

by Katharine Hansen, Ph.D.

Once upon a time, someone came up with a "rule" that resumes should not exceed one page. No one really knows who came up with the rule, but a great many job-seekers still seem to live in fear of this supposed edict.

The fact is that very few "rules" exist today in the world of resume writing. Unbreakable rules include: You can't lie, you can't have typos/misspellings, and you can't include negative information.

Just about every other rule you've ever heard about resumes, however, is breakable, including rules about how many pages your resume should comprise.

Rules are one thing, but trends are another. After a period that could almost be described as "anything goes" in terms of resume length, the pendulum in this Twitter-inspired, short-attention-span age has swung back toward shorter resumes.

"The norm for most resumes/CVs is one to two pages, even for very experienced professionals," says the *Findings of 2011 Global Career Brainstorming Day: Trends for the Now, the New & the Next in Careers*, published by the [Career Thought Leaders Consortium](#). The publication went on to note that a survey of HR/recruiters on LinkedIn indicated an overwhelming preference for two-page resumes provided the content presents enough value to warrant a second page.

Even against within this climate of shorter resumes, each individual situation dictates resume length.

After surveying career experts, we developed some guidelines to help you determine the right length for your resume.

It should be noted that length is primarily an issue that pertains to the traditional, formatted, "print" version of your resume. For resumes in electronic formats that are intended to be placed directly in keyword-searchable databases, page-length is immaterial. "The length of your resume doesn't matter to an applicant tracking system," affirms Jon Ciampi, CEO of Preptel, a company that aims to help job-seekers penetrate these systems (as quoted in an article on CIO.com by Meridith Levinson). "It will scan your resume regardless of whether it's two pages or four. Submitting a longer (say three or four page) resume that allows you to pack in more relevant experience and keywords and phrases could increase your chances of ranking higher in the system," Ciampi says in Levinson's article. Thus, this article's guidelines apply either in situations where your formatted resume is screened by human eyes without having been placed into a keyword-searchable database

or after a keyword search has narrowed the field of applicants.

The guidelines:

- **Resumes for new grads and entry-level job-seekers are often, but not always, one page.**

Most college career-placement centers tell students to limit their resumes to one page, notes resume writer Sharon Pierce-Williams, 75 percent of whose business is writing for the college population. Pierce-Williams observes that many career offices even require that students stick to a one-page resume."

Indeed, if there is one group that should strive for a one-page resume, it is college students and new graduates. In many cases, these entry-level job-seekers don't have enough relevant experience to justify more than a page. Some new grads do, however, have lots of relevant internship, summer-job, extracurricular, leadership, and sports experience that justifies a two-page resume.

Pierce-Williams takes an unusual approach to new-grad resumes. "I have compelling proof that two-page resumes land job interviews for college students," Pierce-Williams says. "Length depends on extra-curricular involvement and leadership. It takes a certain 'go-getter'-type student for a two-page resume."

Pierce-Williams designs college-student resumes in which page one "often looks like a 'regular' resume, but page two is entitled 'Key Leadership and Project Management' or simply 'Key Leadership.'" Pierce-Williams says she uses this page-two section to list three to four projects in which the student made a difference in an association or sorority/fraternity.

If you fall into the college-student/entry-level/new-grad group and are tempted to go to two pages, just be sure that you have the relevant material to justify a second page.

- **A two-page resume may be the best bet for the vast majority of job-seekers.**

"Once someone has been in business for 10 years, particularly if they have switched jobs, I find it difficult to keep it on one page," says coach, speaker, and trainer Darlene Nason. "I think a two-page resume is a good average."

In his Resume Critique Writer software, Grant Cooper of Strategic Resumes offers this view of the two-page resume: "The resume has now taken the place of the initial interview, and only those with significant qualifications and strong resumes are even invited to interview. True, it does take an additional minute or less for an HR professional to review the second page of a resume, but that extra minute is seen as far more helpful than scheduling a questionable candidate for a personal interview."

- **Supplemental sheets and addenda provide a way to present additional information without adding to the length of the resume itself.**

Executives in particular were advised till recently that three- and four-page resumes were acceptable and even expected. Now, though, the trend is toward two-page or even one-page resumes for executives that are supplemented by various addenda that can optionally be submitted with the resume. "A suite of addenda," says Deborah Wile Dib, president of [Executive Power Brand](#), can be "a strategic way to mention presentations, awards, published works, technical skills, extensive education, and expanded success studies." Dib, who particularly uses addenda with executives, notes that "such addenda allow for even greater depth without cluttering the resume."

Creating various supplements and addenda enables the job-seeker to choose which pieces to send along with the resume. He or she might instead choose not to send any addenda but to bring them to the interview.

