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How many years to go back on resume

Your resume is one of the first things a potential employer sees about you. It is an introduction to your professional experience and the first indication of whether you might be a good fit for a role. As you prepare your resume, you'll have to make several decisions about the best way to present your career history, including the type of resume you'll use, sections to include, and, depending on how long you've been in the workforce, how far back your resume should go.Should you include that high school job scooping ice cream? Maybe, if you are seeking a customer service role for your first job out of college. It depends on the job role and how much relevant experience you have. As you move through your career, the rule of thumb is to include only the most recent 10 to 15 years of job experience. Use this guide to understand exactly how far back your resume should reach.How far back should your resume go based on years of experience?What to include in your resume depends on how many years of job experience you have and the type of role you are applying for. It's important to gauge your experiences based on relevancy to the job. Ultimately, you want every role listed on your resume to help build your case as the ideal candidate.If you're not sure how many past jobs to list, consider this simple rule. Include detailed descriptions of your last three jobs, and keep any additional job listings very brief.Students or recent graduates (0-2 years of experience)When you are seeking your first internship or an entry-level position, you may include part-time jobs you had in high school, particularly if they are relevant to the position. Perhaps, while scooping ice cream, you also helped the shop owner with their social media platforms or increased sales by suggesting a new flavor. These are great examples of transferable skills if you're applying for a marketing role. If you are in college and have participated in any meaningful extracurricular activities, these are also fair game for adding to your resume. Consider listing any leadership roles you had within clubs, activities or clubs you initiated, and volunteer experiences that show off your dynamism. You should also include any job-related internships.Learn more: How to Get Your First Job: A GuideEarly or mid-career professionals (2-15 years of experience)Now that you have a bit more experience, you have more flexibility in crafting the story of your career journey. Each time you revise your resume for a new job, make sure it is relevant to the specific job or industry you're applying for. It is less important how far back the resume goes since the focus should be on the quality of your contributions to the company. At this point in your career, your resume should only reflect your most recent and relevant work experiences after graduation.When you have about 10 to 15 years of work experience, you can begin to shed earlier experience. Instead, use the space on your resume to highlight continuing education classes, professional organizations, or a special interests or hobbies section, as this shows an ambitious dedication to developing your technical or workplace skills.There are several ways to address gaps in your resume if you are stepping back into employment after a period of time focusing on other areas of life, such as raising children, a long-term injury, taking care of family, or even getting a PhD. You can address this time away in an objective statement at the top of your resume, add a line in your chronological history accounting for the gap, or detail your skills and accomplishments from this period with a creative addition to your work history.Late-career professionals (more than 15 years of experience)By the time you have been working for 15 years, you most likely will have removed some of your earlier work history in favor of expanding on recent and noteworthy accomplishments. With this much work experience, it's acceptable to have a two-page resume. However, the general guidance is still to include only the most recent 10 to 15 years. This will help hiring managers scan your resume quickly, keep your resume focused on your biggest achievements, and may help avoid age discrimination during the job search process.You may choose to add a section called "Early Work History" that includes early career highlights, such as awards or experiences that remain relevant and impressive.Learn more: How Many Pages Should a Resume Be? Guide + TipsWhat should you include in your resume?There are several different types of resumes (chronological, functional, and combination) to consider. How far back your resume extends depends on where you are in your career and what type of job you are applying for. Consider the industry, the role, and the seniority of the position. Read over the job description to understand precisely what skills they are looking for, whether your experience matches and how to reflect that experience in a way that illustrates your credibility.All in all, it is up to you to include what feels valuable when applying for a job, school, or any new experience. Some resumes, like those in academia, are more descriptive and may span more than two pages. For most jobs, it is best to stay as concise as possible. Most importantly, your resume should reflect the experiences that present you as the best possible candidate.Learn more: How to Make a Resume: Resume Writing GuideLearn more about creating a compelling resume on Coursera. Limiting your career history on your resume to between 10 and 15 years allows you to highlight all the important information you need to convey to an employer. Enhance your resume know-how further on Coursera with a project-centered course in How to Write a Resume from the State University of New York, or demonstrate high-value skills on your resume with a Professional Certificate from industry leaders like Google, Meta, and IBM. Join