

# How to build a standout resume lesson for grades 9-12

## Overview

If you're here, it means you're looking for ways to teach your high school students professional skills. This 60-minute lesson plan has everything you need to teach your students resume-writing skills so they can write resumes that grab employers' attention and, most importantly, lead to interviews.

It includes materials, learning objectives and standards, activities and instructions, and student handouts. We also recommend tech tools that you can use to make the learning experience fun and interactive for your students.

## Resources

- Resume lesson plan (you are here)
- [Resume writing student facing powerpoint](#)
- [Understanding your audience jigsaw activity + handouts](#)
- [Developing your resume content glow and grow activity + handouts](#)
- [Build your resume activity + handouts](#)
- [Jigsaw instructions](#)
- [Self-assessment handout](#)
- Tech tool recommendations
- Stopwatch/timer

**Grade Levels:** 9-12

**Time:** 60 minutes or 1-2 class periods for a full-length lesson, including one of the three activities (25-30 minutes per activity).

## Learning Objectives:

- Students will learn about the importance of tailoring their resume to their audience.
- Students will draft a resume for a fictional student in response to a sample job posting.
- Students will write accomplishment statements they can use on their resumes.
- Students will learn about three common resume formats, and how to choose which format is best for them.
- Students will draft a complete resume they can continue to refine and tailor.
- Students will gain confidence and feel more comfortable about drafting and tailoring resumes for future job applications.

**Common Core Standards:**

English Language Arts College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards For Reading and Writing  
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1  
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4  
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.2  
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4

## Lesson Plan

### Do Now (5 minutes)

When students enter the classroom or sign into class online, project the slide that asks the following questions. You can also use a collaborative tool like [Padlet](#) and post the question there:

What is a resume anyway? How are they used and why do they matter?

### Debrief Do Now (5-10 minutes)

Invite students to share out. If you use Padlet, give students the opportunity to read each other's responses before they share. If you're teaching in person, you can cold call or ask for volunteers. Online, you can ask students to type in the chat box. As students are sharing, note patterns that come up in their responses.

Once several students share, emphasize that a resume is a document that helps potential employers understand who you are when applying for a job:

*"You might think that your resume's goal is to win you a great job. That's true in the long run. But in the hiring process, a resume's greatest impact comes when you first apply for the job. That's when a company decides whether you'll be one of a very few applicants who are invited to a job interview."*

### Framing: Why do we need to learn this? (5-10 minutes)

It's important to format your resume in a way that allows recruiters and hiring managers to easily scan and identify your qualifications as they pertain to a specific job opportunity. They're looking for one thing: how precisely your resume matches the requirements of the job they want to fill.

Recruiters spend an average of about six seconds reviewing a resume before making a decision to: a) continue reading, b) maybe save for later, or c) abandon and move on. And in some companies, the "person" measuring how well you match up isn't a human at all! It's a computer program on the lookout for key words and phrases.

Your resume needs to make a great first impression and fast. How can you write a resume that will help you get in the door? How do you get started?

Optional: You may want to show this [video clip](#) (5:54).

# Activity: Understanding your audience jigsaw

## (30-45 minutes)

### Resources

- [Activity handout for students](#)
- [Sample job description handout](#)
- [Anonymous personal profile handout](#)
- [Resume template handout](#)
- [Jigsaw instructions](#)
- [Self-assessment handout](#)

In this activity, students will work together in groups of three to explore a scenario. They will practice preparing a resume for a fictional student using three resources: a job description, a personal profile of a potential applicant, and a resume template.

The activity is designed as a [jigsaw](#), which is interactive and holds students accountable for contributing to the work equally. At the end of the activity, the class will work together to develop a rough draft of a resume for the sample applicant.

This is essentially a card-sorting activity. It can be run in an in-person class with paper cards (cut in advance), or cut during class by the students (with scissors provided). It can also be run as a digital activity using an online collaboration tool like [Miro](#).

