

# GUIDELINES FOR A FILMMAKER'S RESUME

compiled by **Elizabeth Abbott**

**Questions? Contact:**  
**Anna Adams, Fine Arts Career Advisor**  
**University of Utah Career Services**  
**801.581.6186 or [aadams@sa.utah.edu](mailto:aadams@sa.utah.edu)**

## GENERAL INFORMATION:

**LENGTH:** Your resume should fill one or two complete pages (no partial pages). In general, if you are an undergraduate student or recent graduate with modest experience, limit your resume to one page. Make it visually attractive and easy to read.

**PAPER:** Use plain paper (white, light cream, or very pale gray). Do not use paper with visible flecks in it.

**FONT:** Use a standard font for the main text of your resume (e.g., Times New Roman, Arial, Garamond). Text size should be 10-12 points. Your name and section headings can be a bit larger and can employ other fonts—as long as they are readable. Fully utilize design tools, including **bolding**, • bullets, *italics*, underlining, and ALL CAPITALS.

**ORDER:** In English, we read from top to bottom and from left to right. Readers lose interest as they read down and across the page. You should prioritize information in order of importance, with the most important text up high and to the left where it is most likely to be read. This is true for your resume as a whole and within each section. For a current student or new grad with little or no professional film experience, the education section should be listed toward the top. A more experienced filmmaker would put his or her professional experience first and move education closer to the bottom.

**ABBREVIATIONS:** Minimize use of abbreviations. Do not assume the reader of your resume knows the meaning of any abbreviation. The only exceptions to this rule are:

College Degrees: BA, MFA, PhD, etc.

State Abbreviations: UT, AZ, CA, NY, etc.

**ACCURACY:** Check spelling, grammar, and information very carefully! Make sure all information is accurate and truthful. Also, be sure your formatting is consistent (fonts, using/not using colons, etc.). Finally, proofread your resume out loud to pick up any hidden errors.

## CATEGORIES TO INCLUDE IN YOUR RESUME:

### 1) HEADER:

**NAME:** Your name should be the largest thing on the page – but not too large. It may be centered, right justified, or left justified. This is up to you. Be creative with the font used for your name, but be sure it is readable. Remember, this is your marketing tool, so the formatting should be clear and attractive.

**TITLE:** This is *optional* and should only be used if you have experience. Beneath your name, you may wish to list the title of your specialty (e.g. *sound editor / mixer* or *cinematographer*).

**CONTACT INFO:** List your personal address, city, state, and zip code. Also, be sure to include a contact phone number (cell phone or other phone with voicemail) and an email address. Do not list your work phone number or work email address. Be certain your e-mail address sounds professional (e.g., not “HotLips@whatever”). If you have one, you may list your film-related website and/or the web link to your profile on IMDB.

**2) SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS or HIGHLIGHT OF QUALIFICATIONS:** *Optional*, but you can list three or four highlights that demonstrate that you are an invaluable employee. State measurable results you have achieved. Avoid unsupported claims (e.g., “I am detail oriented”). Let your accomplishments speak for themselves (e.g., “Award-winning editor of more than 10 film festival awards, including Best Picture”).



**3) OBJECTIVE:** An objective is *optional*. It is usually better to include this info in a cover letter where you can elaborate more fully. If you are going to include an objective, use “employer language” by briefly stating your desired field and function (e.g., “camera operator in broadcast industry”). Such an objective may be more credible than the precise job title and name of the company to which you’re applying. Avoid lengthy, life-goal statements.

**4) EDUCATION:** When you have very little in the way of professional experience on your resume, the education/training section is the most important section. Develop it well.

- List university degrees in reverse chronological order (most recent first).
- List your degree and major (e.g., “B.A., English” or “Bachelor of Arts, Film Studies”).
- Include a graduation date, even if it is in the future.
- Do not list a previous college or university unless you received some sort of degree there.
- You do not need to list attendance dates.
- Do not list high school graduation or activities unless you’re early in your college career.
- Include your GPA if it is 3.0 or above.
- You may include both your overall and your major GPA if you wish.