Coursera for free and start learning today. One of the unwritten rules of resume writing is this: Not everything that can go on your resume, should go on your resume. Counter-intuitively, there are some things that can actively harm your candidacy — including a too-long work history. In this guide, we'll cover how many years your resume should go back, what to do if you have more (or less) experience, and when to break those rules.How many years of work history should you include on a resume?While there's no hard and fast rule, the general convention is that your resume should include 10 to 15 years of work experience.Here's how many years your resume should go back in different situations:If you're a recent grad or young professional: 1-5 yearsIf you're a mid-career professional: 10 yearsIf you have extensive work experience or a long gap in your work history: 15+ yearsWhen to include less than 10 years of experience on a resumeThere are times when it makes sense to list less than the standard 10-15 years of work history on a resume:If you're at the beginning of your career and have been working for less than 10 yearsIf you're including non-professional work experience to round out your resumelf you're changing careers and don't have 10 years of relevant experienceIf you're at the beginning of your career10-15 years is an upper limit — not a lower one. If you have less than 10 years of experience, there's obviously no need to make it look like you have more.DO:If you're brand new to the workforce, you can include other types of experience like internships, volunteer work, projects, and extracurricular activities.Stick to listing relevant experience, even if that's just a single job. Once you've held at least one relevant position in your industry, you can leave off things like your part-time gig waiting tables or an internship you completed before you switched majors, unless there's a truly compelling reason for keeping them on your resume.DON'T:There's no need to pad out your resume just for the sake of it. Don't include high school experience or a bunch of short-term jobs in the hopes of appearing more experienced than you really are. This won't make it look like you have real experience — instead, it'll look like you aren't aware of professional resume norms.If you're using non-professional experienceYou should be even stricter about experience that is not work-related — for example, things like extracurricular activities, coursework, university projects, or volunteering. Definitely avoid including non-professional experience if it's older than 10 years, and be extremely wary about including this kind of experience even from as recently as 5 years back. If you've changed careersThe litmus test for including something on your resume is whether or not it's relevant, and positions in a completely different industry generally aren't. If the career change is recent, it's okay to include some older jobs, but try to stick to accomplishments that demonstrate relevant transferable skills. If you changed careers a while back and have more relevant experience since then, you can leave off jobs from your previous career path altogether.If you're a career changer wondering which skills to include in your resume, use the skills and keywords tool below to find some good ones.When to go back further than 15 years on a resumeOccasionally, you might want to consider going back further than 15 years on your resume:If you've been in the same role for several yearsIf you're applying for a job that requires more than 15 years of experienceIf you've been out of work for a whileIf you have highly relevant or impressive accomplishments from a much earlier jobIf you've held the same job for a whileIf you've been in the same position for 15 years, including older jobs can be a good way of rounding out your accomplishments and demonstrating career growth. That said, it isn't the only way — you can also show growth within the same company by using different job titles if you've been promoted or by emphasizing that you've taken on higher level responsibilities over time in your accomplishments.If you're applying for a job that requires a lot of experienceYour resume should always match the criteria in the job description. If you're applying to higher level positions - for example, a job that asks for 20 years' experience in the field — your resume can go back at least 20 years to show that you fit the profile the recruiter is looking for.If you have a long resume gapIf you've been out of the workforce for a while — for example, if you took time off to raise children — most of your experience may be from further back than 10 years ago. In that case, it's fine to go back further than 10-15 years on your resume.If you can, include some details about what you've been doing in the meantime. Obviously, don't try to spin "stay at home mom" as a job title, but if you've done any freelance work or personal projects in that time, listing those can help demonstrate how you've kept your skills sharp between jobs.If your older experience is highly relevantIf you feel that your older experience is compelling enough, that can be a good reason to expand the scope of your resume. This is especially true if your most relevant position is from further back in your career — for example, if you've been working in a different role or industry for a while but are applying for a role similar to a position you held 15 years ago, obviously include your most relevant experience. The same can be true if you have a particularly impressive (think career-defining) accomplishment from an older position that's still relevant today.How to include older experience on your resumelf you do want to include older experience on your resume, here are some of the best ways to do it without compromising the integrity of your resume:Include older experience in your resume summaryCreate a separate resume section for older experienceInclude a career highlights sectionList