



How to Explain an Employment Gap on Your Resume

Many of us take time off, for one reason or another, from working. Sometimes, it's by choice. In other cases, it can take time to find a new job. What is the best way to explain an employment gap on your resume and during a job interview? It depends on the situation and what you did while you weren't employed.

When to Mention an Employment Gap.

If the gap was in the past, you don't need to mention it. In fact, you don't need to include all your experience on your resume, especially if you have been in the workforce for years. It's acceptable to limit the years of experience you include on your resume to fifteen years when seeking a managerial or professional position and ten years when looking for other positions.

Use Dates to Cover the Employment Gaps in Your Resume

When listing dates on your resume, you don't need to list the month/year if you were in a position for over a year or if your position spans multiple years. For example, you could say 2014 - 2016 (rather than May, 2014 - February, 2016) which would give you some room to cover the gaps:

Store Manager, XYZ Store
2014 – 2016

Sales Associate, ABC Store
2012 – 2014

As you can see, the resume doesn't specifically say when the candidate started and ended employment, which can cover an employment gap.

Check Your Resume Format

You can format your resume to minimize the gaps in your employment history.

For example, don't bold the dates and/or use a smaller font than the one you use for the company name or job title. Start your resume with a Summary Statement and Career Highlights section, so you are highlighting your skills and accomplishments, rather than when you did what.

Omit a Job (or Two) on Your Resume

You don't need to include all your experience on your resume, especially if you have been in the workforce for years.

It's acceptable to limit the years of experience you include on your resume to fifteen years when seeking a managerial or professional position and 10 years when looking for a technical or high-tech job.

Include Other Experience Gained During the Gap

What did you do while you weren't employed? Did you freelance or consult? How about volunteering? All those experiences count as work and can be included on your resume. List them as you would list your other jobs - with job title, company name, job description, and dates of employment. If you took a class, you can list that in the Education section of your resume.

Use Your Cover Letter to Briefly Explain the Employment Gap

When you have employment gaps that don't fit on your resume (you took time off to care for an aged parent or to raise a child) you can use your cover letter to explain the gap.

However, you don't need to bring it to the employer's attention.

Explaining an Employment Gap During a Job Interview

Explaining a gap in employment during an interview can be tricky. The best approach is usually to address the issue in a direct and forthright manner. Provide a clear rationale for taking time off if the break was voluntary. If you took time off to deal with a particular issue like caring for a sick relative or completing coursework and are ready to return to full-time employment, make it clear that the reason for your time off from the workforce has been resolved.

If you were laid off due to a workforce contraction, it would be important to provide any evidence of strong performance as you explain the circumstances surrounding the downsizing. Whenever possible secure recommendations from supervisors, colleagues, and customers confirming your competence. Incorporate these with your LinkedIn profile when feasible.

Of course, it will be more difficult to make a strong case if you were fired due to performance issues. If you are now targeting a job which requires different skills or competencies, then you might emphasize how your strengths are better suited for the job at hand. If you have taken action to correct any problems which led to your dismissal, you should mention the steps you have taken to strengthen your abilities.

You should generally avoid any negative characterization of your former employer since many prospective employers would take the employer's side. A proactive approach providing evidence of your competence, and any positive recommendations from previous jobs can be helpful.

Emphasize the Positive

Make sure that you emphasize any constructive activities during your gap period such as volunteer work, workshops or coursework, consulting or freelance work. Finally, exude enthusiasm for returning to work and make a very strong case for why your target job would be exciting for you and an excellent fit.

Credit: <https://www.thebalance.com>