Step 3: Choose a Resume Format

You can quickly capture an employer's eye with the right resume format. Depending on your job objective and work history, the best resume format might be a chronological, functional, or combination.

When your resume gets in front of a recruiter or hiring manager, it has only about eight seconds to do its first job: Show that you're a top job candidate. To do that in such a short time, you need the right resume format.

What is a Resume Format?

A resume format is simply the way resume information is organized on the page. For example:

- **The chronological resume format** puts the work history and achievements together in the body of the resume. (See the [chronological resume template](#).)
- **The functional resume format** divides them up, with the achievements in the body and the history at the end of the page. (See the [functional resume template](#).)
- **The combination resume format** is, well, a combo of the chronological and functional. (See the [combination resume template](#).)

Which Resume Format Should You Use?

Here are some guidelines to help you decide which format will work best for you.

The Chronological Resume Format
The most traditional format is the chronological resume. This format highlights your work chronology. Your dates, places of employment, and job titles are listed as headings under which your achievements are written.

The chronological format is most effective when at least one of the following is the case:

- You want to stay in the same field or industry.
- Your work history shows lateral or vertical career growth or an increase in job responsibility, making your job objective the next obvious step in your career path.
- Your current or most recent job is one you are proud of and enjoy.
- There are no gaps in your employment history; or if you have gaps, they can be filled with "job titles" that show you were doing something relevant or constructive during that time.

The Functional Resume Format
The functional resume presents your work achievements under skill headings, which gives you the freedom to put your achievements in order by relevance and impact rather than by chronology. The dates, names of employers, and job titles in your work history are listed very briefly in a separate section, usually at the bottom of your resume.

The functional format is best when at least one of the following applies:

- You are making an extreme career change such that your work history is in no way relevant to your job objective. (For example, you are a psychologist who wants to become a landscape architect.)
- You have a checkered employment history (such as hard-to-explain gaps in employment or job hopping) that you want to downplay as much as possible.
- You are getting ready to re-enter the job market after many years of unemployment, which you want to hide on your resume.
- You need to focus on experience or skills from a very early time in your work history.

The Combination Resume Format
The combination resume offers the best of the chronological and functional resume formats to highlight both your work history and your relevant skills. Using the basic chronological format, the combination resume presents your work history in the body of the resume. Then skill subheadings are used to group achievement statements under each job title/employer.

The combination format is best when at least one of the following applies:

- You are making a career change and want to highlight your transferable skills.
- You want to advance in the field or industry in which you are currently working.
- Your job titles do not clearly describe the level of responsibility you held.
- You want to fill gaps in employment with unpaid work that is relevant to your job objective.

Which Format Do Employers Prefer?

The [chronological format](#) is most preferred by employers, followed closely by the [combination format](#).

Employers tend to be suspicious of job seekers who use the [functional format](#), fearing they are making false claims about their achievements or hiding something about their past. However, if the chronological or combination resume format doesn't work for your circumstances, the functional resume can work if you address the employers' concerns. Here's how to do that:

For each achievement statement on your functional resume, state clearly where that achievement took place by referencing a job title, organization, or activity you've listed under Work History or Education.

Now You Know

Now that you know about the three types of resume formats, it's time to choose the one you'll use. If you want a resume template that has all the formatting done for you in MS Word, check out my [Ready-Made Resumes](#). It's an online resume builder that has templates for all three formats, along with tips to help figure out which one is best for you.

When you're ready, click **Next>>** (below) to go to the next step in the resume guide.