

How to explain career gaps in your resume

Do you have a chunk of time in your resume when you weren't working? Have you thought about fudging the dates between jobs to cover the gaps?

Having time out of work can happen for a number of important reasons. Sometimes it's hard to know how to explain it, though, especially when you're trying to impress a potential employer.

Here are some tips to help you explain career gaps in your resume.

Career gaps are common

Firstly, career gaps aren't always a bad thing. There are several positive reasons why you might have a career gap: having a baby, studying full-time or travelling.

There are also some more challenging reasons, such as health problems, being unable to find work, redundancy, being fired or burnout.

It's not unusual to have an occasional career gap – perhaps now more than ever, says David George, Managing Director at Michael Page Australia.

“The pandemic has affected almost every sector in the last two years, causing job losses. Employers will probably be much more understanding if you've been let go or made redundant.”

Be honest from the start

You might be hoping that your potential employer simply won't notice the career gaps in your resume. But chances are, it won't escape the eagle-eyed hiring manager or recruiter.

A resume that has small unexplained gaps or just one large one may raise alarm bells for employers, and they often won't have time to find out more information if you don't give it to them.

“There's a high chance that the employer will reject your application straight away,” advises George.

You might be tempted to alter the dates and extend the years and months of employment a little to cover the gaps. But there's a good chance the truth will come up during the reference check, anyway.

Don't try to cover up your career gap or pretend it didn't happen, George says. Be honest about career gaps from the start of the hiring process. “Being open from the beginning and explaining your career break will show your honesty, which should work in your favour.”

Some practical examples

Here's some common reasons for career breaks, and how to explain them in your resume and cover letter.

- **If you lost your job or couldn't find work**

If you were made redundant, then it's understandable that you had some time between jobs. If you were let go, you will need to explain the circumstances, George says.

Turn that into a positive by explaining how you broadened your skills during your time out of work. That applies if you've had trouble finding work for an extended period, too.

"Did you do further training or any volunteer work? If not, what other skills did you gain? Where possible, take this opportunity to show that you've been productive."

It's also okay to speak about taking the time to find the right role, rather than rushing into something that may not end up being right. It's important to be honest, but also to bring attention to any positives associated with the career gap.

- **If you had a long-term illness**

It can be difficult being open with employers about a physical or mental illness that's kept you from working. But if you couldn't work for a lengthy period, you'll need to acknowledge it.

You don't need to go in to specific details if it makes you uncomfortable. "Explain that you had some time off work when you were sick, but you're now ready to work again, and looking forward to returning," George says.

Living with a long-term illness or injury – and going through any recovery process – takes strength and determination. Focusing on any positives from that experience can sometimes work in your favour, he says.

- **If you had caring responsibilities**

It's common to take time out of the workforce to care for young children or family members, so be open about that, George says.

If you have children that are now older and are in school or childcare, explain the situation and that you're now keen to return to your career.

Similarly if you cared for a family member, explain the situation with as much detail as you're comfortable to share. The skills that are required to support others, such as

dedication, kindness and planning, reflect well on you as an individual.

- **If you spent time travelling**

While many of us aren't able to travel right now, plenty of employers see value in taking time off work to travel, George says. Extended time spent travelling can show independence, personal growth and broad cultural awareness.

If you've taken time to travel in the past, highlight how your traveling experiences – both positive and negative – have given you new perspectives and skills that you can apply to the role on offer.

What to say about career gaps during an interview

During the interview, you will probably be asked for more details about your career gap. The hiring manager will be looking for more detail to understand how you spent your time, and how it was productive.

An employer wants to know how you dealt with difficult situations, too, and what it shows about your character and resilience.

“Nearly everyone has challenges and gaps during their career path,” George says. “Showing how you dealt with any adversity in a positive way can work in your favour.”

No matter how much you want to work, career gaps can sometimes be unavoidable. The best approach during the application and interview process is to be open and honest. Where possible, always show the employer how you faced any challenges with strength and resilience, and how your experiences gave you skills that you can use in your new role.

Read more:

- [How to answer interview questions about skills](#)
- [How to answer: 'So, tell me about yourself'](#)
- [How to answer: 'What are your salary expectations?'](#)