting an interview. There are no specific rules on GPAs, but here are some general guidelines. Including your GPA is always optional unless the employer asks for it. But if the employer hasn't asked for it, how do you decide when to provide it? Here are two instances when you could add your GPA to your résumé<sup>17, 18</sup>:

- when you are a recent graduate, or a student approaching graduation, with little or no work experience
- if your GPA is 3.5 or higher

The only appropriate time to include a GPA on your résumé is when you're applying for your first job. GPAs have short half-lives; after a year or more their value diminishes rapidly. If you've been out of school for at least a year and working, you should remove it, because your work experience will be more relevant than your grades.

Your GPA is a metric of your education, but your hands-on, practical experience is almost always more persuasive to a prospective employer than your GPA.<sup>19</sup> "Employers know that it's an imperfect gauge," says career consultant and former manager Alison Green. "Lots of people with high GPAs end up doing mediocre work, and lots of people with unimpressive GPAs end up excelling in their careers."<sup>20</sup>

Not including your GPA won't shut doors that were meant to be open. Just make sure your résumé highlights your skills and experience in a way that shows you're an achiever and don't worry about not including it. If the employer hasn't asked for it—and they rarely do—then they will not miss it.

If you decide to list your GPA on your résumé, it could look like this:

**Bachelor of Science in Nursing—GPA 3.9**  
Anticipated Graduation, May 2023

**Display your work experience.** This section covers your work experiences in inverse chronological order, including nursing-related jobs such as student intern, extern, or nursing assistant, as well as non-nursing jobs. These work experiences can detail the development of skills that candidates will continue to master as RNs. For example:

- Taught (with preceptor) 3 patients how to self-administer their subcutaneous insulin
- On 3 occasions (with preceptor) presented patient condition updates during morning multidisciplinary rounds
- Co-conducted (with preceptor) 2 family conferences
- On 2 occasions gave family members reports on patients' conditions over the phone (with preceptor listening in)

Including metrics or numbers on your résumé adds concrete information and sends a signal to a recruiter or manager that you may be a good fit for their job opening.<sup>21</sup> For example, when talking about your clinical experience, instead of saying you “performed urinary catheterizations,” you could say you “performed urinary catheterizations on 15 male patients,” which is more impressive to readers. Monster.com has some useful tips on how to quantify your measurable achievements at [www.monster.com/career-advice/article/use-numbers-to-make-your-resume-seem-more-impressive-0916](http://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/use-numbers-to-make-your-resume-seem-more-impressive-0916).

Include other nonnursing jobs, even outside of health care, that showcase skills such as communication, conflict resolution, educating the public, and more.<sup>22</sup> For example:

- Conducted staff development training seminars on management, fundraising, and communication skills
- Coordinated leadership training in 7 national Clean Water Action offices, including San Francisco, Austin, Denver, and Providence
- Recorded and made nightly cash deposits

These early job listings and competencies can be eliminated or replaced in subsequent résumé revisions once you've gained more clinically focused experience.

If you are an older new graduate nurse with a lengthy work history, it can be difficult to decide how many years of past work to include. Most online recruitment and résumé-writing experts follow the standard rule to keep work experience to 10 to 15 years.<sup>23-26</sup> Yet applicants' work histories can vary widely, as can perspectives on this standard rule. Tomas Ondrejka, résumé expert at LinkedIn, suggests that older applicants should consider how long they've been in the workforce, how aligned their experience is with their target job, and their other qualifications

## Example of a Nursing Research Listing

### Nursing Research

2022 Survey of Access to Care and Health Status Among the Homeless in Baltimore, MD

- Coinvestigator with fellow nursing school classmates
- Conducted a survey to identify access-to-care issues for and the health status of a small homeless population at a local homeless shelter
- Developed and delivered a health fair to meet some of the health education needs identified in the survey, including:
  - Performed blood pressure screenings and basic health education on maintaining good cardiovascular health
  - Obtained blood glucose screenings for a large portion of the surveyed population who had a family or personal history of diabetes or other blood sugar problems
- Presented a paper on this project at the National Conference on Undergraduate Research

when deciding what past work to include.<sup>27</sup> And CareerBuilder advises that “if some of your earlier jobs are able to effectively communicate the strengths and abilities that you want to emphasize to your future employer, then by all means include them.”<sup>23</sup>