- **Even among employers, there's no consensus on preferred resume length.**

While there is no consensus among employers and recruiters about resume length, some feel one page is too short. Maureen Crawford Hentz, manager of talent acquisition, development and compliance at Osram Sylvania, Boston MA, particularly disdains "abbreviated or 'teaser' resumes" that urge the recruiter, "for more information, call me." Many recruiters believe that two pages is about the right length; for some, three pages is the outside limit that they will read. "If the resume is longer than two pages, it needs to be well worth it," noted Hentz's colleague at Osram Sylvania, Harlynn Goolsby. Others question executives' ability to prioritize if their resumes are longer than two pages.

Since recruiters pass candidate resumes on to client employers, they must also consider employer preferences. "Most of my clients profess that they are too busy to read anything lengthier -- thus, I deliver what they require," said Chris Dutton, director at Intelligent Recruitment Services and Owner, Intelligent IT Recruitment, Manchester, UK. Recruiter opinions about resume length have been colored in recent years by the growing practice of reading resumes on a computer screen rather than printing them. Resumes that might seem too long in print are acceptable on screen.

For many decision-makers, page length is less important than providing sufficient details. "I ... encounter quite a few resumes that have been stripped of any detail in order to confine them to one or two pages," said Pam Sisson, a recruiter for Professional Personnel in Alabama. "My immediate response is to ask for a more detailed resume. A resume that's three or four pages but actually shows the qualifications and experience necessary for a position is much preferred, in my opinion, to one that has cut out all the substance to meet some passe idea of a one-page resume." John Kennedy, senior IT recruiter at Belcan agreed: "Resume length is of very little importance so long as the information is accurate, verifiable, and pertinent to the position. If a candidate has 20 years of experience directly relating to the position being applied for and that experience is verifiable, it should be listed even if the resume goes four-plus pages."

- **No matter what the length, the resume must be concise and capture attention on the first page, preferably the first third of the first page.**

Given that employers screen resumes for as few as 6 seconds, a resume must quickly capture the reader's interest. "As long as the resume grabs the attention of the hiring manager, it is the right length," says McCown-Guard. "Whatever the length of the resume, the critical factor is to make absolutely certain that your reader's interest is piqued within the first half of the first page," cautions Laurie J. Smith, president of [Creative Keystrokes Executive Resume Service](#).

"Of equal or greater importance [to length] is concise writing, short paragraphs, brief lists of bullet points, and good organizational strategies that ensure the resume can be quickly skimmed," notes the

Findings of 2011 Global Career Brainstorming Day: Trends for the Now, the New & the Next in Careers. "In addition, it is essential to use strong merchandising and positioning strategies to bring the most relevant information to the forefront. Creating a strong impact "above the fold" -- on the top half of the first page of the resume -- has become increasingly critical for job seekers in one of the most competitive employment markets we've ever experienced."

- **Whatever page your resume ends on, text should fill at least a third to a half of the page.**

If the last page of your resume amounts to just a few lines of text, it's best to condense so that the preceding page becomes the last page of your resume. Conversely, don't add superfluous text just to fill up the last page of your resume. "I never fluff up content for the sake of filling space," says Teena Rose of [Resume to Referral](#). "Irrelevancies can dilute the overall effectiveness of the resume." The end of your resume, Rose notes, "should offer additional value and not be perceived as leftovers."

- **Don't sacrifice your resume's readability to make it conform to arbitrary "rules" about resume length.**

It's always pitiful when we have to whip out the magnifying glass to read the tiny 8- or 9-point type on the resume of a job-seeker who has gone to absurd lengths to limit his or her resume to a certain number of pages. Don't forego readable type (we suggest no smaller than 10.5 point; 11 to 11.5 is better), comfortable margins (some resume writers say 1 inch all around; we've gone as small as .7"), space between lines, white space, and a pleasing, eye-attracting layout just to cram your resume onto X number of pages. "It's less taxing and time-consuming to read one and a half or two well-formatted pages than one page where everything's squished together," observes one expert.

"Those resumes that do contain detailed information, but are literally 'crammed' into one page, are now frowned upon," says Cooper in his Resume Critique Writer software. "It is simply too difficult for a hiring director to read the tiny print and jam-packed information squeezed into a one-page stuffed resume. Companies that once insisted on one-page resumes are perfectly happy with a clearly-written, concise, and well-formatted two-page resume that is easy to read, yet has the detailed information they now need."

- **Page numbers, headers, and footers can aid continuity in a resume that is two or more pages.**

All resume pages beyond page one need to be numbered. Some job-seekers choose a "page 2 of 3" model. "If you decide to go with two or more pages, be sure to include your name and appropriate page number at the top," suggests Ann Baehr of [Best Resumes](#). "And organize all of the information with