#### **POSSIBLE EDUCATION SUBHEADINGS TO CONSIDER:**

##### **a) HONORS AND AWARDS:**

- Graduation honors (summa cum laude, magna cum laude, cum laude)
- List dean’s list if applicable (include number of semesters)
- List any scholarships
- Include any honor societies or similar organizations to which you belong

**b) RELATED or RELEVANT COURSEWORK:** A sub-category like “Related Coursework” can help compensate for lack of specific work experience and also explain in more detail the training you received during your college career. You need not include course numbers or introductory course titles. Be specific. When possible, include not merely course titles, but describe a particular technique, project, or area of study taught.

**c) ADDITIONAL TRAINING:** This includes any *related* workshops, seminars, on-going studio classes, masterclasses, or private coaching received outside of a college or university setting. It can also include training at a college from which you never graduated. Be specific. When possible, include not only the course title, but also the teacher and techniques taught.

**5) SKILLS or SKILLS SUMMARY:** List skills grouped together by type (film equipment, computers/software, writing, languages, communication, teaching, etc.). Use adjectives and other descriptors to specify your **proficiency level** in each type of skill (expert, fluent, proficient, expertise in, extensive knowledge of, understanding of, experience with, awareness of, familiar, familiarity with, working knowledge of, rudimentary knowledge of, basic understanding of, etc.). Here are some effective examples of how to list your skills:

- Highly skilled at cameras (DVC PRO 25/50, HD, Bolex, Arriflex, other DV cameras)
- Expertise with sound equipment (mixers for video, Nagra, boom)
- Extensive experience in writing, directing, and editing
- Expert knowledge of lighting and photography
- Proficient editor with extensive experience in AVID, FINAL CUT PRO, ADOBE PREMIERE
- Ability to cooperate with directors and grasp their intentions and goals
- Skills to analyze raw footage and construct it into a well-structured narrative or documentary
- Accomplished instructor with 3 years experience teaching editing at college level
- Familiar with PHOTOSHOP, MAC, PC, MICROSOFT OFFICE
- Familiarity with Mac OS X, Windows OS, able to navigate the Internet fluidly
- Proficient with Mac OS X, Microsoft Word, Excel, Outlook, HTML, Adobe Photoshop 7.0, multi-line phones and web-based research
- Expertise in Microsoft Office programs, email, & Internet research
- Fluent in Japanese and English in speaking, writing, and interpreting
- Rudimentary knowledge of Spanish & French



The following statements are okay to use in your skills section (the ones above are better because they are more specific). If you decide to use something similar to the following, be sure to prove your claim with specific examples in the Relevant Experience section.

- Team player, creative problem solver, attentive to detail, able to meet deadlines
- Practical talent for assessing what needs to be done and doing it
- Excellent at organizing, instructing, promoting, and presenting
- Excellent written and verbal communications skills, creative problem solver
- Highly motivated, ability to take initiative, can apply training quickly

**6) FILM PROJECTS or FILMOGRAPHY or CREDITS:** List specific film credits including any professional, student, or independent projects with which you've been involved. Include the following when possible:

- **project title**
- **project length, type, and/or format** (*e.g., 35mm feature film, half-hour documentary, TV pilot, animated short, etc.*)
- **year produced**
- **location where produced** (*city and state*)
- **your role/roles in the production** (*writer, director, editor, producer, camera operator, boom mic operator, production assistant, etc.*)
- **director** (*if not you*)
- **production company** (*if applicable*)
- **any film festival screenings or awards**

Here is an effective example of how to list your credits:

***The Hairs*** (5 minutes; 2004; editor, director, producer, writer) Salt Lake City, Utah  
 Screenings at 33 film festivals in USA, Japan, Canada

- **Best of Festival Award** (Berkeley Video and Film Festival)
- **Audience Award 3rd Place** (Film Fest New Haven)
- **2nd Place in Experimental** (Spindletop Film Festival)

***The Bookshelf*** (5 minutes; 2003; editor, director, producer, writer) Salt Lake City, Utah  
 Screenings at 18 film festivals in USA, England

- **Grand Festival Award** (Berkeley Video and Film Festival)
- **Best 16mm** (Utah Short Film and Video Festival)
- **Best Experimental** (Spindletop Film Festival)
- **Honorable Mention** (Columbus International Film and Video Festival)
- **1st Runner-up in Experimental** (Flicker Film Festival)

Here is another effective example of how to list your credits:

