

Tips for Writing Performance and Composition Résumés

I. Basics

- An effective résumé can get you in the door for an audition or interview. Résumés are also used to apply for grants, fellowships, degree programs, festivals, and competitions. They provide the reader with a blueprint of your most pertinent qualifications, skills and experiences; relevant to the particular job or opportunity for which you are applying.
- It's typical and recommended for musicians to have several versions of their résumé – ones for performance, teaching, arts administration, or “day” jobs. Each one should be geared specifically for that type of work.
- The challenge in writing a résumé is to write it from the perspective of the EMPLOYER'S NEEDS. Put yourself in the employer's shoes; use the job description (or the grant application guidelines) to tailor a version of your résumé to specifically highlight your relevant skills and experience.
- Statistics show that employers spend less than ten seconds scanning a résumé, so the design and format should allow the reader to take in your most important credentials at a glance in order for you to make the best first impression. Avoid complete sentences.
- Use only one page for your résumé. Longer teaching résumés and CV's are used for college level teaching. Use two pages only if you have extensive experience, particularly as a professor if you need to list courses taught or publications written.
- Design a letterhead at the top of the page with your name, address, and telephone number. Choose an attractive and professional-looking font so that this stands out and will be remembered by the reader. Use the identical letterhead on your cover letter and other promotional materials (see pg. 5).

II. Content

- Divide your information into categories and use bold to set them off. The categories you use and the order you put them in should be determined by the job you are applying for (e.g. If you're looking for an orchestral position, put orchestra experience first). Tailor each version you send out to the particular situation. Typical categories for performance experience on performance résumés include:

For Classical Vocalists: Full Roles, Partial Roles, Choral Experience, Solo Recitals, Musical Theater, etc.

For Jazz Musicians: Clubs, Other Venues, Jazz Festivals, Has Performed with:, Recordings, Ensembles, etc.

For Classical Instrumentalists: Orchestral Experience, Chamber Music Experience, Solo Performances, Soloist with Orchestras, Community Performances and Presentations (AKA “Outreach”)

For Composers, categories may include: Original Works (or just ‘Compositions’), Selected Compositions, Premiers,

Selected Performances of Original Works, Current Projects, Arrangements/Transcriptions, Commissioned Works

Pianists may have categories such as: Solo Recitals, Soloist with Orchestras, Chamber Music Performances, Accompanying, Church Positions

- Beyond the performance experience, the other categories typically found on all performance résumés are:

- Honors/Awards
- Education
- Principal Teachers
- Coaches
- Master Classes
- Conductors [for orchestral/vocal résumés]
- Affiliations/Memberships

- Only include information relevant to the job or opportunity you are seeking. Generally, performance résumés should not include teaching or arts administration experience since this is usually not relevant to the employer or situation. However, if you're applying for a performance degree program and you want to be considered for a teaching assistantship, showing your teaching experience would be appropriate. Or if you're seeking an orchestral or opera audition and the organization has an extensive outreach program, then listing your community outreach

performance experience, and some of your teaching experience may be useful. The trick is to think about your résumé from the intended recipient's point of view.

- Dates are used when listing orchestral experience, teaching experience, roles (for vocalists) and for degrees and for awards and honors. In using dates, items within any category should be presented in *reverse chronological order*: begin with the most recent and work back chronologically. A range of dates can be abbreviated to 2006-07 to simplify and cut down on clutter (as opposed to 2006-2007).
- Include 'References available upon request' at the end of your résumé. Your list of reference names should not be listed on the résumé – instead, use a separate page, printed with your letterhead and title "References" at the top: list three or four contacts with name, title, institution, address, and phone. Reference sheets should not be mailed with your résumé unless specifically requested. When an employer asks for references after the initial screening, it means you are being seriously considered and then you need to contact your references and let them know to expect a call or email from the employer.
- Your résumé is always a work in progress. As you gain more experience, you'll add new listings, and delete the less impressive.

III. Format

- The order of your résumé categories should reflect the interests of your reader. If you are making a version of your résumé to be used in seeking solo performance opportunities, then don't start with "Orchestral Experience."
- Be consistent in how you list information in each category. If you list the city and state after each entry, continue to do so in subsequent categories.
- Categories should be in bold (not all caps) and should be left-hand justified. Indent .5" (using Tab on your computer) to list information in each category. This helps the reader to quickly sort through and find whatever they're most interested in reading.
- Format the résumé so that it looks professional, is reader-friendly, and is graphically attractive – don't be afraid of 'white space.' It's not about trying to fill up the page—it's about making sure that what you write is relevant. And if you have extensive experience, the important question may be: what do you need to leave out so that your résumé isn't crowded with material irrelevant to the employer.
- For the text content of your résumé use a traditional "seraph" typeface that's easy to read; such as these fonts: Palatino, Times New Roman, or Garamond. Avoid extraneous punctuation, i.e., underlines, italics, parentheses, and periods at the ends of bulleted phrases. Use the same point size for your headings and text, and save the fancy stuff for your letterhead