*Include your internships.* Citing your internships is an excellent way to expand the work experience section of your résumé and increase the likelihood of an invitation for an interview. Many hiring managers and recruiters view internships as valuable real-world work experiences. Internships allow students to increase their social and professional skills,<sup>28</sup> put into practice the theoretical knowledge they've learned in class,<sup>29</sup> and acquire more general skills such as time management.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, potential future employers may perceive students who participate in internships as highly motivated, hardworking, and ambitious.<sup>31</sup>

Nunley and colleagues found that job seekers who had industry-relevant internship experience while completing their college degree had interview rates approximately 14% higher than those without internship experience.<sup>32</sup> The positive effects of internship experience were greater for those who obtained non-business degrees and indicated a high GPA on their résumés. Similarly, Baert and colleagues found that applicants with internship experience had, on average, a 12.6% higher probability of being invited to a job interview.<sup>33</sup>

You can add your internship experience to the work section of your résumé or create a dedicated

## How to Tailor Your Résumé for Scanning

- Building a résumé in Microsoft Word is the best way to ensure it will be properly read by most applicant tracking system (ATS) processors.<sup>42, 46, 47</sup>
- Send it as a Microsoft Word file unless the employer asks for PDF format or a plain-text file, because older ATS software may have trouble scanning PDF files.<sup>48</sup>
- Do not include JPEG, TIFF, GIF, or ZIP files and do not password protect your files.<sup>47</sup>
- Use a standard reverse chronological résumé format, which is easier for an ATS to scan.<sup>42</sup>
- Give every section a heading.<sup>49</sup>
- Use the same job titles that appear in the job description or job posting you are responding to.<sup>42</sup>
- Use the same or similar keywords that appear in the job posting for the skills and experience sections; emphasize keywords modified by the words "significant," "strong," and "mastery."<sup>4, 34</sup>
- Don't include a skill you don't have because it appears in the job posting—even if an ATS can't tell you lied, most hiring managers easily can.<sup>46</sup>

internship section. Include the title of your internship, the dates it began and ended, who sponsored it, and where it occurred. Also list your responsibilities and achievements during the internship. Emphasize the experiences that are relevant to the position you're applying for.

Here's an example of how to list an internship experience in the work experience section (again, use concrete numbers where possible):

June–August 2020. Student Nurse Internship, Critical Care Unit, Mercy Medical Center, Baltimore, MD. Worked alongside an RN preceptor for 350+ hours in the critical care unit:

- Managed IV infusion and IV bolus medication administration on over 30 patients
- Completed physical assessments under supervision on over 30 patients
- Performed complex wound care and dressing changes on 10 patients
- Participated in interdisciplinary rounds and bedside change of shift reporting on over 30 patients
- Assisted patients with their activities of daily living
- Obtained ECGs on 10 patients
- Collected blood, urine, fecal, and sputum specimens on over 8 patients
- Reported stat lab results to health care team as necessary on over 20 patients

**Display related experience.** *Pitch your presentations.* List significant and relevant presentations you've given, such as poster sessions or health education talks at school or outside programs. (This section should not include workshops or conferences where you were an attendee and not a presenter.) Here's an example of how such an entry could be worded:

2022. "The Effects of Compassion Fatigue on Pediatric Nurses Caring for Medically Complex Patients." Senior Clinical Practicum Poster Presentation, Sandra R. Berman School of Nursing and Health Professions, Stevenson University, Owings Mills, MD.

Presentations to lay audiences can also reveal essential patient teaching experiences. The following example shows how these experiences can be summarized:

2022. "Recognizing Early Warning Signs of a Stroke." Presented to the Senior Citizens Club of Towson, MD.

*List certifications, certificates of completion, and licensure.* Next, list professional certificates of completion and certifications, spelling out any credentials that may not be familiar to the reader. List the name of the agency that provided the certification, the year obtained, and expiration if applicable. For example:

2021–present	Certified Nursing Assistant—Maryland Board of Nursing
2020–present	Basic Life Support—American Heart Association
2018–2020	Basic First Aid—American Red Cross

To prevent identity theft, never include certification or social security numbers. Your documents are handled by and accessible to a wide range of agency staff during the recruitment and onboarding process.