<b><i>THE REASON</i></b> (5 minutes; 2005; Salt Lake City, UT)	<i>sound editor</i>	University of Utah Student Film directed by Matt Walker
<b><i>FAKING IT</i></b> (4 minutes; 2005; Salt Lake City, UT)	<i>camera operator</i>	Independent directed by Kelsey Landry

As you earn more credits, you may wish break your credits down by category: *Feature Film, Short Film, Music Video, Animation, Documentary, Television, TV Series, TV Movies, Soaps, Commercial/Promotional, etc.*

**7) RELEVANT EXPERIENCE or WORK EXPERIENCE:** There are several ways to list your relevant experience. The two main ones are:

- a) **Chronological Format** - focuses on your *employment history/professional experience*, which is presented in reverse chronological order - most recent first. In this format, you will highlight the skills, knowledge and experience you have gained through past employment that relate to your career objective. *This can be an effective style if you have work experience that is closely related to your career goal.*
- b) **Functional (skills-based) Format** - focuses on *transferable skills* that relate to the position you're applying for, rather than on the chronology of your job history. In this format, you will highlight the skills needed for your desired job and give examples of times when you have used those skills in employment, class projects, individual projects, and volunteer work. List your accomplishments by skill type. *This can be an effective style if you lack experience directly related to your career goal.*

If you select the functional format, you will also need to include a separate section entitled **WORK HISTORY or EMPLOYMENT HISTORY**. Film-related and non-film-related employment should be included. List work history in reverse chronological order (current job first). Include your job title, organization name, location (city and state), and duration of employment (e.g., "May 2005 – Sept. 2006").

With either format, think of the "experience" section of your resume as the "prove it" section, where you prove with examples that you have used the skills needed for your desired job. This will likely be the most time-consuming section of your resume. Use *accomplishment statements* to show specific instances when you have used those skills. Your accomplishment statements will be more effective if you:

- Focus on your achievements rather than the job description. Job expectations are the same for someone who excels and succeeds as they are for someone who is fired after a week.
- Focus on describing specific accomplishments— not just what you spent the most time doing. For example, feature the fact that you wrote a training manual – even if you spent most your time just filing documents.
- Begin each accomplishment statement with an action verb. A list of action verbs is available on the Career Services website or you can use a thesaurus. Do not use the same action verb more than twice.
- Ask yourself questions that help to quantify:
  - How many?**                      **How long?**
  - How much?**                    **How old?**
  - How often?**
- Ask yourself questions that help to qualify:
  - Who?**                              **When?**
  - What kinds?**                    **How?**
- Ask yourself what the results of your accomplishment were.
  - Was I promoted or rewarded?**
  - Was there an increase in efficiency, revenue, or awareness of a problem?**
  - How did customers, company, industry, or community benefit?**
  - What did others learn?**
  - What did I learn?**

**8) MISCELLANEOUS SECTIONS:** Include miscellaneous sections, such as "Hobbies and Interests" or "Volunteer Work" only if they directly relate to the position for which you are applying. For instance, a studio that focuses on extreme sports may be interested in your snowboarding abilities. Likewise, a company that focuses on religious films may be interested in your missionary service experience. An animation studio probably won't care.

DO NOT include information that is illegal for the employer to ask about and that may negatively affect the employer's decision to interview you (e.g., religious affiliation, marital status, age).

Please remember that your resume is your bayonet. It is marketing you.  
**You are the product. Package the product well!!**

## **DOCUMENTS THAT SHOULD ACCOMPANY YOUR RESUME:**

**COVER LETTER:** A good cover letter is as important as a good resume when conducting an effective job search. Think of it as a chance to tell your story. Your resume will tell them the facts; the cover letter should create interest in the resume and bring your qualifications to life. The purpose of a cover letter is to get an interview!

**REFERENCES:** References should be listed on a separate sheet; they do not belong on the resume. Particularly, do not say on your resume “References available upon request”—it is understood and a waste of valuable space. Your same name/contact information (in the same fonts) that you have at the top of your resume should also appear at the top of the list of references. Below that header, title the page “References.”

- List 3-4 references, including employers, professors, and supervisors from your volunteer experiences.
- Be sure all references know you and will speak of you positively. Ask their permission in advance.
- Include each reference’s name, job title and/or work relationship to you, organization, address, phone number, e-mail address, and any other relevant contact information.
- Check on accuracy of contact information periodically and update as necessary.
- Do not submit references until the employer requests them. This usually happens at or after an interview.