IV. Don't forget...

- Always have someone else proofread the finished résumé for typos before you have it printed. You may miss the most obvious mistake and then have to reprint it. Most computers also have a "spell-check" – use it! Finally, make sure to double-check the spelling of all names (teachers, conductors, etc.).
- Make sure you use a top quality printer (laser quality) to print your résumé, and then have it photocopied onto stationery quality paper. You can also purchase matching envelopes, which are usually available at the same shop where you have your résumé printed.

Résumé Worksheet

The first step in creating your résumé is to write down as much information as you can about your training and experiences. Start with more than you think you need—you can pare it down to one page later. The order of the categories will change depending on the type of job you are seeking. You may not have information to put in every category – don't worry. We've given you some examples to get you started.

Performance Experience [choose the order of your categories based on the reader's needs and interests]

Orchestral Experience [include position, city, state, country if outside the US, and dates]
Portland Symphony Orchestra, substitute, ME, 2007-present [no need to repeat Portland as the city]
Tanglewood Festival Orchestra, Lenox, MA, 2007
New England Conservatory Orchestras, Boston, MA, 2004-06

Solo Recitals [you don't necessarily need dates on these]
Community Concert Series, United Methodist Church, Springfield, OH
Hale House, retirement home, Boston, MA
New England Conservatory, Boston, MA [don't list specific halls unless it's Jordan Hall]
Somerville Community Church, MA

Chamber Music Performances [you don't necessarily need dates on these]
St. James's Church-Piccadilly, London, UK
Jordan Hall, Boston, MA
First Unitarian Church, Salem, NH
WGBH public radio, Boston, MA
Tuesday New Music, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA
Kuppencicus Art Gallery, St. Paul, MN

For vocalists: typical performance experience categories include:

Full Roles, Partial Roles, Roles Studied,
Musical Theater, Solo Performances, Choral Experience,
Recordings, New Music, or Early Music

For listing roles, because there is a lot of detailed information that employers and audition committees like to see, the norm is to list the information in columns. Use the TAB function on your computer to make these columns straight. List the information, from left to right, according to these areas: The role, the title of the work, the institution where you performed this (with city/state), and the year. Note that you must list these in reverse chronological order (most recent first; least recent last) See example:

Opera Experience

2 nd Woman	<i>Dido and Aeneas</i>	Oberlin Baroque Performance Institute 2007
Susanna	<i>Le Nozze di Figaro</i>	Phillips Academy, Andover, MA 2006
1 st Lady	<i>The Magic Flute (scenes)</i>	Boston University Tanglewood Institute 2005
Belinda	<i>Dido and Aeneas</i>	The Treble Chorus of New England, Andover, MA 2004

Outside of roles, there's no need to continue to divide your information into 4 columns. The other categories and information is easier for the reader to scan, if left out of columns (i.e. Recitals, chorus, education, awards, etc.) See example:

Choral Experience

Cantor & member, Schola Cantorum, Church of St. John the Evangelist, Boston, 2003-present

Jazz players have a number of good ways to list their experience in subcategories. Choose the ones that will best highlight your experience. Since the names of the ensembles you perform with may not be well known, it may be more impressive and important to list where you've performed.

<i>Boston area venues:</i>	<i>or</i>	<i>NYC area venues</i>	<i>or another Geographic location</i>
Park Plaza		Knitting Factory	_____
Harvard Club		CBGB's	_____
Fogg Museum		Tonic	_____

Other possible categories:

<i>Festivals</i>	<i>or</i>	<i>Radio/TV</i>	<i>or Recordings</i>
Montreal Jazz Festival		WGBH Radio, Boston	"Blue Mama" with drummer Stan Freiberg,

<i>Jazz Ensembles, New England Conservatory</i>	<i>Has performed with</i>
George Garzone Ensemble	[use well-known names here, not fellow students]
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Awards / Honors (include city, state, country, and any explanation necessary, plus dates)

Winner, Canadian Music Competition, Toronto, 2007
 Scholarship, New England Conservatory of Music, Boston, MA, 2005-06
 Recipient, Harriet Hale Wooley Grant, for study in Paris, France, 2004-05

Education

New England Conservatory of Music, Boston, MA
 Bachelor of Music in Guitar Performance, anticipated 2009

Boston University School for the Arts, Boston, MA
 Bachelor of Music performance program, 2005-07 [Transfer student—did not complete the degree]

[For a degree you received or are expecting to receive, list the year it was awarded or the year it's expected. If you transferred from a previous school where you did not receive the degree, list the program you were enrolled in and the years you were enrolled.]

