The Riley Guide: [Resumes & Cover Letters](#)

Prepare Your Resume for Email and Online Posting

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Back in the pre-Internet era, your resume would've been just one kind of document: A sheet of paper listing your experience and skills. And while it's true that you'll need to make some changes to your resume as you prepare to submit it in response to online job postings, those changes may not be as dramatic as you'd expect. Here, we'll lay out exactly how to prepare your resume for online submission, how to format your replies to job postings that interest you and how to balance publicity with privacy and online safety. Read on to find out how to get started.

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Differences Between Print & Online Resumes

Preparing your resume for online distribution basically boils down to making some simple changes in formatting and file types. You've probably typed up your resume in Microsoft Word or a similar word-processing program, and as handy as this format is for making updates, it's not ideally suited for all the channels through which you may want to distribute it.

One important point to keep in mind is that any properly prepared resume - even in the most minimal format - should already contain the right phrasing and keywords for grabbing the employer's attention. In fact, quite a few job-seekers keep multiple versions of their resume on hand, each version tailored for relevance to a particular employer or job sector - while others start with a bare-bones version of their resume and tailor its keywords and experience specifically for each job posting to which they apply. Whichever approach you take, you should make these kinds of tweaks to your core resume file before you start adapting it for different distribution purposes.

Any properly prepared resume should contain keywords for grabbing the employer's attention...

Once you've got your resume - or each version of your resume - customized just how you want it, you'll want to prepare copies in at least the following three file formats:

- A **Portable Document Format (PDF) file**. This format is extremely handy for online distribution, because it preserves the document's formatting (bullet-point lists, etc.) exactly as you see it on your own screen - regardless of the recipient's screen size, font library and so on; and it even ensures that your formatting will be preserved in printouts of the file. PDF

files also can't be edited. Free online tools like [PDFConverter](#) can help you easily convert your resume to PDF format.

- A **Microsoft Word .doc file**. It's very common for employers to ask for your resume in this format - and in fact, it may be the format in which you composed your resume in the first place. The main potential downside of sending your resume in Word format is that some of your formatting may look different on the recipient's screen than it did on yours - but this shouldn't present a major problem as long as you stick to common fonts and basic bullet-point lists.
- A **plain-text version** without any special formatting at all - for example, if you absolutely must include a bullet-point list in this version, you'll need to manually space out the lines and replace the bullet points with dashes (-) or asterisks (*). This version is for copy-pasting into online forms that only accept plain text.

You may also want to prepare a **plain text email version**, whose lines are broken up so they won't run past the edge of the recipient's email viewer. This was more common a few years ago, when many email providers had length-of-line restrictions - but most of today's email providers take care of a lot of formatting clean-up on their own. It's up to you whether you want to take the time to prepare a version in this format.

HTML-format resumes are becoming more common, but they're not always appropriate...

Some people recommend creating an **HTML version** of your resume, which includes links to work samples and a photo of yourself - and this is certainly how you'll want to present your resume or CV on your own website (if you have one) and on career networking sites like LinkedIn. Sending out a resume in this format is also becoming more common practice in creative fields like graphic design and advertising, where candidates want to impress potential employers with their ability to make a dramatic first impression.

The best way to figure out whether an HTML-format resume is appropriate for your own job search is to talk with others applying for similar jobs - along with hiring managers at the kinds of companies you play to apply to - and gauge their receptiveness to resumes in this format. If lots of applicants in your field are using HTML resumes, there's nothing wrong with creating one, provided you keep it simple and stay away from brightly-colored text and crazy fonts. But if you're not sure how a potential employer will feel about opening your HTML document, remember that you can't go wrong with a classic minimalist resume in a well-known file format.

Replying to Online Job Postings

Many online job postings will indicate exactly what the employer wants you to send - for example, your resume in a particular file format, along with links to online samples of your work. It's also usually assumed that you'll include a brief cover letter - either in the email to which you attach your resume; or, on some online job boards, in your on-site message to the employer. But whether you're

contacting the employer via email or using a job website's built-in contact form, a few simple rules can help get your message read, and keep it out of the employer's trash bin.

Include specific keywords from the job posting, and use related keywords when describing yourself...

- **Customize your cover letter** to include a brief description of why this particular job posting interested you, and which of your skills and work experiences are relevant to its requirements. Repeat specific keywords from the posting itself, and use closely related keywords when describing the skills you'll bring to the position. This kind of tailoring is the *bare minimum* necessary to convince an employer that you're not just blindly sending identical mass messages in response to every post in your search results - so it's well worth your time.

- **Be specific in your subject line**, and stay away from all-purpose phrases like "seeking employment." If the posting includes a job code, include that in your subject line - otherwise, mention the job title by name, and use a job title to describe yourself as well. For example, a subject line like, "Legal Proofreader Interested in the Chicago Paralegal Position" makes it clear who you are and why you're contacting this employer, before they even open your message.