*List memberships in professional groups and organizations.* Use the association's full name the first time it's mentioned, followed by its abbreviation or acronym thereafter. Include the years of membership:

2022–present	Member, Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing, Rho Epsilon Chapter
2020–present	President, National Student Nurses' Association (NSNA) Stevenson University Chapter
2019–present	Member, NSNA
2018–2019	Member, Stevenson University Student Government Association

If you belong to an underrepresented racial or ethnic group, use terms that will let the system identify you to employers trying to diversify their workforces and become more inclusive.<sup>34</sup> For example:

2021–present	Member, Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
2020–present	Member, National Black Nurses Association

*Share software and language skills.* Nursing plays a vital role in electronic health record (EHR) use in the clinical setting. If you have experience with this information technology, include it among your other proficiencies. Cite your language skills or level of ability (fluency) in any language other than English and include mastery of American Sign Language or Braille. For example:

**Software Skills:**

2022–EpicCare EHR

2021–Cerner Ambulatory EHR

**Language Skills:**

Spanish–reading proficiency only

American Sign Language

*Document research activities.* Not all nursing students or new nurse graduates have conducted research. However, some students may have been involved in an evidence-based practice (EBP) initiative, introductory research, or a quality improvement project under the supervision of a faculty member or preceptor. These experiences can be impressive on novice nurses' résumés. Beginning research experiences, such as searching for, reviewing, and appraising the literature on a specific clinical question; helping develop data collection tools; assisting in data collection; and managing or interviewing subjects or respondents, can show basic research competencies, as well as the ability to understand statistical terms and the language used in research articles (see *Example of a Nursing Research Listing*).

*Include EBP experience.* EBP initiatives are rapidly becoming the norm in most medical centers nationwide. EBP is a core competency of baccalaureate education.<sup>12</sup> Showing evidence of basic EBP capabilities can be advantageous, particularly if you're considering a job in an academic medical center. However, numerous reports, including from nurses, suggest that nurses are not properly trained to apply EBP and do not use it often enough.<sup>35–41</sup>

If you are properly trained in EBP, you should list this information on your résumé. Include experiences such as assisting with the critical thinking required to formulate valid clinical questions and skills such as knowing what strong evidence looks like and how to search for it. These experiences can also include assisting with searching electronic databases for relevant evidence, critically appraising that evidence, and assisting in the difficult process of translating findings into practice changes.

## REVIEWING AND SUBMITTING THE RÉSUMÉ

**Write for the robot.** After you have drafted your résumé, edit it for scanning by an applicant tracking system (ATS). Many nurses think their résumés are personally read by human eyes after they submit them to a job site. This was true—up until about 1999, when job searches first went online.<sup>42</sup> Nowadays, most employers use automated résumé scanning software, such as an ATS, to sort through multitudes of applicants. An ATS uses artificial intelligence to scan for relevant keywords, assess and screen candidates, and rank those that make it through the initial screening.<sup>43, 44</sup> Most résumés pass through an ATS before they get to a human—and an estimated 75% are never seen by a human at all.<sup>45, 46</sup>

Eye-catching fonts, unique styling, and formatting used to help a résumé stand out and appeal to human reviewers. Now, a résumé should be designed using the simplest, most generic résumé template you can find so it can be readily scanned, read, and “understood” by the ATS.<sup>42</sup> Writing for these robots is not hard, though—it just requires attention to detail so your résumé will deliver what the ATS has been programmed to find. See *How to Tailor Your Résumé for Scanning*.<sup>4, 34, 42, 46–49</sup>

**Proofread, then proofread again.** A recent study found that “applicants with error-laden résumés were less likely to be interviewed [and] hired [and were] offered lower starting salaries and rated lower on job-related traits than applicants with error-free résumés.”<sup>50</sup> Allow enough time for a thorough review of your completed résumé. Proofread it for layout consistency and check for spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors. Bear in mind that it's very easy to miss errors in a document you've been working on repeatedly. And don't rely on your computer's spelling or grammar tools, which can miss mistakes such as misspelled uncommon words that aren't in the program's database. Ask someone else to proofread the résumé too. And last, avoid using the same words over and over. It suggests a lack of attention to detail.<sup>51</sup>

**Be honest.** This should go without saying, but truth matters. Avoid embellishments in your education section, make sure all your dates are accurate, and don't exaggerate your skills and accomplishments.