Principal Teachers	Coaches	Conductors	Master Classes
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Professional Memberships

National Association of Teachers of Singing, 2006-present
Chamber Music America, 2005-present
American Music Center, 2004-present

Related Skills (or “Other Skills”) (only if pertinent—singers often detail language and dance/acting training)

Fluent in Spanish; Reading ability: French; conversational Italian
Special training: Ballet, 9 yrs.; Fencing, 4 yrs.

Creating Your Letterhead

“Letterhead” means your name, profession, address, & phone info arranged in an attractive graphic design at the top of all your press materials – your résumé, bio, press releases, repertoire list, etc. In choosing your letterhead design, keep in mind that every font style (letter style), has a different look – communicates a different “personality” or image – elegant, established, distinctive, slick, etc. Be careful of too stiff or formal a look, and too frilly or cute a look – remember that this is most likely the first impression a concert series presenter or employer will get of you. Your letterhead should communicate that you’re a professional. Your name should be the largest – you want the reader to remember you. All capital letters are harder to read than using both upper and lower case and tend to make you look more formal. If your name is long and/or difficult to pronounce, you should choose a plainer, less ornate font to make it more reader-friendly. Shorter, simpler names can use the fancier fonts in larger point sizes. Your address and phone are less interesting, so you should put those in a plainer font that works well with the font of your name. The computer you produce your résumé on may not have a large choice of fonts – experiment with the ones available to you to find the most effective letterhead. Here are some examples of letterheads.

Christine Taylor, jazz vocalist

PO Box 411 Your Favorite City, State 02222 (999) 555-1212
christine@christinetaylor.com • www.chrstinetaylor.com
(typeface is Britannic Bold, 18 pts, address lines are Calibri, 10 pts)

Christine Taylor, jazz vocalist

PO Box 411 • Your Favorite City, State 02222 • (999) 555-1212
christine@christinetaylor.com • www.chrstinetaylor.com
(typeface is Century Gothic, 16 pts, address lines are Century Gothic, 9 pts)
Line across page is made using Borders, single, under “Format,” in Microsoft, MAC

Christine Taylor, jazz vocalist

PO Box 411 Your Favorite City, State 02222 (999) 555-1212
christine@christinetaylor.com _ www.chrstinetaylor.com
(typeface is Kudasai, 16 pts, address lines are Calibri, 10 pts)

Christine Taylor, jazz vocalist

PO Box 411 Your Favorite City, State 02222 (999) 555-1212
christine@christinetaylor.com | www.chrstinetaylor.com
(typeface is Pristina, 20 pts, address lines are Palatino, 10 pts)

Beatrice Bononcini, soprano

100 Somewhere St. #1 • Anytown, MA 02115 • (617) 555-1212 • bbononcini@email.net

Performance Experience

Central City Opera Apprenticeship Program

Roles contracted for 1995 season: Papagena, *The Magic Flute*; Polly, *The Threepenny Opera*.

Operatic Roles

Pamina	<i>The Magic Flute</i>	University of Mississippi 2003
Adele	<i>Die Fledermaus</i>	University of Mississippi 2002
Jenny	<i>Down In the Valley</i>	University of Mississippi 2002
Laetitia	<i>The Old Maid and the Thief</i>	University of Mississippi 2001
Witch	<i>Hansel and Gretel</i>	Abilene Christian University 2001
Celie	<i>Signor Deluso</i>	Abilene Christian University 2000

Partial Operatic Roles

Polly	<i>The Threepenny Opera</i>	New England Conservatory 2004
Adele	<i>Die Fledermaus</i>	New England Conservatory 2004
Donna Elvira	<i>Don Giovanni</i>	University of Mississippi 2004
First Lady	<i>The Magic Flute</i>	Abilene Christian University 2000
Belinda	<i>Dido and Aeneas</i>	Abilene Christian University 2000

Musical Theatre Roles

Meg	<i>Little Women</i>	Abilene Christian University 2001
Anne	<i>Anne of Green Gables</i>	Abilene Christian University 2000

Partial Musical Theater Roles

Lily	<i>The Secret Garden</i>	University of Mississippi 2004
Christine	<i>Phantom of the Opera</i>	University of Mississippi 2003

