



It has been an honor to have authored the *Career Connect* column for *The New Social Worker* magazine since 2014. In my 15 articles, I have written about social work interviews, salary negotiation, the value of a strong professional network, job search strategies and mistakes to avoid, transferable social work skills, and my first and most popular article, “10 Essential Tips for Your Amazing Social Work Résumé.”

I am passing the social work career baton, and this will be my last column for *The New Social Worker*, for now. I am leaving you all with where we started, a follow-up to my résumé article. Since writing my first article about social work résumés, I have reviewed and provided résumé feedback to more than 500 National Association of Social Workers–North Carolina members. I review résumés of students, new professionals, and seasoned social workers who are looking to advance their social work careers. I speak often with hiring managers and organizations about what they are searching for in social work candidates and what they are looking for, both positive and negative, on candidates’ résumés.

Make sure to read my first résumé article, “10 Essential Tips for Your Amazing Social Work Résumé” before diving into this article. The following are even more tips to help you develop a résumé that stands out and gets read by the hiring manager. I use a few real-life “DON’Ts” I have found on résumés and have included example “DOs” to help your résumé shine.

1. Include your credentials behind your name at the top of your résumé.

The first item most hiring managers look for on a résumé is the applicant’s credentials. If they are looking for someone with a social work degree, credential, and/or license, they don’t want to have to search the rest of your résumé to see if you meet the basic educational and licensure qualifications. You worked hard for your education and credentials. Always include them after your name on your résumé, cover letter, and email signature.

DON’T: (Résumé header) Katherine Jones

Address, City, State, Phone, Email

DO: Katherine Jones, MSW, LCSW
Address, City, State, Phone, Email

2. State clearly who your clients are.

Over the years, I have seen many résumés that make no mention of who the client is at internship placements or places of employment. Social work is a person-centered profession. If you don’t mention who it is you provide psychotherapy for, who you assessed for services, or who your services are designed for, your résumé will not be as attractive to the hiring organization. Even if you do not provide direct services, you need to define what population your organization or program serves. Do you serve adults, children, seniors, individuals with substance use issues, individuals with developmental disabilities, individuals with mental illness? And in what settings? Be specific, especially if you are applying for a job working with similar populations.

DON’T: Primary responsibilities include intake, assessments, and referrals.

Even if I told you the name of this organization, you would have a hard time guessing who this social worker’s clients are. Always define who your clients are in the first bullet of each position.

DO: Provide clinical care management for adult patients (age 21 and up) referred from Family Medicine Department, including conducting psychosocial assessments; developing patient-centered care plans; linking patients with community resources; and engaging in care coordination, communication, and follow-up.

3. Language matters.

Most of the time, social workers are spot on when using appropriate language regarding their client populations or types of services and treatments they use. Occasionally, however, I will see résumés with outdated language. It is essential to use respectful language when describing your client population and the types of services you provide these populations. People-first language emphasizes the person, not the disability or diagnosis. This is the preferred language to use with some populations. However, others prefer identity-first language (for example, a disabled person vs. a person with a disability). Don't have your résumé passed over for using the wrong terms. It is usually safe to use the same language used in the job description or the language the organization uses to describe its client populations on the website.

DON'T: Served as intern at substance abuse clinic for drug addicts.

DO: Co-lead group therapy with clients recovering from substance use disorders using motivational enhancement therapy and cognitive behavioral therapy with the goal of developing tools for recovery and decreased chances of relapse.

4. Name your documents with your first and last name.

Before emailing your résumé to an employer or submitting your résumé to an online Automated Tracking System (ATS), make sure the document is named appropriately. Remember, the hiring manager probably receives dozens or hundreds of applications for multiple job openings, so a document named, "social-work résumé 3" could get lost in the fray or deleted completely. Yes, you may have 10 versions of your résumé, but make sure the one you send out has your first and last name on it: "FirstName LastName résumé."