- **Read the post in full, and follow any instructions it includes**. Many posts mention specific things that must be included in every message the employer won't delete - this is a simple time-saving measure to ensure that the employer only devotes attention to applicants who are detail-oriented enough to read the entire posting. For this reason, some posts will include a job code that you'll need to put in your subject line or message, while others include a variety of other little tests - for example, "Mention your favorite color." So make sure you look for and follow any instructions like these, or you're just sending your message straight to the employer's trash bin.

- Along the same lines, **follow the post's instructions about how to send your resume**, if there are any. Some employers will want the resume in the body of your email or message - in which case you should use your plain-text or email-only version to avoid any formatting mix-ups - while others will want it as an attachment in Word or PDF format. Some career coaches advocate always sending your resume in the body of the email in order to "force" the employer to start reading it - but this is obviously a bad idea if the job posting has specifically asked you to attach it in some other format.

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Following these tips really doesn't take much extra effort or time - especially once you get into the habit of following them for every message you send - but it's surprising how few applicants think they're worth the trouble. Although your odds of actually landing a job depend on your skills, your

experience, and the way you present yourself during the interview process, simply taking the time to customize your cover letter and follow any other instructions in a job post often makes all the difference between getting at least some kind of reply - even if it's a negative one - and just plain getting ignored.

Publicity, Privacy & Online Safety

Any time you share information online - even if it's just the contact info at the top of your resume - you expose yourself to some level of risk. True, it's not very likely that someone can steal your identity using this information alone - but depending on where you post your resume, and how widely you share it, you may be opening yourself up to spam from recruiters, resume distribution services, and various other companies - some of which may be legitimate; while most of them won't be.

Sharing your resume too broadly can get you a reputation as a resume spammer, which may limit your prospects...

In addition, sharing your resume too broadly can actually work against you, as recruiters and hiring managers may get tired of seeing your resume again and again in every database they visit. This can get you a reputation as a resume spammer, which can significantly reduce the number of legitimate recruiters who contact you. Plus, there's always the risk that your current employer may see your resume online, which will likely result in your termination. The good news is that you can greatly limit your exposure to issues like these by following a few general tips on where to post your resume, and on how much information to share about yourself.

- **Take time to carefully select the sites where you post your resume**. The ideal approach is to post it in the resume databases of just one or two of the largest job websites, along with one or two sites that target your particular field. Some career coaches recommend targeting sites that focus on your geographical region, but this may bring an increased risk that your current employer will find you out.
- **Read the privacy policy of every site you're considering**, and stay away from posting on any site that doesn't clearly state that they won't share your information with third parties. Some job sites will sell your personal info to spammers, while others - perhaps with the best of intentions - may share it with recruiters and other resume databases. But for all the reasons mentioned in the first two paragraphs of this section, that kind of leakage often spells bad news for your reputation.
- Along the same lines, **don't post your resume on any site that'll actively distribute it**. This kind of resume blasting usually just amounts to spamming your resume (along with lots of others) out to thousands of email addresses - and many employers are annoyed by this, because they often didn't request to be put on any distribution list. When choosing where to send your resume, focus on quality above quantity.
- **Be choosy about how much contact info you share**. Some of the most popular job sites, like LinkedIn, are built around a secure messaging system that prevents anyone from seeing

your personal contact info if you don't want them to. Depending on how careful you need to be, you may want to block your resume from being searchable at all, or you may want to allow anyone to see it but limit who sees your contact info. However you choose to play it, stay consistent in how much (or how little) you share, and only post your resume on sites whose settings allow you to select the privacy level that works for you.

- You may even want to **set up an email address specifically for this job search**. This is easy to do for free on email providers like Gmail, Hotmail and Yahoo - and it also allows you to tailor the email address for the type of job search in question - for example, "WebDesigner866@[email provider].com." This can be a handy technique for protecting yourself from long-term spam - and for further distancing your job search from your personal info.

- **When your search is over,** *delete your resume* **from all databases**. You never know when your current hiring manager might stumble on an online resume you posted ages ago, and call you into his or her office for some serious explaining. Plus, as mentioned above, there's always the risk that spammers or other online annoyances may someday gain access to contact info you've just left sitting somewhere. In general, if you don't get a single response to your resume after about a month and a half on a given site, just delete it from that site and try somewhere else.

The underlying message here is, Don't assume that a helpful-looking website is just there to help you. Websites are business assets, which means their reason for existence is to generate money. While many job websites make money from advertisements and paid postings, quite a few others generate side income by selling members' info to spammers, advertisers and perhaps even shadier companies. No matter how you want to share your resume, the Internet abounds with sites that can meet your needs. So read the fine print, keep your common sense about you, and remember that when it comes to sharing your resume, you're the one in charge.