

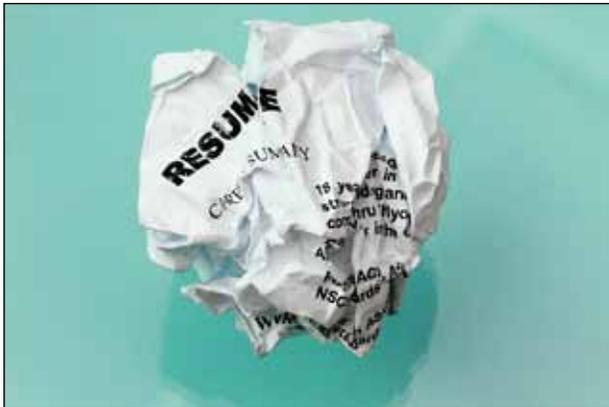
10 Essential Tips for Your Amazing Social Work Résumé

by Valerie Arendt, MSW, MPP

Is your résumé ready to send out to employers? You have Googled example résumé templates, perfected your formatting, and added appropriate action words. Everything is in the correct tense, in reverse chronological order, and kept to two pages or less. What else should you think about for an amazing social work résumé? Whether you are a clinical or macro social worker, student, new professional, or have been in the field for 30 years, these essential tips will keep your résumé ready to send out to your future employer.

1. Objective or Professional Summary?

Let's start at the beginning. I am not a fan of the objective, and neither are many hiring managers. If they are reading your résumé, they already



know you are seeking a position with them. Generally, an objective is used by someone who has recently graduated or has very little experience. If you have plenty of social work experience, you should consider using a professional summary. This is one to three sentences at the beginning of your résumé that help describe the value you bring as a social worker through your skills and experience. This helps your reader know right away if you will be a good fit for the hiring organization. It is much easier for a hiring manager to find that value in a short paragraph than trying to piece it together from a lengthy history of professional experience and education.

DON'T: Objective: Seeking a social work position within a facility where I can utilize

my experience to the benefit of my employer as well as gain knowledge and professional growth.

DO: Licensed Clinical Social Worker with 6+ years experience in medical and mental health settings, working with diverse populations in private practice, health care, outpatient, and inpatient treatment settings. Recently relocated to Georgia.

2. Don't assume your reader already knows what you do.

This is one of the biggest mistakes I see when reviewing résumés. Write your résumé as if the person reading it has no idea what you do. Really? Yes! This will help you to be descriptive about your experience. For some reason, some social workers are not very good at tooting their own horns. Your résumé is exactly the place you need to brag about what an amazing professional you are. Don't assume that because your title was "Outpatient Therapist," the reader of your résumé will know exactly what you did. Be descriptive. Give a little information about the organization or program, the clients, and the type of therapy or work you performed. This can easily be done in three to five bullets if you craft thoughtful, complete sentences.

DON'T: Provide psychotherapy to clients.

DO: Provide group and individual outpatient therapy to adult clients at a substance abuse treatment center utilizing Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT), psychoeducation, and motivational interviewing.

3. List your accomplishments.

If you worked in a position for five years but don't list one relevant accomplishment, that is a red flag for a hiring manager. Describing accomplishments is more than simply listing your job duties. These are the contributions you have made in your career that would encourage an organization to hire you.

Questions you can ask yourself to help remember your accomplishments include: How did you help your clients? Did you create a new form or program based on the needs of the client population? Did your therapy skills reduce the relapse rate in your agency? Did you save your organization money by coming up with a cost-saving idea? Were you selected for special projects, committees, or task forces? Even if the only social work experience you have on your résumé is your field placement, you should be able to list an accomplishment that will entice the reader to want to know more.

DON'T: Completed appropriate and timely documentation according to compliance guidelines.

DO: Recognized need for updated agency forms. Developed 10 clinical and administrative forms, including no-harm contract, behavior contract, and therapist's behavior inventory, which increased staff efficiency and productivity by 15%.