Film Roles

Caroline Jefferson	<i>Miss Firecracker</i>	Cosair Productions, Los Angeles, CA 1998
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Principal Teachers

Susan Clickner
Cynthia F. Linton

Coaches

John Moriarty
Dale Morehouse

Master Classes

Martin Isepp

Awards/Honors

Outstanding Vocalist of the Year, University of Mississippi, 2004
Outstanding Undergraduate of the Year, U of M, 2004
Prizewinner, Rose Palm-Tenser Scholarship Awards Competition, 2004
Member, Phi Kappa Phi Academic Honorary Society, U of M, 2003
Member, Pi Kappa Lambda, Musical Honorary Society, U of M, 2003
Second Prize, NATS Southern Regional Competition, Graduate Division, 2003
First Prize, NATS Southern Regional Competition, 2002
Governor's Award for Most Promising Talent for a Professional Career
First Prize, NATS Southern Regional Competition, 2001
First Prize, NATS Southern Regional Competition, 1999

Education

New England Conservatory, Boston, MA
Master of Music in Vocal Performance, anticipated 2006

University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS
Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance, *magna cum laude*, 2004

Formatting Your Résumé – Guidelines and Shortcuts

Rules for Formatting

Fonts: Only fonts with serifs should be used in the body of your résumé. Serifs are the little flourishes on the ends of letters. They lead the eye across a line of text, making it easier to read. We recommend using Palatino and Times. (NB: Times is very compact and should be used only in 12 pt. text.)

Examples of fonts without serifs: Avant-garde, Arial, Helvetica, Futura. These are fine to use as part of your letterhead, but not in the body of your résumé.

Note: Don't use New York. New York has serifs, but it incorporates a lot of space around every letter so that it leaves vertical "rivers" of white space trailing down the page – very distracting and very difficult to read. Don't use.

Margins: The absolute minimum margins for a résumé are .75 inches for the left, right, and top margins, and .5 inches for the bottom. Anything less makes the page look crowded. If you need more space, edit your résumé. Also, don't use uneven margins (e.g. 1.25 inches on the left, .75 on the right) – it distracts the eye from the content of the résumé.

All caps and underlines: Don't use either. All caps are hard to read. They also have a "shouting" effect that is counterproductive – why have a potential employer's eye distracted by huge headings when you want them to read what's underneath? Bold your headings instead.

Underlines are similarly distracting – don't use them. They are a holdover from when underlining was the only way to emphasize typewritten text. Bolding is a more straightforward, legible way to add emphasis to headings

Italics: Italics de-emphasize text. Don't use them for headings. It's OK to use them for subheadings, especially if there are a lot of subheadings within a specific category (such as performance experience). It's also OK to use them for things like *cum laude* and *with honors* when listing degrees earned, for *References Available Upon Request* at the bottom of the résumé, and for composition titles (for composers' résumés).

Bold Text: Bold should *only* be used for headings. Do not use it to highlight job titles, responsibilities, awards, etc. Bolded text draws the eye. If you use bold for anything but headings, it will be distracting.

Point sizes: All of the text of your résumé excluding your letterhead should be in the same point size. We recommend 10 or 12 point characters. Again, this is to improve legibility and to draw the eye to the *content* of the résumé, not the headings.

To summarize: Headings should be in the same point size as the text, not in all caps, and bold.

Indents: Information following a heading should be uniformly indented so that the reader can find relevant information quickly. You can do this by hitting the tab button at the beginning of every line of text underneath a heading. The default setting for a tab is approximately .5 inches, which is fine.

MS Word for Macintosh Formatting Shortcuts

How to get the line shown in our letterhead examples: This looks like an underline but is actually a border placed underneath the name in the letterhead. To get it:

1. Type your name
2. Press return to get to the next line
3. With the cursor remaining on the line underneath the name, highlight *Format* on the tool bar and then go to *Border* on the pop-up menu.
4. Look at the "map" of the page that will appear. Click on the top margin of the page. Then click on the line thickness you want (we recommend hairline or single).
5. Click "OK." You're done.

Bullets: Bullets are dots (like this: •) that are useful when listing two or more items (job responsibilities, etc.). To get them, go to “Insert,” and then “Symbol”. This gives you more freedom with your bullets. However, some people prefer to use their program’s automatic bullets, which you can use by clicking on the “Bullets” icon on the tool bar. The program will automatically tab your text over, so use the “Hanging Indent” on the tool bar to re-adjust the space between your bullets and your text. Be sure to follow the bullet with one space.

Tabs and paragraph marks: You should have tabs and paragraph marks show on the screen when you’re working on your résumé so that you space things correctly. You can do this by pressing command-J.