1. Share with students that the most important things they need to do to prepare a successful resume is to understand what the employer is looking for and then to recognize how they can meet the employer's needs.
2. Split students into groups of three.
3. Give each student a scenario (samples provided). The scenarios will include:
  - A basic job description
  - A profile of a potential applicant which includes both relevant and irrelevant details, all written as independent statements
  - A resume template including all the typical sections with descriptions
4. Explain the [jigsaw instructions](#). Each student is responsible for reading and thinking about one of the documents (job description, personal profile, and resume template). Note: If you are teaching online, put each group in a different breakout room so they can work together. Students can use a Google Doc to collaborate.

5. Students work independently for five minutes to familiarize themselves with the information on their documents.
6. When five minutes are up, each person summarizes what they read and what it made them think about with the rest of the group.
7. The group works together to determine what information should be included on the applicant's resume, what information should be excluded, and how it might be organized according to the template. The group can select appropriate statements and move them around into the various sections of the template.
8. Bring the class back together to share their ideas. Why did they make the choices they did? Document their conclusions by building a draft resume for the applicant in real time.

**Optional extension (15 minutes):**

- Ask the class: what if this same applicant applied to a different position? Display a second job description, different from the first in important ways, but still a fit to the applicant's goals and experience.
- Work together to edit the initial draft. What stays, what goes, how might the information be re-organized? Compare and contrast the two versions to emphasize the importance of understanding your audience and tailoring your resume to fit the opportunity.

## Activity: Developing your content glow and grow (30-45 minutes)

**Resource**

- [Activity handout for students](#)
- Video: ["Get hired" clip](#)
- [Self-assessment handout](#)

In this activity, students will learn about "accomplishment statements", including a helpful formula for writing them. They'll learn why these types of statements are important and useful when you're building your resume because they show potential employers what you did and the impact of your actions.

Students will review examples of accomplishment statements, practice drafting their own, then pair up to give feedback on each other's statements.

**Framing tip:**

Explain to students: the best way to show an employer what you can do for them is to tell them what you've already accomplished. That's why it's so important to not only tell potential hiring managers what you've done in your past roles, but also the impact of your actions. Make every word count!

Optional: You may want to show this [video clip](#) (3:04).

1. Explain what Accomplishment Statements are and how they can be used in a resume to demonstrate your qualifications:

*"Accomplishment statements let employers know about your unique achievements. Beyond a simple list of duties or responsibilities, accomplishment statements show how your work created an impact."*

2. Share this formula to develop strong bullet points: What + So What?
  - What = The task you accomplished or were responsible for
  - So What? = The result or impact of your actions, or the rationale behind what you did

Explain that students should use specific examples and quantify results when they can to show the scope of their work.

3. Review a few examples that reflect the importance of transferable skills:

Peer Math Tutor: "Helped fellow high school students understand and apply key math concepts, and prepare for their exams. Succeeded in helping my tutees raise their math grades by an average of 20%."

Assistant Childcare Supervisor: "Established a safe, enjoyable, and enriching environment for children aged 5-12 by designing, preparing, and leading a variety of indoor and outdoor activities, while following appropriate safety protocols."

Blood Center Volunteer: "Designed a PowerPoint presentation and a poster summarizing how and why to participate in the local blood drive, to raise awareness about the importance of blood donation in our community."

4. Invite students to think about one or two of their relevant experiences, then draft some Accomplishment Statements that demonstrate their qualifications powerfully and succinctly. Encourage them to use the ability verbs on the activity handout.
5. Pair students together to share their draft Accomplishment Statements. Ask students to give feedback (a glow and a grow), keeping in mind the What + So What? Formula.

#### **Optional extension (15 minutes):**

- Give students 10 minutes to review sample job postings that sound interesting to them, even if they're not ready to apply for jobs yet. Point them to specific sources, or provide a sample of entry-level job

postings from various industries. Ask them to read the job postings carefully, paying particular attention to how the employer describes their ideal candidate. They can look in the qualifications, duties, and summary sections for clues.

