

Résumé Tips For Your International Experience

“A global point of view is a critical skill set that is not easily come by in the US, and it is a skill set that facilitates creativity, diversity of thinking, and better skills for working with a variety of individuals with varied backgrounds, interests and capabilities.”

- Advertising Executive

Have people assured you that your experience abroad “looks great on a résumé?” They’re right! The bad news is that potential employers or members of graduate or professional school admissions committees may lack these experiences themselves. It’s up to you to effectively communicate the skills and proficiencies that will benefit their organization and convince them of the value of your experience.

“I think I have my current job because of my experiences abroad. Those experiences gave me greater self-confidence and a greater understanding of myself, which led to my willingness to uproot myself and try new work in a new location.”

-Higher Education Administrator

Skills

What skills have you acquired or enhanced while you were abroad?

Some of the skills that professionals with international experience cite as being particularly useful in their careers include:

- Enhanced cultural awareness and sensitivity to customs and cultural differences
- Foreign language proficiency
- Adaptability
- Ability to identify and achieve goals
- General improvement in communications skills
- Increased confidence, initiative, and independence
- Greater flexibility and sense of humor
- Awareness of global economic and political issues and realities
- Ability to maintain an open mind and be tolerant of others
- Clarification of goals and improved self-awareness
- General travel skills
- Resource management
- Organization
- Problem solving and crisis management
- Patience
- Listening and observation

Résumé

Where are you locating your experience on your résumé?

If it is a study program, consider listing the program in your education section rather than under activities or other experiences.

B.A. University of Minnesota—Art History 2003
Paul Valéry Université, Montpellier, France, 2001

If the experience included an internship, list the experience as a professional experience rather than as an activity.

Marketing Assistant, Hamley’s Toys
London, England, 1/02–5/02

If you did a work program but the work was not particularly related to your intended profession, list it as work experience but concentrate on the cross-cultural learning.

The Black Dog Pub, Cambridge, England
Served patrons in a local restaurant, worked as the only American in a British business, trained co-workers in American-style customer service.

If your resume includes a section for skills or proficiencies, include specific skills acquired or improved while abroad.

“My experience in Russia and Ukraine differentiated me from the masses of “standard” college grads hunting for the most desirable jobs. I heard it time and again from employers.”

-Advertising Account Planning Manager

Cover Letter

How does your experience relate to your field?

What field do you intend to work in? How might your international experience uniquely benefit a professional in that that field?

Develop a strategy to specifically address this in your cover letter or résumé.

My experience living in Ecuador will enhance my ability to communicate and interact effectively with the local Latino population this position has the opportunity to work closely with.

My studies in Japan provided me with a great insight into the cultural differences that influence consumers in different countries and will improve my ability to contribute to international marketing initiatives.

Even if your career goals do not include a specific international dimension at this time, you can promote the general transferable

“Agriculture is truly a global business. Students who have studied or interned abroad have a better perspective and are thus more valuable to companies such as Archer Daniels Midland.”

- President and Chief Operating Officer of ADM

The Interview

Consider in advance where and how you will refer to your experience abroad. While it is important, you should not use it as your only point of reference.

If your interviewer remarks or asks about your international experience, take it as an opportunity to expand. Don't let the opportunity pass by with a simple “Yes, it was great!”

Prepare specific examples. Did you:

- Do a specific project or research applicable to your field of interest while abroad?
- Travel independently?
- Learn to work with a more diverse group of people than you had previously been exposed to?
- Resolve a conflict based on misunderstandings or cultural differences?
- Learn new activities, languages, hobbies, or skills?

“I usually bring up my international experience when asked, ‘tell me something interesting about yourself’.”

-Clinical Research Coordinator

“My international experience is always asked about, whether it is relevant to the position or not.”

-Director of Conferences for a Professional Association