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How Many Years of Experience to Show On a Resume

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One of the most common questions that I am asked in my professional resume writing practice, has to do with how many years of experience a candidate should to show on the resume. Do you go back 10 years? 15 years? 20 years? To the very beginning? Just how far should you go back on your resume?

I wish I could give you a definitive answer. It would certainly make my job easier! But, the truth is that the answer is different for every person. In my book, 101 Before-and-After Resume Examples, I confront questions like this one and show real-life examples of how I have handled issues such age on resumes for my clients.

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In short, if you are wondering about how to handle the length of your career on your resume and wondering how far to go back, remember that a resume is NOT an autobiography, it is a marketing piece. Every data point and element that you include in your resume should be pertinent in relation to your current career goal. The data in your resume should be included because it directly illustrates and supports your qualifications and candidacy for your current career focus. If it does not serve that purpose, it should not be included.

For example, if you have been working for 20 years but changed careers five years ago, you may only need to show the past five years. Everything beyond that may be irrelevant.

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If you are an executive who has been progressing on the corporate ladder for the past 30 years, you may decide (based on the “flow” of jobs in your career history) that your best cut-off point is 17 years or 21 years, and that there would be no advantage in showing work history further back than that.

Or, you may be a “techie” with 20 years of experience. But, for the first eight years of your career you worked with a technology that is now obsolete, so you choose your cut-off point as 12 years.

As you can see, the answer to your question is as unique as your circumstances. So, my best advice is to take a good look at your situation and make your decision strategically, selecting the cut-off point for your resume that makes the most strategic sense for you in your unique situation.

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Michelle Dumas runs of one of the longest-standing and most respected professional résumé writing firms on the internet, Distinctive Career Services, LLC (dba Distinctive Documents). Since 1996, Michelle has empowered thousands of professionals with résumés that get results and win jobs fast. Get insider résumé writing tips that you won't find anywhere else at her website. Go now to www.distinctiveweb.com

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