Resume Writing in English: Comparing the Beliefs and Practices of Mexican University Students with Conventions in English-Speaking Countries[1]

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Abstract

This study compares the beliefs and practices of Mexican university students with conventions of resume writing in English. Due to the nonexistence of a single definitive source on resume writing and the differences between conventions in English-speaking countries and in Mexico, students may make incorrect assumptions. Forty up-to-date, credible sources were surveyed to establish these conventions. A questionnaire on student beliefs and practices was given, and two student resumes were analyzed, one collected before a presentation of the conventions, and one after. The results show a lack of knowledge as to what constitutes an effective resume in English. The students were taught in school wrong elements and included them on their first resumes. However, these results must be interpreted according to the survey of forty sources, which revealed that English resume conventions are not as straightforward or uniform as one might expect. Students should not only be taught common conventions, but also conflicting viewpoints and the importance of tailoring their resumes to specific job offers. In this way, students can understand that there is no catch-all prescription for a resume, and that their own best judgement should be used for its composition.

Resumen

Este estudio compara las creencias y costumbres de estudiantes de una universidad mexicana con las prácticas de redacción de un currículum en inglés. Es posible que los estudiantes hagan suposiciones incorrectas debido a que no existe una única y definitiva fuente sobre redacción del currículum y a las diferentes prácticas entre países angloparlantes y México. Se revisaron cuarenta fuentes actualizadas y creíbles para establecer estas prácticas. Se aplicó un cuestionario sobre creencias y costumbres a los estudiantes, y se analizaron dos currículums por estudiante, uno recolectado antes de la presentación de prácticas y el otro después. Los resultados arrojan que falta conocimiento de lo que constituye un currículum efectivo en inglés. A los estudiantes les enseñaron en la escuela elementos erróneos que fueron incluidos en sus currículums iniciales. Sin embargo, estos resultados deben ser interpretados de acuerdo a la revisión de 40 fuentes, las cuales revelan que las prácticas de redacción del currículum en inglés no son tan sencillas o tan uniformes como uno podría esperar. A los estudiantes no sólo debe enseñárseles prácticas comunes, sino también puntos de vista conflictivos y la importancia de adaptar sus currículums a ofertas de trabajo específicas. En este sentido, los estudiantes pueden llegar a entender que no existe una receta general para la redacción de un currículum y que deben utilizar el mejor juicio para su composición.

Introduction

There is no question that a resume (Curriculum Vitae, or CV) is crucial document for any job seeker (Berdanier et al., 2016; Burns et al., 2014; Chin et al., 2017; Januchowski-Hartley et al., 2019; Risavy, 2017; Tillotson & Osborn, 2012). In Mexico, for many job opportunities, a resume in Spanish is not enough, since a resume in English may also be requested.

The problem is that there is no single, definitive source of information on resume writing in the English-speaking world, and those that do exist may be dated and therefore obsolete (Risavy, 2017). Because of this, there are many gaps and inconsistencies in the literature about how to write a resume, similar to gaps and inconsistencies found by other studies between what is taught in the classroom regarding resumes and what is expected from a resume by a typical employer (Berdanier et al., 2016; Fen et al., 2017; Risavy, 2017).

A simple Google search is not enough for planning a lesson on resume writing in English. Besides obsolete sources, it provides conflicting or inappropriate information, especially from the commercial websites typically found at the top of searches. Adding to Mexican students' potential confusion are the different conventions between Spanish resumes used in Mexico, English resumes used in Mexico, and English resumes used in the English-speaking world.

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Because of this, the content of a resume writing lesson must draw from a variety of credible and up-to-date sources. In this study, 40 online sources about resume writing were consulted: 20 business articles from 2018-2019, and 20 university guides from 2016-2019. As expected, there were inconsistencies and disagreements among the sources, but in general they recommended the same basic elements to be included on resumes, along with advice regarding the importance of proofreading and of tailoring each resume to a specific job offer. These findings, including the inconsistencies and disagreements, were presented to the students to allow them to decide for themselves what would be most appropriate for their own resumes.

Although establishing resume writing conventions was important, the main purpose of this research was to examine the beliefs and practices regarding resume writing in English of this group of 18 Mexican university students in an advanced English course. This was done with a survey and by comparing two resumes written by the students, one before a presentation of the conventions, and one after.