4. Quantify your accomplishments.

Numbers aren't just for business professionals. Numbers also help with the bragging I mentioned that needs to happen on your résumé. The most convincing accomplishments are measurable and help your résumé stand out from the crowd. How many clients did you serve? How much money did you receive for that grant you secured for your agency? How many people do you supervise?

DON'T: Wrote grants for counseling program in schools.

DO: Co-wrote School Group Experiences proposal, which received a \$150,000 grant from State Foundation for Health, resulting in doubling the number of children served in group counseling from 120 children to 240 children, and increasing the percentage of minority children served from 20% to 50% of the total child population in group therapy.

5. Tailor your résumé to the specific job.

You have heard this over and over, and it should make sense. Still, not many social workers do this correctly or at all.

Many big organizations, hospitals, and university systems use online applicant tracking systems to review résumés. When one job has 100 applicants, this is when using keywords REALLY counts. Look at the job description for keywords.

For example, what words do they use to describe the clients? Patients, clients, residents, victims, survivors, adults, children? If you have worked with the same client populations, used the same therapy techniques, or provided the supervision listed in the job description, make sure these SAME words are in your résumé. Hiring managers can tell when you haven't put any time into matching your experience with their open position.

DON'T: Provide in-home therapy for families.

DO: (Similar language from job description) Perform individual and family, agency, and home-based therapy for medically fragile children and their families (parents and siblings) with goal of maintaining intact families and improving family functioning.

6. Spell out all acronyms.

Social workers LOVE to use acronyms. Many social workers spend hours writing case notes, and to be efficient, they rely on acronyms to describe their work. For the same reasons you should use keywords, it is essential that you spell things out for the computer or human resources person who may not know what certain acronyms mean. I am a social worker with limited clinical knowledge, and I often have to Google acronyms when I review NASW members' résumés. The reader responsible for finding the right candidates to interview will consider this a waste of his or her time and might move on to the rest of the résumés in the pile if he or she has no idea what you are talking about.

DON'T: Scored and analyzed clinical assessments to include SIB-R, CBCL, CTRF, or SCQ in packets for families scheduled for autism evaluations.

DO: Scored and analyzed clinical assessments for autism evaluations including Scales of Independent Behavior-Revised (SIB-R), Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL), Caregiver/Teacher Report Form (CTRF), and Social Communication Questionnaire (SCQ).

7. Bullets, bullets, bullets.

Most résumés I review are succinct and formatted very nicely by bulleting experience. But there are still some folks who use paragraphs to describe their experience. You may have 20 years of so-

cial work experience at one agency, but that does not mean you can't be concise. I guarantee you that hiring managers are not going to read a paragraph that is 15 lines long to look for the experience that will fit the position they are trying to fill.

Cover Letters for Social Workers: Get Yourself the Interview

by Valerie Arendt, MSW, MPP

Should you submit a cover letter when one is not required? The answer is *yes*. Cover letters are essential to getting an interview. They are a concise way to communicate your value to an organization, and hiring managers do use them to winnow candidates. Your cover letter should tell the employer that you are the perfect match for the position. Do this by using the language from the job description and organizational mission. It is essential to tailor your cover letter to the specific job.

Here are some basics for writing an interview-winning cover letter:

- **Salutation:** Find out who will be reading your letter. This is essential. If it is easy to find out who will be reviewing applications and you don't take the time to do this, they probably won't take the time to read your letter.
- **Name of Organization and Position Title:** The organization may have multiple openings. Be sure to indicate which position you are applying for.
- **Referral Source:** If someone in or close to the organization suggested you apply for this job, mention that person in the cover letter. This will let the reader know you have a connection to the organization and will score big points.
- **Why do you want to work for them?** You need to describe to your reader how the organization's mission and goals are a good fit for you professionally. This shows them you know about the organization and have done your homework.
- **What can you do for their clients/organization?** Sell yourself. Let them know how your experience and education is a perfect match for the position and a good fit for the organization. This is where you use the keywords from the job description to really hit it home that you are a candidate worthy of an interview.

Below is a real job description with keywords highlighted. If you have the experience they are looking for, you should invariably use the same language in your cover letter.

