



CARY COMMUNICATIONS INSIGHTS

How to Update Your Resume

By Karen Bluestein

If you have been out of the job market for a while, your resume is probably not doing you any favors. Not because your experience is weak, but because the rules have changed. Recruiters work differently, hiring managers skim faster, AI-assisted screening tools shape who gets seen, and attention spans are shorter. A resume in 2026 is not a career autobiography. It is a decision-making tool. Its job is to get you into a conversation, not to tell your entire story.

1. Show career progression, not just longevity

If you stayed at one company for a long time, break it out. A single job title covering a decade or more hides growth and makes it harder for recruiters to understand your trajectory. Show each time you were promoted to a new role.

OLD: Biggee Corp, Houston, TX, Customer Service Leader (Aug. 12, 2017 to Dec. 1, 2025)

NEW: Biggee Corp., Houston, TX (2017-2025)
Customer Service Manager (2022-2025)
Customer Service Representative (2020-2022)
Customer Support Representative (2017-2020)

Years are enough for most professionals. Months only matter if you are early in career or changed roles frequently. If you took time away from working for any reason, account for that time. E.g. 2015-2016 Cared for elderly parent full-time. Don't hide it.

2. Lead with outcomes, not responsibilities

Hiring managers care far more about impact than tasks. Listing what you were responsible for tells them little. Showing what changed because you were there tells them everything.

OLD: Responsible for following up on leads, presenting product information, and making cold calls.

NEW: Increased qualified leads by 25 percent year over year by simplifying the lead intake process and refining call scripts.

Start bullets with action verbs and anchor them in results whenever possible.

3. Use metrics to show scope and credibility

Numbers add weight. They help recruiters quickly understand scale, complexity, and responsibility.

OLD: Managed Human Resources team. Responsible for screening and hiring new employees.

NEW: Led a team of five recruiters, screened 238 applicants, and hired 27 employees in 10 months. Improved retention by 7 percent year over year.

Perfect data is not required. Reasonable estimates are fine if they are directionally accurate.

4. Be specific about your skills

Generic skill labels do not help you get found or remembered. In 2026, skills function as keywords that drive visibility in AI-assisted screening tools.

OLD: IT, Operations, Finance

NEW: Data Analysis, CRM Optimization, Process Automation, SEO, Generative AI Prompting

Align your skills with how roles are described today, not how they were described years ago. Use LinkedIn's full skills section strategically.

5. Highlight recognition with recent, credible examples

Awards still matter, but recency matters more. Hiring managers want to see momentum.

OLD: Award-winning sales professional

NEW: Seller of the Year, 2024; Innovation in Action Award, 2023; Best Practices Award, 2022

When award names are vague, add brief context to show why they mattered.

6. Show who you are, not just what you do

Culture fit matters more than ever. Employers want capable people they actually want to work with.

OLD: References available upon request

NEW: Interests include animal rescue volunteering, triathalons, and community fundraising

Keep this brief. The goal is to humanize you, not distract.

7. Remove education dates when they no longer help you

If you graduated more than ten years ago, your degree date rarely adds value and can unintentionally introduce age bias. Also, spell out name of school and include city and state.

OLD: UNC Chapel Hill, BA, Art History, 1986

NEW: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Bachelor of Arts, Art History

Recent certifications and ongoing education are the exception.

8. Trim early-career noise

If you have more than 15 years of experience, your earliest roles usually do not need detailed bullets. Focus depth on the last 10 to 15 years.

OLD: Auto Mechanic, Tom's Gas Station, summers 1986-1989

NEW: Earlier experience includes marketing and operations roles in manufacturing and services environments.

You can also group older roles under a single heading such as "Additional Experience."

9. Treat LinkedIn as your primary career asset

More people will see your LinkedIn profile than your resume. In many cases, it is the first impression. Write a first-person summary that sounds like you, highlight outcomes instead of job descriptions, add featured projects, and request recommendations that speak to results. Use your LinkedIn profile banner as a billboard. Don't leave it blank. Writing recommendations for others signals leadership and credibility.

10. Build visible expertise over time

Strong candidates in 2026 are not invisible. Share articles, comment thoughtfully, and write short posts about trends, lessons learned, or problems you solve well. You do not need to be loud or prolific. You need to be consistent and relevant.

11. About ATS

Before a human ever sees your resume, it's often reviewed by an applicant tracking system (ATS). An ATS is software companies use to collect, organize, and filter resumes before they reach a recruiter or hiring manager. These systems scan for relevant job titles, skills, keywords, and experience that match the role. If your resume language does not align with how the job is written, it may be filtered out automatically, even if you are well qualified.

To improve your chances, mirror the terminology used in the job description, use clear section headings, and stick to simple formatting. Avoid graphics, tables, columns, text boxes, and keyword stuffing, all of which can confuse the system or make your resume harder to parse. The goal is not to game the ATS, but to make it easy for both software and humans to quickly understand your value. Incorporate real-world experience in your bullets that tie directly to the job description.

12. Resumes have changed

Resumes have changed dramatically over the past decade. What once worked as a detailed career history now works against you. Today's resumes are skimmed in seconds, screened by software, and reviewed by people who are looking for clarity and relevance, not volume.

That means shorter summaries, stronger headlines, and bullets that focus on outcomes instead of duties. What to do: tailor your resume for each role, use current job titles and keywords, lead with results, and keep formatting clean and easy to scan.

A big change involves including soft skills and cultural fit references, e.g. conflict management, oral/written communication, stakeholder management, cross-functional collaboration, fast-paced environment, independent thinking, comfortable with change. Consider all of them when writing your bullets.

13. What NOT to do

Your resume can flag you as an "old-timer" if you don't follow recent resume standards.

- Do not include your street address. Just list city and state.
- Do not include your current company email or a silly email address. You need something simple and professional like firstname.lastname@gmail.com.
- Do not include a career objective. Instead, summarize the impacts you've made and the value you bring, not the role you seek. It's not about you (ironic, right?). It's about how you can make your boss look good.
- List the exact role you seek at the top of the resume with some skill highlights. Don't make the reader guess how your background aligns with your experience or which role you're applying for.
- Do not list every task you ever performed. Make sure your resume is brief, but powerful. It'll be skimmed quickly and you must make every line matter.
- Do not list extra entries for multiple roles at the same company. Group them under one company name.
- Do not assume the reader will make it beyond the first few paragraphs. They certainly won't read everything, so only include compelling items.
- Do not reuse the exact same resume for every job application.

- Do not say, “Responsibilities include: x, y, z.” Just list simple impact bullets with metrics where possible.
- Do not include graduation year if you’re more than 10 years out of school. Just list school and degree. (See info above).
- Do not include “references available upon request.” That’s a red flag for older workers.

14. Formatting for each role

Include for each role:

- Company name
- City/state
- Job title (and scope if relevant, e.g. Sales Director, Asia Pacific Services)
- Start and end years (2022-2024)
- Bullets explaining impact and scope, e.g. Led team of 5 sales leaders to grow sales by 18% y/y.

Final thoughts

You do not need to do all of this at once. Update what you can, set a clear deadline, and keep moving. Capture wins, metrics, and recognition every quarter in one place. Your next resume update will be faster, easier, and far more effective.

Need help updating your resume? [Contact](#) Cary Communications for a free 15-minute consultation.

[Cary Communications](#) | hello@carycomms.com | (919) 578-2666 | [Portfolio](#) | [Contact Us](#)

Career Services | Corporate Communications | Creative Services

Personal Branding | Career Coaching | Executive Resumes | Messaging | Presentations | Graphics Design