

## **WRITING PROFESSIONAL SUMMARIES**

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The professional summary is probably the toughest part of the resume to write. It needs to be brief, but informative. It needs to stand out because it's the first thing that an employer will read on your resume or CV.

Professional summaries have many names- "Objective," "Profile," "Summary," "Professional Profile," and of course, "Professional Summary." Sometimes, individuals choose to replace the generic title with a descriptive title like "Marketing Expert" or "Experienced Physician Assistant." The title of the section doesn't really matter. It's the content of the section that can make your resume pop.

### **Content**

It may be easiest to explain professional summaries by first explaining what they are not. **Do not** write generic objective statements like "To obtain employment at a reputable organization where I can utilize my skills." This is a meaningless statement. Let's hope you have a desire to work for a reputable employer where you can utilize your skills. Otherwise, why are you applying?

**Do not** start your summary with the word "To." Any statement that starts with "to" sounds like the answer to an exam question. You want the summary to be interesting, personal, and engaging. Let's take a look at an example for a sales rep who is applying for a management job:

#### **Professional Summary**

Successful insurance sales representative with over 10 years of experience. Eastern Region Sales Rep of the Month nine times. Significant experience in new rep training and recruiting. Highly skilled with Oracle database systems and Microsoft Excel. Seeking a position as Regional Sales Manager in the financial services industry.

Without knowing anything else about this individual, we know that he has a successful insurance practice (as evidenced by his sales rep of the month awards) and he has trained and recruited new representatives. These are two very relevant and important attributes for a Regional Sales Manager Candidate.

Now, let's take a look at the summary of a new graduate who doesn't have the years of experience as the individual above. This person obtained her bachelor degree in nursing and is applying to her first full-time RN position:

#### **Professional Summary**

Recent BSN graduate with a strong history of leadership and academic success. Achieved Dean's List for last six semesters and served as President of Student Nurses Association in 2017. Familiar with hospital and private medical office environments. Experience with IV placement, catheterization, measurement of vital signs, and related patient care skills. Knowledgeable with EHR systems. Seeking a position as a Registered Nurse in an outpatient clinic.

Despite this graduate's lack of professional experience, she has highlighted skills that she learned in her clinical experiences and classes. This is completely acceptable- most employers place approximately the same value on education as professional experience. Job postings often say something like "Four years experience required, or equivalent combination of education and experience."

### **Format**

Like all text on resumes and CVs, professional summaries should utilize **gapping**. Gapping is a writing style that uses concise phrases and incomplete sentences to convey information quickly and clearly (Purdue OWL, 2017). Resumes are not essays. Hiring managers often have dozens of resumes to review, so it is important to create a summary that grabs the manager's attention quickly.

Like the examples above, professional summaries can be in the format of a brief paragraph. They can also take the form of bulleted lists, or a combination of phrases and bullets. See the two examples below:

#### **Experienced System Administrator**

IT Manager with A+, Network +, and Security + certifications. Knowledgeable with Windows, Linux, and Mac operating systems.

- Managed team of 10 help desk technicians in a small college environment
- Planned and implemented organization-wide database change from IBM DB2 to Microsoft SQL
- Led the installation of 45 wireless routers and installed new fiber optic cable in 50,000 ft<sup>2</sup> building
- Experienced operator of Dell PowerEdge Servers

#### **Dynamic Nonprofit Manager**

- Director of Development for Kanawha Valley United Way for five years
- Over 15 years total experience in nonprofit organizations
- Organized most successful fundraising campaign in KV United Way's history in 2016
- Highly experienced with various customer relationship management systems
- Orchestrated dozens of partnerships with community groups and charities
- Member of three nonprofit boards of directors
- Comfortable with TV and radio appearances and newspaper interviews

As you can see in the examples above, it isn't a requirement for professional summaries to state a specific objective. In fact, there may be times when you need to omit any statements about a desired job. For example, if you are distributing resumes at a career fair where there are many different

employers, you'll probably want to refrain from attaching yourself to a specific job. When applying to a specific job opening, it is assumed that you want the job. Otherwise, you wouldn't apply.

Occasionally, employers won't post individual job openings. They may have a general statement on their website that says "To be considered for employment, please submit your resume to [careers@ABCcorp.com](mailto:careers@ABCcorp.com)." In that case, it **is** a good idea to include a specific objective. That way, the employer will be able to match you to a specific opening.

### **Additional Tips and Examples**

Here are some additional ideas and examples to help you construct an effective professional summary:

- Wait until the rest of your resume is completed before writing the professional summary. That way, you can use the content of the resume for guidance.
- Use the professional summary to introduce yourself and highlight your best strengths. Don't regurgitate a job description from the work experience part of the resume. As a general rule, you don't want to repeat yourself on the resume. If you feel that it's necessary to list the same fact(s) in your summary and your work experience, reword the statement or write about a different aspect of the experience or accomplishment.
- Be personal but not biographical. The professional summary is for **professional** accomplishments, not **personal** background.
- Avoid using empty buzzwords and phrases. It's ok to use adjectives like "dynamic," "driven," and "motivated," but you need to include tangible experiences and accomplishments.

Acceptable: "Motivated PA graduate with significant patient care experience. Skilled in venipuncture, suture placement and removal, interpretation of EKGs, and injections. Past president of the PA student association and member of Generation Charleston. Seeking a position in a rural clinic or urgent care facility.

Unacceptable: "Dynamic team player and effective communicator with a strong work ethic. Detail-oriented professional comfortable in any environment. Effective multi-tasker and comfortable as a leader or follower. Seeking a position as a full-time PA.

In the acceptable example, the graduate points to specific skills that she feels are especially important and relevant. This list can be tailored to the individual job posting. This should not be an exhaustive list of everything the graduate can do. The rest of the resume can cover the other skills. She also mentions her involvement in two organizations that demonstrate her leadership skills and passion for her community.

In the unacceptable example, the graduate fails to give any insight into his strengths or abilities. He calls himself a "team player" and "effective communicator." Those are basic, foundational skills that everyone should have. They don't differentiate the candidate. He also says he is a "multi-tasker" and has a "strong work ethic." No recruiter is going to hire someone that comes across as being lazy. Don't just say you have a strong work ethic- prove it with examples of your work. Finally, he says he is comfortable in any environment. The recruiter is only interested in knowing if you can make it in **their**

**environment**, so he would have been better off to mention a positive clinical experience that was similar to where he's applying.

In conclusion, you cannot be everything to everyone. Focus on your individual strengths and experiences. You have a much better chance of catching the recruiter's attention.

#### References

Purdue OWL. (2017). Writing the Curriculum Vitae. Retrieved from <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/641/01/>.