

# Writing a Résumé “Aussie” Style

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Document composed in Australian English, not US English

Résumés in Australia have been transformed over the past few years. Not too long ago, dates of birth, marital status and interests took “pride of place” on page one, followed closely by education and the ubiquitous set of generic skills that the masses all claimed to possess. Was there a person in Australia who *didn't* declare they had “excellent communication and interpersonal skills” and that they were “team players” with “strong organizational skills”? If a smattering of these people existed, they were certainly in the minority of Australian workers!

In the fast moving pace of today's global workforce, résumés have had to keep pace with changes in legislation, changes in perception, and to what is considered “politically correct.” Whether the reason lies behind the vast resources of the Internet and greater exposure to the international community or not, résumés in Australia have come of age, being recognized as a critical selling tool, and the first step in gaining an edge on a highly competitive workforce.

## CV or Résumé?

A résumé in Australia is more often than not referred to as a CV (Curriculum Vitae). While strictly speaking a résumé and a CV are two distinct documents—the curriculum vitae being traditionally a tool used by the medical, scientific, and academic communities, the term CV has been embraced as an industry standard regardless of the type of document it is.

While résumés vary appreciably in terms of style, format, and approach depending on the job seeker's talents and the market they hope to penetrate, there are a few absolutes when composing an employment document for the Australian job market.

## Australian Spelling

Spelling is a particular issue. Words often considered “misspelled” are frequently those deemed as “American/English.” Words such as Centre=Center, Organise=Organize, Cheque=Check, Realise=Realize, Colour=Color, Specialise=Specialize, Recognise= Recognize, Licence = License, Defence = Defense, are many of the main offenders that will be considered glaring spelling errors should they find themselves in an Australian résumé, and only serve to reinforce the candidate's lack of familiarity with the norms of the country. The suggestion is to set the word processing software to Australian English, or English UK, and take prompts from there. If unsure, an outstanding internet reference for clarifying these spelling anomalies can be found at the Australian Macquarie Dictionary site at: <http://www.webwombat.com.au/reference/macqdict.htm> .

## Technical Details

Paper size in Australia conforms to European standards. It is expected that a résumé will be composed using A4 size paper (217mm x 297) and not US Letter size (8”x11”).

## Desirable Size

Australian employers and recruiters tend to reach agreement about the length of Australian résumés across all industries and occupations. One-page résumés tend to be particularly out of vogue, with a format of this nature widely considered as lacking in detail. As a country with only a population of 20 million and a land mass of almost the size of the United States, it is clear Australians are used to “spreading out” and this also translates to résumés! White space is considered desirable for easy reading, with 1” (2.54cm) margins acknowledged as the industry norm, and information spreading from 2-4 pages considered an appropriate length. Résumés extending to 5 or more pages are for the most part, considered unnecessary.



## **Intention of Direction**

So, what are the key components of an Australian résumé? Well certainly, a “theme” is important. Just as a person seeking a particular genre of novel at a bookstore, it is desirable for the reader to be presented with information that supports the book’s theme. Consequently if a job candidate wants to pursue a career in the Information Technology industry for example, then providing lengthy non-IT descriptions of unrelated work that detracts the reader from the overall “theme” of the résumé is considered unwise. Similarly for an individual who may have two streams of career possibilities; it is advantageous for the candidate to showcase his/her talents in two separate résumés, than placing a confusing assortment of non-matching skills for the employer to “take their pick” of which ones they would prefer!

Consider the case of a classroom teacher, who may be interested in theatre acting and media arts. Could the following “skills” be considered anything but confusing by the reader?

### **Employment Skills:**

- Classroom Teaching & Discipline
- Curriculum Development
- 5’6” tall, blue eyes, blonde, 36 24, 26
- Experience in theatre production of *Hair*
- Understudy for part of “Hooker” in the “*Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*”
- Children with Special Needs.

While the above example is played for laughs, comparable poor decisions are not uncommon and Australian decision-makers are likely to quickly discard a résumé that presents the individual as a “Jack-of-all-Trades.” In other words, a job seeker must quickly establish where they are heading, what they are applying for, and must support their case through a résumé that showcases and supports their achievements.

## **Duties, Responsibilities or Achievements?**

In recent times, Australian résumés have transitioned from primarily “duties-based” to “achievement-based” mirroring the rapid increases in employee working hours, the intense job-market competition, and the perception of employers that employees at all levels should be increasingly productive. Solid thought should be given to initiatives, special ideas, or inroads the candidate made during their employment, that distinguished them from their peers.

## **Let it all hang out? Not anymore!**

A hallmark of the Australian résumé in mid eighties-early nineties was to “let it all hang out.” Routinely at the conclusion of each employment, text would invariably explore why the employee chose (or was chosen to) leave that company. “Reasons for Leaving” typically ran from the obvious “to seek new challenges” to the completely inappropriate “ideas differed from management, prompting my decision to leave.” Despite some individuals still believing that the résumé should fully disclose minute detail, this way to “shoot yourself in the foot” has all but disappeared from the Australian résumé in the new millennium.

## **First Person/Third Person**

Australians are an outgoing race of people, not shy to voice their achievements; yet similarly bragging is considered immodest. To circumvent the constant references to “I, me, my, our” Australian résumés omit the first-person references. In place of “I spearheaded a new procedure that increased productivity by 45%” the preferred way is to say “Spearheaded a new procedure....” The trend in the early ‘90s to refer to the job candidate in the third-person,



i.e. “John spearheaded a procedure...” has virtually disappeared from the Australian résumé, although it is still routinely used in company biographies.

## **Education**

Education is highly prized in Australia and impresses many employers; studies should be disclosed along with any training that supports the candidate’s employment goals.

## **Personal Details**

Personal details once considered a prominent fixture on an Australian résumé has all but disappeared in today’s “career marketing” documents. Certainly legislation prohibits employers quizzing job candidates on their marital status, dates of birth, and religion, and although many in Australia still volunteer this information, together with hobbies and interests, there is a growing trend away from revealing what most consider being irrelevant to the candidate’s capacity to perform their job well.

## **References**

Unlike most of their American counterparts, references are still routinely disclosed on the Australian résumé, although this, like many other components of the traditional Australian résumé is a declining trend. Privacy seems to be a particular case in point, where many job candidates have found that their references (or referees as frequently called by many Australians) have been contacted for purposes other than to provide a reference! In today’s large databanks of names and contact information, many job candidates are wisely recognizing the need to shield these cherished “assets” until a firm job offer is presented, and simply placing “Available upon request” under the Reference heading.

Government applications are a clear exception to the rule where job candidates are customarily required to disclose full reference details, and on occasion, obtain a written report on the job candidate by responding to a series of job-specific and performance-based questions.

## **Summary**

If there’s one absolute to composing a résumé for the Australian job-market it is “nothing stays the same.” In a rapidly changing employment market, employers are continually seeking new ways to uncover the talents of the people they hire, and new ways to reveal their strengths; as their tactics evolve, so should those of the savvy Australian job hunter, who will know the current trends sufficiently to stay ahead of the game.

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End



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**Founder, Top Margin Résumés Online**



Residing in the beautiful cosmopolitan city of Melbourne Australia, Gayle's early career was spent in customer service refining her talents and defining her philosophy of "customer service excellence". Progressively responsible roles in office administration followed, exposing her to the exciting world of personnel recruitment. This defining career moment, precipitated Gayle's thirst for new challenges and in March 1990, she tentatively placed the "Top Margin" shingle outside the front entrance to greet her very first client.

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