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The Ultimate Resume Checklist

25 Things to Review Before You Click Apply

A comprehensive career resource for Canadian job seekers.
Includes interactive checklist, practical tips, common mistakes,
and a personal action plan.

CAREER COACHING · RESUME WRITING · INTERVIEW COACHING

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CAREER RESOURCE CENTRE

Executive Summary

Your resume is the single most important document in your job search. It is your first impression, your personal marketing document, and in many cases, the only thing standing between you and an interview. Yet most job seekers submit resumes that contain avoidable errors — errors that cost them opportunities every day.

What This Checklist Covers

1. **Formatting & Presentation**
   Ensure your resume is visually professional and easy to scan.
2. **Contact Information**
   Confirm all details are accurate, professional, and complete.
3. **Professional Summary**
   Craft a targeted opening that immediately communicates your value.
4. **Work Experience**
   Present your accomplishments with impact, using numbers and results.
5. **Skills & ATS Optimization**
   Align your resume with the job posting and pass automated screening.

How to Use This Checklist

- Work through each section systematically — do not skip ahead.
- Check each item only when you are fully satisfied it is complete.
- Use the Personal Action Plan on the final page to record your priorities.
- Revisit this checklist for every new application — tailor each time.

> **PRO TIP**
> Print this checklist and work through it with a physical pen. Research shows that reviewing documents on paper catches more errors than reading on screen.

RESUME CHECKLIST

1. Formatting & Presentation

1 ☐ **One to two pages maximum**
Most Canadian employers expect one page for under 10 years of experience and two pages for senior professionals. Never exceed two pages.

2 ☐ **Consistent font throughout**
Use a single professional font (e.g., Calibri, Garamond, or Georgia) at 10–12 pt for body text. Mixing fonts looks unprofessional.

3 ☐ **Adequate white space and margins**
Set margins to at least 0.75 inches on all sides. Dense, wall-to-wall text is difficult to scan and signals poor judgment.

4 ☐ **Clear section headings**
Use bold headings for each section (Summary, Experience, Education, Skills). Recruiters scan in seconds — make navigation effortless.

5 ☐ **Saved as PDF**
Unless the posting requests a Word document, submit as PDF. PDFs preserve your formatting across all devices and operating systems.

FORMATTING TIP
Open your resume in a different PDF viewer or print a test page to verify that your formatting holds across platforms.

RESUME CHECKLIST

2. Contact Information

6 ☐ **Full name prominently displayed**
Your name should be the largest text on the page — typically 16–20 pt. It is the first thing a recruiter reads.

7 ☐ **Professional email address**
Use firstname.lastname@gmail.com or similar. Avoid nicknames, numbers, or addresses from outdated providers.

8 ☐ **Phone number with area code**
Include your Canadian area code. Ensure your voicemail is set up with a professional greeting.

9 ☐ **LinkedIn profile URL**
Customize your LinkedIn URL (linkedin.com/in/yourname) and include it. Most Canadian recruiters will check your profile.

10 ☐ **City and province only**
Do not include your full street address. City and province (e.g., Calgary, AB) is sufficient and protects your privacy.

CONTACT TIP
Search your own name on LinkedIn to confirm your profile URL is correct and your profile photo is professional.

RESUME CHECKLIST

3. Professional Summary

11 ☐ **Three to five concise sentences**
Your summary is a headline, not a biography. State your professional identity, years of experience, key strengths, and what you bring to the role.

12 ☐ **Tailored to the specific role**
Generic summaries are ignored. Mirror the language of the job posting and speak directly to what the employer needs.

13 ☐ **Quantified achievements included**
Even in the summary, include one or two numbers. 'Managed a team of 12' or 'Increased sales by 23%' is far more compelling than vague claims.

14 ☐ **No first-person pronouns**
Do not write 'I am a results-driven professional.' Begin with your professional title or a strong adjective: 'Results-driven operations manager with 8 years...'

15 ☐ **Keywords from the job posting**
Include two or three keywords from the job description in your summary. This improves ATS compatibility and signals alignment immediately.

SUMMARY TIP
Read your summary aloud. If it sounds like a generic job description rather than a specific person, rewrite it.

RESUME CHECKLIST

4. Work Experience

16 ☐ **Reverse chronological order**
List your most recent position first. This is the standard format expected by Canadian employers and ATS systems.

