

How to Write a Professional Summary

What is a professional summary?

A professional summary, sometimes also referred to as a summary of qualifications (SoQ), is a short overview of your top skills and accomplishments and is intended to catch the attention of potential employers. Similar to an elevator pitch or your 30-second introduction, the professional summary is designed to briefly showcase how you are a match for the position. As this is usually the first thing an employer will review on your resume, the professional summary should be customized for each job to which you apply to ensure the qualifications listed match the needs of each employer.

Professional summary vs. objective

Professional summaries are not the same as resume objectives. While not as frequently used today as they were in the past, resume objectives briefly state to the employer what type of work you are seeking or what your career goals and ambitions are. In contrast, the professional summary focuses on your career highlights that are most relevant to the employer.

When to use a professional summary

While any job seeker could use a professional summary on their resume, they are most often used by those who have a few years of experience in their career field. Those with little professional experience may still choose to use a professional summary as a way to highlight important and interesting aspects of their career thus far. However, all candidates choosing to use a professional summary should ensure that the information shared is relevant to the potential employer and that it adds value to the resume.

You can use a thoughtful and well-written professional summary as a basis for your LinkedIn Profile Summary, but keep in mind that there are some importance differences between these two items. While a professional summary for a resume is usually only 3-6 lines and includes information that is relevant to the specific employer, LinkedIn summaries are typically lengthier, providing more detail on the individual's background and skill set. Unlike the highly-targeted professional summary, the LinkedIn Profile Summary must include all of the information and keywords necessary to be attractive to multiple employers.

Steps to Writing an Effective Professional Summary

1. Make a list of your top **accomplishments**
2. Make a list of your top **skills** (do not focus on skills that you do not like using, even if you are good at them, as highlighting them could likely result in you having to use those skills in your next job).
3. Make a list of keywords (skills and areas of expertise) from the job posting
4. Compare the list of your skills and accomplishments with the list of keywords from the job posting
5. Using the keywords and skills that are on both of the lists, write a short statement (3-6 sentences) that will quickly convey this information to the potential employer.

Examples

“Sales and marketing professional with experience in both B2B and direct sales. 6+ years in customer service/client facing roles, as well as a bachelor’s degree in business/marketing, including 2 sales internships. Accomplished at selling and promoting. Increased participation by 160% for sorority community service events.”

“Nonprofit administrator with a focus in fundraising and social media campaigns. Past success in grant writing, winning a \$50,000 grant as an intern. Bachelor’s degree in Nonprofit and NGO Studies with academic coursework in areas such as public policy, campaigns and strategy, and social action. 2+ years’ experience using various CRM and donor software programs.”

“Mechanical Engineering student with practical experience using AutoCAD and C++ through two internships. Strong base of engineering knowledge demonstrated through a 3.9 GPA and honors courses. Focus on leadership and communication skills as executive board member of two student clubs.”