- Ask students to then reflect on which of their strengths, skills and experiences overlap with employers' wish lists? They might draw from their paid and volunteer work, as well as school and personal life:

*“Which of your attributes set you apart from other candidates? Which attributes are worth your effort to develop further? Set some SMART goals for yourself.”*

## Activity: Build your resume (30 minutes)

### Resources

- [Activity handout for students](#)
- [Resume template handout](#)
- [Resume formats article](#)
- [Resume Genius resource](#)
- [Self-assessment handout](#)

This activity gives students an opportunity to actually build their resume based on the three most common resume formats: chronological, functional, and combination. Each of the three formats is summarized [in this article](#) (you'll also find samples of each resume format in that article).

The **chronological resume** format is what the majority of people use to create their own resume. Chronological resumes begin with your contact details and resume introduction, but then immediately move into your most recent work experience. Because hiring managers care a lot about your work experience (if you have any), featuring this information near the top helps them evaluate your application quickly.

The **functional resume** format focuses on your relevant job skills. Unlike a chronological resume, the functional format ignores when and where you learned your skills. Instead of focusing on your work history, functional resumes are used to list your strongest resume skills at the top.

A **combination resume** is a blend of the chronological and functional resume formats. Combination resumes:

- Lead with a core skills section (like a functional resume)
- End with a detailed work experience section (like a chronological resume)

1. Summarize how the three main resume formats compare and contrast, and share some basic formatting tips. The flowchart infographic from [this article](#) is a simple tool that can help students make an informed decision about format.

2. Invite students to start drafting a resume that demonstrates their strongest skills and most relevant experiences. They could do this online using a tool like [Resume Genius](#), or with a guided template in google docs, or with a hardcopy template (as in the first activity in this lesson plan).

**Framing tip:**

Remind students to consider the “What + So What?” formula (outlined in the second activity) as they work on drafting accomplishments for their resume:

- What = The task you accomplished or were responsible for
  - So What? = The result or impact of your actions, or the rationale behind what you did
3. As students work, check in with individuals to answer questions, provide clarification, or offer suggestions. If appropriate, have students share their resumes with each other to gather inspiration and ideas for improvement. Encourage students to seek out feedback from other adults in their lives.

## Cool down (5-10 minutes)

**Resource**

- [Self-assessment handout](#)

No matter which activity you did, give students the opportunity to reflect and set a goal for their next steps. These self-assessments will also help you figure out what you need to do next to help them meet the learning objectives and grow stronger in resume-writing skills. Here are some suggestions:

- You can use a tool like [Mentimeter](#) or [Poll Everywhere](#) to do a pulse check. Ask students on a scale of 1-5 (1 not confident, 5 ready to tailor their resume now), how prepared they feel to draft and tailor their resumes for potential employers. This information is also helpful for you, as you can use their responses to think about how much more guidance they need and whether or not you want to dig deeper into this skill.
- Create a Google Form that gives students a place to reflect and set a goal. Here are some questions you might include:
  - How prepared do you feel to draft and tailor resumes for potential employers?
  - What aspect of the resume-writing process do you feel most confident about?
  - What part of your resume do you want to work on next?
  - What do you need more help with?
- Encourage students to continually assess their resumes, and adapt them as their goals change and as they gain experience. Remind them to consider format and content. Here are some questions they can ask themselves:
  - Will my resume stand out in a pile?
  - Have I considered the employer’s perspective?

- Have I shown the employer I can do the job?
- Do the headings I use and their order reflect what is most important to the position?
- Do my bullet points include details about the quality and impact of my past work—the “So what?”
- Can I say the same thing with fewer words?
- Is it free of spelling and grammar errors?
- Have I asked someone to proofread it and offer feedback?
- Is my name and key contact information up-to-date and clearly visible on every page?
- Is the text (font and size) easy to read?
- Is there enough white space?
- Is my formatting consistent?

## Amplify with additional resources

If you want to dig deeper into teaching resume skills and give your students more practice, check out [Open P-TECH's self-paced student courses](#).

\*Note: You'll need to register for Open P-TECH to access this content.