17 ☐ **Accomplishment-based bullet points**
Each bullet should describe what you did, how you did it, and the result. Avoid task lists. 'Reduced onboarding time by 30% by redesigning the orientation program' beats 'Responsible for onboarding.'

18 ☐ **Quantified results wherever possible**
Numbers add credibility. Use percentages, dollar amounts, team sizes, timelines, or volume metrics. If you cannot quantify exactly, estimate conservatively.

19 ☐ **Consistent verb tense**
Use past tense for previous roles and present tense for your current role. Inconsistency is a red flag for attention to detail.

20 ☐ **Relevant experience prioritized**
Lead each role with your most relevant and impressive accomplishments. Recruiters spend 6–10 seconds on initial review — front-load your value.

EXPERIENCE TIP
For each bullet point, ask: 'So what?' If you cannot answer that question, the bullet needs to be stronger.

RESUME CHECKLIST

5. Skills & ATS Optimization

21 ☐ **Hard skills matched to the job posting**
Review the job description carefully and include the specific tools, software, and technical skills listed. ATS systems scan for exact keyword matches.

22 ☐ **Soft skills supported by evidence**
Do not simply list 'strong communicator.' Instead, demonstrate it in your experience bullets. Unsupported soft skills add no value.

23 ☐ **Industry-specific keywords included**
Research standard terminology in your field and incorporate it naturally. Avoid keyword stuffing — it reads poorly to human reviewers.

24 ☐ **Education section complete and accurate**
Include your degree, institution, city, and graduation year. If your GPA was strong (3.5+), include it. List relevant certifications separately.

25 ☐ **No spelling or grammar errors**
A single typo can disqualify an otherwise strong application. Proofread manually, use spell-check, and ask a trusted colleague to review.

> **ATS TIP**
> Paste your resume text into a plain text editor. If it becomes unreadable, your formatting may cause ATS parsing errors.

RESUME CHECKLIST

7 Common Resume Mistakes to Avoid

Even strong candidates lose opportunities due to avoidable resume errors. Review each of these common mistakes before submitting your application.

Using a generic objective statement
FIX: Replace it with a tailored professional summary that speaks directly to the role.

Including a photo
FIX: Canadian employers do not expect photos on resumes. Including one can introduce unconscious bias and is considered non-standard.

Listing references on the resume
FIX: Remove 'References available upon request.' It wastes space. Provide references only when asked.

Using tables or text boxes
FIX: Many ATS systems cannot parse content inside tables or text boxes. Use plain text formatting throughout.

Submitting the same resume to every job
FIX: Tailor your resume for each application. At minimum, adjust your summary and skills section to reflect the specific posting.

Exaggerating or fabricating experience
FIX: Background checks are standard in Canada. Misrepresentation can result in immediate disqualification or termination after hire.

Inconsistent formatting
FIX: Mixed fonts, uneven spacing, or inconsistent bullet styles signal carelessness. Use a template and review the final document carefully.

YOUR NEXT STEPS

Personal Action Plan

Use this page to record your priorities and commit to specific next steps. The most effective job seekers treat their resume as a living document — reviewed and refined for each application.

1. **My biggest resume weakness right now is:**

2. **The three keywords I need to add to my resume are:**

3. **The accomplishment I am most proud of (with numbers) is:**

4. **One section I need to rewrite or strengthen is:**

5. **My target role and ideal employer are:**

6. **My next action step (with a deadline) is:**

> **REMEMBER**
> A resume is not a one-size-fits-all document. The most effective resumes are tailored to each specific role. Before submitting any application, revisit your summary, skills section, and top bullet points to ensure alignment with the job posting.

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Ready for Professional Support?

You now have the tools to review your resume. If you want expert guidance to take it further, Yves Gagnon is here to help.

Resume Writing

A professionally written, ATS-optimized resume tailored to your target role and the Canadian job market.

From $75 CAD

Career Coaching

Structured one-on-one coaching to clarify your direction, build your strategy, and move forward with confidence.

From $65 CAD

Interview Coaching

Practice real interview questions, refine your answers, and walk into your next interview prepared and confident.

From $65 CAD

Book a Free 15-Minute Consultation

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