A 2020 survey study of 400 applicants and 400 hiring professionals found that as many as 78% of applicants misrepresented themselves on their résumés and in interviews.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, about 44% of applicants reported they had faked or would fake references.<sup>53</sup> This is unwise, as lies can be easily exposed through routine background checks, or soon after starting work when you cannot meet job expectations.<sup>54</sup>

**Always send a cover letter.** In response to a CareerBuilder survey, 40% of hiring managers said that the presence of a cover letter was more likely to



## Sample of New Graduate Nurse Résumé

**John Smith, CNA**

Baltimore, MD 21218 • (410) 999-9999 • johnsmith@gmail.com  
COVID-19 Vaccinated

### Summary of Qualifications

- Skilled in completing patient assessments including vital signs, physical exams, and medical histories
- Proficient in use of multiple clinical technologies such as IV pumps, bladder scans, ECG machines, and electronic health records, including Cerner, EPIC, and MedConnect
- Performed invasive procedures, including suctioning artificial airways, routine blood glucose monitoring, and completing 15 urinary catheterizations on male patients
- Assisted during 2 CPR and 3 rapid response codes
- Respects diverse cultures and socioeconomic perspectives among staff, patients, and visitors

### Education

2018–present Sandra R. Berman School of Nursing and Health Professions, Stevenson University, Owings Mills, MD  
Bachelor of Science in Nursing (Psychology Minor)  
Expected Graduation, May 2023

### Clinical Experience

#### Spring 2022

- MedStar St. Mary's Hospital, Leonardtown, MD—Emergency Department Practicum Rotation (120 hours)
- Sinai Hospital, Baltimore, MD—Pediatric and Pediatric ICU Pediatrics Rotation (40 hours)

#### Fall 2021

- Sinai Hospital, Baltimore, MD—Pulmonary Infectious Disease Unit Medical–Surgical II Rotation (40 hours)
- Baltimore Department of Health, Baltimore, MD, and HomeCall Home Health, Westminster, MD Community Health Rotation (90 hours) Influenza Vaccine Clinic

#### Spring 2021

- MedStar Union Memorial Hospital, Baltimore, MD—Cardiovascular Step-Down Unit Medical–Surgical I Rotation (90 hours)
- The Sheppard and Enoch Pratt Hospital, Towson, MD—Adult Crisis Stabilization Unit Psychiatric Rotation (40 hours)
- Virtual Simulation and DocuCare, Stevenson University—Lippincott CoursePoint Solutions Women's Health and Obstetrics Rotation (40 hours)

#### Fall 2020

- Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center, Baltimore, MD—Medical–Surgical Unit Fundamentals of Nursing Rotation (90 hours)

### Relevant Work Experience

#### June–August 2021

##### **Student Nurse Extern**—Multi-Trauma Intermediate Care

University of Maryland/ R Adams Cowley Shock Trauma Center, Baltimore, MD

- Worked 1:1 with an RN preceptor in the Primary Adult Resource Center for Trauma
- Cared for 2 trauma patients with pneumothorax, 5 patients with brain injuries, 3 with chest tubes, and 10 with arterial lines
- Performed activities such as medication preparation, venipuncture for blood specimens, IV insertions, and 3 Foley catheter insertions
- Cleaned and dressed patient wounds, including 1 patient with abdominal necrotizing fasciitis and 2 patients with gunshot injuries

#### March 2020–present

##### **Desk Assistant**—Student Activities

Stevenson University, Owings Mills, MD

- Manage ticket sales for both on- and off-campus events while providing excellent customer service