fewer bullet points under earlier rolesExpand your LinkedIn profile to provide a more comprehensive overview of your work experienceA resume summary is a great place for things that don't belong elsewhere on your resume — including older experience. Start your summary with a line like "Marketing Executive with 25+ years of experience" to quickly let recruiters know that you have more experience than your resume shows and include 2-3 key accomplishments from any stage in your career.Use your resume summary to quickly show that you have extensive experienceCreate a section for older experienceTo differentiate between current or more relevant experience and older positions, split your work history into 'Relevant Experience' and 'Previous Professional Experience.' Under that heading, you can briefly list experience that's older or from a different industry.Include older jobs on your resume under a different heading or subsectionInclude a career highlights sectionIf you want to include one or two particularly impressive accomplishments from earlier in your career, you don't need to list every detail about those older jobs. Instead, create an 'Awards' or 'Career Highlights' section where you can focus on your most relevant or impressive older accomplishments.Create a career highlights section to list accomplishments that are older but still relevantList fewer bullet pointsIf you do list older jobs in the experience section of your resume, don't overdo it — 1-2 bullet points is plenty for older jobs, or you could skip the accomplishments entirely and just list the job title, company, and dates of employment.Skip the accomplishments for older positions on your resumeFind out how many bullet points per job you should add to your resume.If you want a complete record of your older experience somewhere but it's too lengthy for your resume, consider adding it to your LinkedIn profile instead. There's no upper length limit on LinkedIn profiles, and it's a good way to showcase the depth of your experience while keeping your resume as a shorter, easy to read career overview.Include older experience on your LinkedIn profile to avoid resume bloatWhy you shouldn't include all your experience on a resumeWhy limit your resume to 10-15 years? Trimming your resume down to just your most recent work experience helps toOlder experience is less relevantThe biggest reason to limit the number of years of experience you include on your resume is this: The older your experience is, the less relevant it becomes. This goes double if your older experience was in a different industry, or if you're in an advanced stage of your career. If you're a senior employee or executive, recruiters don't want to know what you did right after college — just focus on what's recent.Relevant: How many jobs should you list on your resume?Redundant accomplishments are redundantMaybe your older experience is still relevant — but in this case, your career has likely covered a lot of the same ground since then. If you were still working in the same industry 20 years ago, chances are most of your resume accomplishments from back then have been replicated (and improved on) in newer positions, so it makes more sense to include them in your more recent jobs instead.Relevant: How to write resume accomplishmentsShorter resumes are betterObviously, if you have 25 years' experience, you don't need to try to cram your entire work history onto a single page. On the other hand, if your resume has blown out to more than two pages, or if a single job from 15+ years ago is pushing your resume from one page to two, it's time to eliminate some of that older experience.Relevant: Optimal resume length in 2021Prevent age discriminationIs age discrimination illegal? Yes. Does it still happen? Unfortunately, also yes. If you're worried at all about age discrimination, you can avoid it becoming an issue in earlier stages by limiting your resume to 10-15 years and leaving the graduation dates off your education section.Avoid resume gapsSometimes, including older experience can cause even more problems. One potential downside is the appearance of an employment gap, especially if you've changed careers. If you spent some time in a different role or industry, it's time to re-evaluate whether those older jobs really need to be listed. (Tip: If you held one relevant job 20 years ago with a decade-long gap in between, it probably isn't worth it.)Relevant: How to deal with gaps on a resumeOptimize your resumeforLike most things on your resume, how many years to go back is ultimately a judgment call. Uploading your resume to the tool below can help you decide what should stay and what should go. The struggle is real. After lots of thought, deliberation, and "aha" moments, you've decided to start looking for a new job. But before beginning this journey, you'll have to face the job seeker's rite of passage: writing or updating your resume. Trending SearchesSEARCH ALL JOBS If you've been in the workforce for a while, you might be wondering: How far back should a resume go? Why shouldn't you just include all of your experience? What amount of work history is enough to convince a recruiter or hiring manager you've got the chops for the role, but is not so much they don't know how to make sense of it all? Well the answer to this career quandary is: It's complicated. Generally, your resume should go back no more than 10 to 15 years. However, every applicant is different and so is every resume, and there are a few other rules of thumb that can serve as a GPS as you decide how far back your resume should go. There are a few reasons why you might not want to include every job you've ever had on a resume, especially as your career bypasses that 10- to 15-year mark, and you should keep these in mind as you decide what's best for your resume. You'll want to: Why 10 to 15 years, you ask? Well, that's the timeframe recruiters and employers perceive as most relevant. Recruiters aren't interested in your