DON'T: "résumé 1," "social work résumé," or "Brian résumé version 3."

DO: "Jane Williams Résumé" and "Jane Williams Cover Letter" or "Jane Williams Résumé - United Way."

5. Attending meetings is not a skill.

Everything on your résumé should have a purpose and highlight either a professional accomplishment or a skill that you possess. Check out my résumé article mentioned above and my "Changing Areas of Practice—The Transferability of Social Work Skills" article to make sure you understand the importance of articulating accomplishments and skills on your résumé. The ability to work on teams is critical for social workers, and these teams often require many meetings to discuss client cases. However, saying you have attended meetings doesn't express to your reader what you contributed to the meeting or what your role in the meeting may have been.



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Top employers on SocialWorkJobBank could be hiring for your dream job right now. The first way to stand out from the other candidates on SocialWorkJobBank is to update your résumé to show the employers why you're the one they're looking for.

Here are some simple tips on how to distinguish yourself from the others:

1. Add your objective in the title.
2. Add your LinkedIn, Twitter, and other links so employers can see your personality.
3. Add more accomplishments to show your strengths.

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DON'T: Attend general department meetings, treatment team, and case supervision meetings.

DO: Serve as team lead on multi-disciplinary team, which includes physician, nurse, psychologist, and occupational therapist. Organize and facilitate case consultation meetings for team to provide specialized service for children and young adults with mental health disorders.

6. Volunteer experiences are just as important as paid experience.

If you have related, relevant volunteer experience that might look good to an employer, don't hide it at the bottom of your résumé with no supporting information. List related volunteer experience under your "Relevant Experience" header, just as you would any paid employment. Include exactly what you did for the organization, what your contributions were, and when you were there. Saying "Food Bank Volunteer" doesn't tell your reader very much at all.

DON'T: (At bottom/last page of résumé) Volunteer, North Carolina Food Bank

DO: Volunteer, North Carolina Food Bank, Durham, NC, 2014-Present

- Attend and assist at special food and fundraising events, such as Stamp Out Hunger (Letter Carriers' Food Drive) in May and Hunger Relief Day at the North Carolina State Fair.
- Organize bi-annual food drive at East Carolina University. Recruited 4 additional on-campus volunteers and collected more than 300 pounds of food in 2014-2016 and 400 pounds of food in 2017.

7. Should you submit your résumé as a Word document or PDF?

This is a common question, and everyone seems to have an opinion about which format to use. If the job

posting does not specify which format to use for your résumé and cover letter, consider the following guidelines for when to use a PDF and when to use a Microsoft Word document when submitting your application documents.

When to use a PDF: When you're emailing a résumé directly to someone.

PDFs are typically virus-free when downloaded and retain formatting. Everyone seems to have a different version of Microsoft Word, and not everyone knows that certain fonts and formatting are inconsistent from version to version. Sometimes I review résumés that were two pages when emailed to me but are three pages when I open and view them.

Word documents aren't always mobile friendly and might show up corrupted in some systems. Please see the REAL example below that a hiring manager colleague received. This is what he saw when he opened the file on his mobile device. Not only is the formatting way off for the words that do appear, but the majority of the content has been replaced by emojis.

Someone might inadvertently alter your résumé in a Word document.



PDFs will provide the employer with an error-free copy.

When to use Microsoft Word: When you're submitting your résumé online.

You might opt for a Word document because of the complicated nature of Automated Tracking Systems (ATS), the software used by medium and large organizations to weed through job applications. The ATS may not track or scan keywords on PDFs as well as on Word documents, which means your application could fail to reach a human. The PDF is typically going to be the better-looking version, but if you have any worries about an ATS missing your keywords, the Word version is the way to go.

Thank you for following along with me, and I wish you the best in your social work career. Your communities need you, and I hope my articles will allow you to not only land a job you love, but also to share your strong social work skills serving those who need you most.

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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