Title: Social Worker

Job Details: Responsible for completion of *psychosocial assessment* of *patients* and *families* enrolled in *Hospice*. Will work as *part of a team* to address *end-of-life needs*, some *counseling* and emphasis on *case management*. Able to access *homes* in *Moore & Montgomery County* service areas. Must be able to take *call rotation*. Strong *organizational skills* needed.

After a strong introductory paragraph, the body of your cover letter should be concise and address the two to four most important details from the job description:

My experience and areas of expertise are an excellent match for the requirements stated in your announcement:

- **Hospice Assessments:** As a clinician with St. John's Hospital, I prepared extensive psychosocial assessments and treatment plans for patients.
- **End-of-Life Care:** I provided counseling and accurate case management to more than 1,000 patients and their families over 7 years as a member of the St. John's Hospital end-of-life team.
- **Home Visits:** I made regular home visits to hospice patients in Moore and Montgomery Counties and was responsible for two on-call shifts per month.

Close by stating that your experience and passion make you a perfect fit for the employer. Include the best way for them to contact you for an interview.

Write your résumé in such a way that it is easy to scan and find the keywords in 30 seconds or less. Use three to eight bullets to describe your experience and accomplishments.

8. Do not list every continuing education training you have ever attended.

Whether or not you are licensed in your state, you should seek out continuing education in social work. Don't forget, it is in the *NASW Code of Ethics: Section 4.01 (b) Competence*: "...Social workers should routinely review the professional literature and participate in continuing education relevant to social work practice and social work ethics."

It is great to show your reader that you are up to date on the latest clinical information on your client population, but the section on your résumé for Continuing Education or Professional Development should only list the courses that are relevant to the job you are applying for. It is a great idea to keep a list of all your continuing education, for your own reference and for your license renewal. You just don't need to list them all on your résumé.

9. Less is more.

I hope you are seeing a theme here. Recently, I have come across a few résumés that have all of the following sections:

- Professional Summary
- Education
- Relevant Social Work Experience
- Work Experience
- Additional Experience
- Summary of Skills
- Professional Affiliations
- Volunteer Experience
- Publications
- Relevant Coursework
- Activities
- Honors

Every résumé is personal and different. You don't need 10 categories on your résumé. Professional Experience and Education are musts. but after that, limit the places hiring managers need to search to find the information that will help them decide to interview you. Only put the information that is most relevant to the job to which you are applying.

10. Your references should always be available upon request and not on your résumé.

If the last line on your résumé is "References Available Upon Request," this one is for you. It is not necessary to tell your reader that you have references. If you get far enough in the interview process, they will ask you for your references. Have them listed in a separate document.

Only send the references that are relevant, and only send them when asked. It is imperative that you inform your references that they may be contacted, and always send them a copy of the job description and your recent résumé, so they can be prepared when contacted. Nothing is a bigger turnoff to me than getting a call to be a reference for someone I supervised five years ago and I can't remember exactly what their job duties were. It is great to get a heads-up and a reminder of what the person did under my supervision. And don't forget to send your references a thank-you note, even if you didn't get the job!

DON'T: References Available Upon Request

DO: (Separate document with your contact information at the top) References:

*Jessica Rogers, MSW, LICSW, Director of Family Programs, Affordable Housing Authority Chicago, IL
Relationship: Former Supervisor
Phone: 543-321-1234
rogers@email.org*

Jessica was my direct supervisor and is familiar with my clinical social work skills, my ability to work with diverse communities, and my aptitude for managing relationships with partner organizations. Jessica recognized my success in client outcomes and promoted me within 6 months of my hire date.

Remember, your résumé is your tool to get an interview. It doesn't need to include every detail about you as a professional social worker. Use your cover letter to expand on details that are specific to the job you are seeking. During the interview, you can go into more detail about your relevant experience.

Valerie Arendt, MSW, MPP, is the Associate Executive Director for the National Association of Social Workers, North Carolina Chapter (NASW-NC). She received her dual degree in social work and public policy from the University of Minnesota and currently provides membership support, including résumé review, to the members of NASW-NC.



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