August 2019–present	<b>Resident Assistant</b> —Apartments and Upper-Class Suites, Stevenson University, Owings Mills, MD <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervise 30-50 residents while promoting community, leadership, academia, involvement, safety, support, and overall personal excellence</li> <li>• Enforce university policies and assist with administrative tasks</li> </ul>
June 2018–present	<b>Nursing Technician (Certified Nursing Assistant)</b> —Emergency Department, MedStar St. Mary's Hospital, Leonardtown, MD <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete routine ECGs, urine dipsticks, lab blood draws, and cleaning of patient care rooms</li> <li>• Successful application of orthopedic ortho-glass splints</li> <li>• Effectively perform CPR on 2 patients</li> </ul>
<b>Certifications</b>	
October 2021–present	Opioid Overdose Response/Narcan Administration Baltimore County Department of Health
February 2021–present	NIH Stroke Scale, National Institutes of Health
January 2021–present	Certified Nursing Assistant, Maryland Board of Nursing
May 2020–present	Basic Life Support (CPR) Certified, American Heart Association
<b>Awards &amp; Honors</b>	
May 2020–present	Rho Alpha Sigma Honor Society
May 2019–present	Recipient of the Sandra and Malcolm Berman Family Endowed Scholarship in Nursing
May 2019	Recipient of The Promise of Nursing, Maryland Scholarship National Student Nurses' Association (NSNA)
August 2018–present	NSNA, Stevenson University President (May 2020–present) Vice President (May 2019–May 2020)
August 2018–present	Recipient of Dean's Scholarship, Stevenson University

get a résumé noticed.<sup>55</sup> A cover letter is usually a one-page letter addressed to the hiring manager briefly describing your interests, credentials, and qualifications for the available job.<sup>55</sup> A cover letter can significantly boost your application if it's well written or sink it if it's poorly written. Job search expert Alison Doyle offers some useful tips on writing cover letters for students and recent graduates at [www.liveabout.com/student-cover-letter-samples-2063664](http://www.liveabout.com/student-cover-letter-samples-2063664). For example, she suggests mentioning “soft skills—interpersonal ‘people’ skills like creative thinking, communication, teamwork, or time management that will help you to adapt easily to the people and clients or customers you will be working with.”<sup>56</sup> Specific references can be given during the interview rather than in a cover letter, but you can end your résumé with “References on Request.”

**Stay in touch with prospective employers.** Stay on top of communications with prospective employers. Try to respond to all requests from employers as soon as you can. And check your spam folder often: the automatic email responses frequently sent by ATSs may be read by your email provider as spam.

**Bring a copy of your résumé to the interview.** A good rule to follow is to always have a printed hard copy to share with nurse recruiters and nurse managers at the in-person interview. Although nurse

recruiters and managers have the ATS version you submitted, many prefer to read and take notes on a hard copy. They also like to use these hard copies as a guide or blueprint for the interview. What's more, bringing a hard copy with you is your opportunity to adapt the initial résumé to include more details and appear more attractive than the ATS version. For an example of a final résumé, see *Sample of New Graduate Nurse Résumé*.

## CONCLUSION

### **Make sure your résumé reflects your progress.**

Throughout your career, you'll need to revise the résumé as you apply for new positions. Although showcasing student work can be useful in a first-time job search, once you graduate and begin your first professional job, prospective employers may see some of these student entries as inappropriate or irrelevant. These entries should now be removed to make room for new professional accomplishments that show a progression in clinical and scholarly contributions, responsibility, authority, and leadership.

Remove items like anticipated date of graduation, school projects and papers, GPA, student clinical rotations, and part-time student jobs (such as babysitting or lawn mowing). However, any nonnursing

jobs involving working with people, meeting deadlines, and essential responsibilities can remain for a few years before eventually being deleted.

It's a good idea to save a copy of your résumé that contains this older information. It serves as historical evidence of your past work and other achievements and could be useful at a future date. In fact, you should maintain a thorough, detailed master copy of your résumé, as well as a collection of all your old résumés. When you apply for a new position, you can pull from this database and use only those items that are relevant to the targeted new job.

**An entrée into employment.** Your résumé is your ambassador. It goes before you, introducing you to prospective employers and giving them a good first impression of you and your abilities. Highlighting your competencies by using keywords and metrics, formatting your content for an automated reviewer, and remembering to be employer focused can help push your résumé to the top of the stack. Writing an effective résumé can be challenging and time consuming. It requires research, editing, proofing by another reader, and rewrites. However, all that work can pay off—generating a prospective employer's interest and resulting in that sought-after in-person job interview. ▼

For 215 additional nursing continuing professional development activities on professional issues, go to [www.nursingcenter.com/ce](http://www.nursingcenter.com/ce).

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