



# Ditch the Template: Writing a Resume in Microsoft® Word

## Ready Reference ♦ E-15

College of Engineering, Architecture & Technology ♦ Career Services

Ever had your resume looked at and then been told to not use a template? Ever wonder why? It's because templates are used so often that they have become generic and rather cliché. But if you feel as though creating a resume on your own is too difficult and time consuming, or your word processor just won't cooperate and do what you want it to do, then this document is the one for you.

(Note that this document uses Microsoft® Office Word 2003 for its discussions and assumes a basic working knowledge of the software.)

### Setting Up Your Resume

Before you begin typing your resume, set up your document to meet a few general guidelines, a few of which are explained below (more guidelines can be found in Ready Reference E-4).

**Margins:** Margins are the surrounding border of whitespace around the edge of your document, and are generally recommended to be 1 inch all the way around. To set your margins, go to *File* → *Page Setup*. In the dialogue box, change the dimensions of the left, right, top, and bottom margins to all equal 1 inch.

**Font:** Make sure that the font you choose to use for your resume is professional looking and easy to read. Typical fonts include Times, Times New Roman, Arial, Helvetica, Optima, and Tahoma. Make sure that the font size is somewhere between 10 and 12 point for the body of the resume, and somewhere between 12 and 14 point for the contact information. Your name can be a slightly larger, 14 – 16 point.

**Page Length:** Limit your resume to 1 page.

**Colors:** This is an engineering resume, not a display of your artistic abilities. Leave out the fancy colors and graphics – use black ink only.

### Filling in Resume Content

#### Formatting Features:

When to use such features as **bold**, *italics*, underline, ALL CAPS, or a combination is up to you. Bear in mind that the use of these features is to enable and enhance the readability of your resume. Emphasizing certain types of text, such as section headers, job titles, and your name, are good places to start. Stick with the general philosophy of “less is more” – don't use any feature too often.

#### Bullet Points:

Make sure you use bullet points to help describe the skills and accomplishments you achieved in your professional or academic experiences, projects, leadership roles, and volunteer activities. Bullet points help to draw the reader's eye towards these main points and are an effective method of describing the work that you did.

*To Use Bullet Points:* Click on the “Bullets” button on the *Formatting toolbar* on your screen to start the auto-bulleted feature, or go to *Format* → *Bullets and Numbering* to select a bullet style before beginning, and then press OK. To exit the bulleted text mode, either press “Enter” on your keyboard twice, or press the “Bullets” button on a new line of text. **NOTE:** if you already have several sentences of un-bulleted text typed out, you can select the text and then press the “Bullets” button on the *Formatting toolbar* to auto-bullet what you've already written.

*To Un-Bullet Text:* Select the text from which you wish to remove the bullets, then click the *Bullets* button on the *Formatting toolbar*.

**Tabs:**

Tabs offer a great deal of flexibility in your document writing, and are an ideal tool to use then formatting your resume.

Tabs are text placeholders that allow you to begin writing text at a certain place within the document. In order words, tabs are a great tool to use for creating lists, such as a list of Activities or Previous Work Experience. They allow you to line up text throughout your document without having to use the spacebar on your keyboard, which often results in text that does not line up perfectly.

Tabs also allow the user to perform text alignment in their document, such as setting up Contact Information with text on both the left and right margins of the paper, as well as in the center, all on the same line. (A good example of this can be seen in Ready Reference E-8.)

**Using Left Tabs:** In *Normal* and *Print Layout* views, there should be a small black L shape in a box right next to the horizontal ruler near the top of the screen. That L-shape represents the *Left Tab* option. When used in a document, left tabs allow text to be written at different places across the screen while remaining left-aligned. To use a left tab, click anywhere on the ruler at the top of the screen to insert a left tab at the point of insertion. From then on, whenever the *Tab* button is pressed on the keyboard, the text cursor will automatically be placed at that point, and then writing may resume as normal. Multiple left tabs may be placed on the ruler. Each time the Tab button is pressed, the cursor will move over from one tab stop to another until the desired place has been reached.

Example:

This text is left tabbed.  
And so is this.

**Using Right Tabs:** Right tabs are similar to left tabs, but they right-align text as it is typed (therefore, text appears to be moving backwards from the text cursor). To use a right tab, click on the L-shaped button near

the ruler until you see a backwards L. That symbol represents a right tab. Then click anywhere in the ruler to set that right tab stop.

Example:

1111 Engineering Circle  
Stillwater, OK 74078

**Using Center Tabs:** Center tabs allow text to be centered out from the point of the tab stop. This differs from simply center aligning text because it only affects a small portion of the text (whatever it tabbed to), and can be placed anywhere. So you could place a center tab at 6 inch across the screen, and then for each line you press *Tab* on, the text will go to that spot and center itself across the tab as you type. In order to use a center tab, click on the L-shaped button next to the ruler at the top of the screen until you see an upside-down T symbol. This represents the center tab. Click anywhere on the ruler to place it into the document.

Example:

PISTOL PETE  
pistol.pete@okstate.edu

**Clearing Tabs:** To clear a tab at any time from a portion or the entirety of a particular document, select the text that you no longer want the tab to apply to, then select the tab on the ruler by clicking on it. Drag it off the ruler to remove the tab. You can always remove a tab after you have begun a new line of text to ensure that the tab does not apply to anything from that point forward.

**Tables:**

The advice is to leave this one to the pros! While tables can be useful for presenting data in reports, they do not make good formatting tools when it comes to laying out the content of your resume. The use of tables in a resume often affects the flexibility of the document's layout. They can also inadvertently add unwanted white space near the borders of your resume, causing it to become longer than planned. *Unless you're already an expert with this feature, ditch the tables and use tabs to properly format your text.*