

MARKETING YOUR PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS: Creating an Effective Résumé and Bio

INTRODUCTION

While your talent, qualifications and dedication are most important in determining your success in the music field, the manner in which you present yourself can enhance or detract from your professional image. An effective résumé and winning bio are essential tools for all musicians. This guide is designed to help you craft professional promotional materials to accompany your recorded auditions; apply for music performance, education or arts administration jobs; compete for grants, fellowships, or competitions; book performances; or use as a marketing piece to showcase your professional credentials. Let's begin by reviewing a few basics of résumé writing.

RÉSUMÉ STYLE

There are many résumés styles used today. No longer is a typed paper résumé the only option. In fact, you will need to consider all styles and learn to create different résumé versions for specific circumstances. For example, a traditional paper résumé would be used when sending your material via the US postal service. When transmitting material by e-mail, a plain text or scannable résumé is standard. Video and Internet résumés are escalating in popularity and rapidly becoming indispensable to the musician's marketing toolkit.

RÉSUMÉ CONTENT

The typical categories for information that may be highlighted in your music-related résumé depend on your target audience, your purpose, and your music genre.

Classical, jazz or pop music performance/composition résumés may include:

- Education/Training
- Coaches
- Principal Teachers
- Master Classes
- Professional Affiliations
- Special Achievements
- Orchestral Experience
- Chamber Music Experience
- Ensemble Experience
- Professional Audition Finals
- Performance Venues
- Solo Performances/Engagements
- Summer or Jazz Festivals
- Recordings
- Recitals
- Artists Performed With
- Media Appearances
- Compositions/Arrangements

Music Education/Private Teaching résumés may include:

- Education/Training
- Coaches
- Principal Teachers
- Master Classes
- Professional Affiliations
- Special Achievements
- Teaching Experience
- Certifications
- Publications
- Related Experience
- Special Skills
- Education/Music Technology
- Performance Experience
- Compositions/Arrangements

Music Administration résumés may include any of the categories above, and additional knowledge and experience related to business areas such as marketing, management, accounting, finance, business law.

RÉSUMÉ FORMAT BASICS

Organization - Whether paper, online or video style, the presentation of your content must relate back to the purpose. For example, if seeking a solo performance opportunity, it would be more effective to highlight solo performance experience rather than orchestral experience.

Consistency - Throughout the Résumé, content should be presented in a uniform manner. Additionally, information should be presented in reverse chronological order (most recent to oldest) if dates are used, or order of importance or difficulty, if no dates are used.

Simplicity - Visually, the design should be neat and uncomplicated – one font type and no more than two font sizes. Text should be easy to read – traditional *seraph* typeface such as Times New Roman, Garamond, or Palatino. Online and video résumés particularly require a simple format that is concise and direct.

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE RÉSUMÉS

Traditional Paper Résumés:

- Spelling and grammar errors are unacceptable. It's good to use your word processing spell checker, however, ask at least three other people to proofread your résumé before distributing it.

- Content must be completely truthful. Never minimize or exaggerate your credentials, and avoid self-aggrandizing opinions.
- Use first person, active voice and imply but do not use "I." Focus your attention on your role and contribution when showcasing a group activity.
- Use bullets and brief statements rather than long, dense paragraphs for readability.
- Be smart about the length, layout, and choice of font and font size. Typically, 1-2 pages of text are adequate using margins of .75 to 1.0 on all four sides and 11-12 point font size.

Online or Scannable Résumés:

- Keep all text plain and free of embellishments like italics or underlines.
- Align text to left side margin. Do not justify text as that leaves unnatural spaces between words.
- Graphics such as bullets should be avoided.
- Twelve point font size using Courier or Times New Roman is most preferred.
- Emphasize content using keywords (nouns) relevant to the purpose of the résumé that would show up in a database search.

Video/Internet Résumés:

- Be prepared. Never *wing it!* The short term opportunity as well as your reputation is under scrutiny.
- Be concise. Hold the viewers interest. The complete video résumé may consist of several segments with each segment between two and five minutes long.
- Be organized. Your video Résumé is a performance, not a jam session. Have a beginning, middle and an end.
- Be yourself. Let your enthusiasm shine through. Keep in mind that your audience is prospective teachers, bosses, and colleagues so smile and be professional.

- Look presentable. Appearance makes an impression. Wear wrinkle-free, comfortable, and genre-appropriate clothing.
- Be honest. As with traditional paper résumés or bios, there is no room to misrepresent the facts in a video Résumé.
- Be creative. Make your presentation stand out. Pay attention to visual details and your presentation style.

CREATING A WINNING BIO

Some may think that a “Bio” is a detailed factual history of their life. For marketing purposes, a bio is a vibrant document that showcases your professional qualifications in an interesting, creative narrative structure. Bios are used in lieu of a résumé for printed concert programs, oral introductions, promo kits, award ceremonies, and various other marketing and promotion purposes. As a marketing tool, a bio needs to capture the readers’ attention, provide pertinent information in a concise manner, and create a memorable image of the individual. Typically, bios are relatively brief ranging from one-quarter to one page in length or 150 to 500 words.

Getting Started

- Gather together any relevant materials like your résumé, programs from performances, school or community newspaper articles, or other such information to use as reference material.
- Make a list of the most important or impressive accomplishments you have achieved relevant to your music career area. Remember to include both academic and professional activities such as where and with whom you studied, distinctive awards you have received, competitions won, or scholarships received.
- Identify the most interesting material to begin the narrative. Talk to parents, teachers, spouses, friends or mentors to get an idea of what they think are your most noteworthy successes.

Begin Writing

- Write a draft of your bio. Don't worry about your writing ability at this point. Get your ideas on paper always keeping in mind your purpose and the intended audience.
- Compose your bio using the third person, as if you are talking about someone else, not first person as in your résumé. Alternate between referring to yourself by name (Mr., Ms., Dr.) and by pronoun (he, she).
- Create a story that highlights your music-related accomplishments, your authentic personality, and your education or training. Just as you begin your bio with an attention grabbing professional item, consider ending your bio with a surprising personal detail about yourself.
- You may write several drafts before you are satisfied. If writing is not your strong suit, be sure to get help from someone who has excellent writing skills.

The Finished Product

- The final version of your bio is finished – only for now! Remember that your bio is a dynamic document that will change and develop as your accomplishments and experiences accrue.
- Before sending out your bio, be sure to have at least three people proofread the final version. If writing a bio is a new experience for you, ask a trusted professional colleague or teacher to provide you with some constructive feedback.

SUMMARY

A résumé and bio are two valuable marketing pieces required of all aspiring or professionals in the music field. In some cases, a first impression is conveyed through these documents and therefore should present you and your qualifications in the most favorable light. Knowing how to create an effective résumé and winning bio are essential professional skills.

Where there is love and skill together, expect a masterpiece.

John Ruskin