accomplishments as an entry-level employee if you've been in the field for 20 years. And even if you're early in your career, they don't necessarily need to know about a paper route on a resume slated for a tech position. Your resume should be a high-level summary of your relevant professional accomplishments, not a dissertation of all your jobs and responsibilities since middle school. Recruiters and hiring managers want to quickly see why you're the right person for this job, and your experience in the past decade or so is most likely the reason. So think twice before you let non-essential information take up real estate on your resume. Instead use that space to shine a light on applicable achievements, experiences, and positions that more closely align with the jobs you're targeting. If you keep your experience contained to the last 10 to 15 years, it's also easier for recruiters to review your work history with a cursory glance over your resume. As you get further along in your career, it's OK for your resume to stretch to two pages—but more than that will be too long for a recruiter to take in quickly, and they might even skip it entirely. So while you may feel a little shortchanged lopping off your years of sweat equity, you'll be more likely to make it past that first look if you trim your experience timeline. Unfortunately, age discrimination in hiring isn't an urban legend, and having too many years of experience on your resume could fast-track it to the rejection pile. You see, it's common for hiring managers to look at resumes with 20+ years of experience and assume the candidate is too expensive, may not feel challenged enough, or is otherwise too seasoned for consideration. So trust me when I tell you, age proofing your resume is good for your job search, and limiting your experience to only the most relevant and recent is a great place to start. The answer varies depending on your situation. But there are two key factors: how long you've been in the employment game and how that experience aligns with your current job targets. You can include your professional, academic, and personal experiences and achievements from both high school and college. But the key is that you'll want to highlight your transferable skills. Demonstrate how you used leadership, collaboration, problem-solving, communication, and time management skills in related class projects, internships, volunteer work, leadership roles, sports, passion projects, or part-time jobs. Just make sure you're being selective. Before you add something, ask yourself if participating in that car wash fundraiser would really move the needle for a copywriter position (it might if you wrote the social media messaging!), then act accordingly. At this point, you have enough work experience under your belt to leave college courses, projects, awards, and GPAs off your brag sheet. Unless you had a noteworthy long-term job or highly relevant internship with serious name drop appeal, employers are no longer interested in your college activities. Stick to your post-grad experience. But keep in mind those post-grad experiences don't all have to come from your nine-to-five job. Enhance your resume by demonstrating your professional prowess outside of work. Use volunteer experiences, leadership roles, side hustles, and professional organizations and affiliations to add personality instead of years to your work history. After you've hit the five-year mark, you should begin focusing on pertinent roles and responsibilities that will enhance your qualifications for your next career move. This may mean de-emphasizing or even omitting early-professional and part-time positions and elevating more relevant work experiences as the primary focus, perhaps with more detail. As you get even further into your career, that "10 to 15 years" rule will start to kick in, and you can use it as a guide when debating whether to keep a position on your resume. You should also consider if your experience warrants a two-page resume, but make sure you keep in mind how relevant each entry and bullet point you're including actually is. Once you have more job titles under your belt, you might consider splitting your work experience into two separate sections: Related Experience: Include the roles and responsibilities closely associated with your job search targets with detailed bullets that highlight your accomplishments. The key is making relevancy and transferable skills the focal point of your resume content. If you have relevant experience that you really need to include outside of the last 10 to 15 years—if you're making a career change, for instance—you can list it here.Other Experience: Simply list unrelated positions within the last 10 to 15 years without descriptions or bullet points so there are no visible gaps on your resume. Doing this will keep your most relevant experience front and center so a recruiter doesn't have to go hunting for it in a more extensive career history. If you've taken a break from your career that makes most or all of your experience fall outside of this 10- to 15-year window—to raise kids, for example—you likely have to go back a little further on your resume. This is OK, but you should explain up front why your most recent work experience is so far back. You can do this in a cover letter or in a resume summary at the top of the page. But you should still keep in mind how relevant your past experience is as you decide what to include and leave off. And if you've done anything in the meantime, whether that's a part-time job or a side hustle or something else to keep you up-to-date in your field, be sure to include that as well. So what's the takeaway here? Well, at the end of the day, your resume should tell the story of how your related experiences and accomplishments make you a great candidate for your next position; not the number of work anniversaries you've celebrated. Because when it's all said and done, that's what's going to get you hired.