This research shows that although the students were unprepared to write a resume in English, they were willing to make extensive changes to their resumes once they had learned about the conventions of resume writing in English, including the contradictions.

Context

The Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México is a large public university located in Toluca, Mexico about an hour from Mexico City. Students in the Department of Languages study a bachelor's degree in languages, with an emphasis on teaching or translation, either in English or French.

English 10 is an elective course, because students with the chosen language of English are only required to study until English 8. The level of English 10 corresponds to C1, and much of the textbook is devoted to preparation for the Cambridge Advanced Certificate. In fact, the students took a mock exam for this certificate at the end of the semester.

No course in the department included lessons on resume writing in English, nor did the books for the higher-level English courses. As mentioned, these books[3] are focused on the Cambridge Examination, which while undoubtedly important, especially for aspiring English teachers, is not a substitute for the document on which the score will be shown: the resume.

Methodology

Participants

There were 18 students in English 10 in the spring 2019 semester, 13 female and five male. Thirteen had a teaching emphasis, and four a translation emphasis. (One did not answer this question on the questionnaire, simply listing 'languages'). Fifteen students were 22 years old, one was 23 years old, and two were 24. Seventeen were in the 10th (final) semester of the major, and one was in the 8th semester.

Purpose and selection of sources on resume writing

Although studies exist on what should be included on a resume, as shown in a recent literature review by Risavy (2017), many of them are out of date, often published before the widespread use of the internet in job searching. Also, possible inconsistencies between the business and academic worlds, as noted by Fen et al. (2017), needed to be accounted for. For these reasons, 40 sources were used to determine which elements should and should not be included on resumes in English. They were divided into two categories: 20 business articles published online in 2018 and 2019, and 20 guides in .pdf format from universities in the US, UK and elsewhere, published between 2016 and 2019.

It was necessary that the business articles be published by reputable sources, meaning that commercial websites, some of which mimicked the appearance of a legitimate business article, were eliminated. These commercial websites often appeared at the top of Google searches, and they provided resume templates of dubious quality and offered advice or proofreading for hire.

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[3] For English 9 and 10: Norris, R., & French, A. (2014). *Ready for advanced* (3rd ed.). Macmillan English.

The business articles chosen for this research came from these sources: *Business Insider, BusinessTech*, CNBC, CNN, *Forbes, Fortune, Money*, and the *New Zealand Herald.* Seventeen were published in 2018, and three in early 2019.

Most business articles did not attempt to be comprehensive guides covering all aspects of resume writing, but instead focused on specific elements of a resume, often indicating new or changing trends. Some titles of this type of article included: From *Forbe*s: *Ten resume-writing rules you're allowed to break now* (Ryan, 2018a), *Robots are reading your resume, so here are 5 tips to meet their approval* (Cornfield, 2018), and from *Business Insider, 38 things you should never include on your résumé* (Gillette & Cain, 2018). Some business articles did attempt to be comprehensive, such as *25% of Americans plan to look for a new job in 2019—here's exactly what your resume should look like* (Renzulli, 2019), although these articles were not nearly as comprehensive as the university guides. For instance, at 1,716 words, the above example from CNBC is not nearly as long as a typical university guide, such as the relatively short, 4-page guide from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, which contains 2,580 words.

The second group of sources were guides from universities. The main limiting factor in choosing these guides was the date of publication. Many university guides that can be found online were from before 2015, some even from the 1990s, so they were eliminated. Often the guides did not include a date of publication, although this could be estimated based on the dates used on the sample resumes included in the guides. If these dates were only from 2015 or earlier, the guide was eliminated. Also, if the guide was published on the university's website (nearly always without a date), but not available as a downloadable .pdf, then it was also eliminated, in order that its content be preserved for the purposes of this research.

Next, I attempted to find guides from both public and private universities, and from across the English-speaking world. Despite this, a majority of guides came from U.S. universities, simply because there were more available. Fortunately, other countries were represented as well, with five from the U.K., three from Canada, and one from Australia. A list of the universities in the study can be found in Appendix 1.

It is important to note that the information in these 40 sources were not presented to the students as a definitive guide to proper resume writing, but rather as a survey of the conventions generally agreed (or disagreed) upon by them. While presenting the results of this review, I not only noted these conventions, but also highlighted disagreements between the sources, in order to emphasize that the students would ultimately have decide for themselves what to include on their resumes, as even up-to-date guides from world-renowned universities and recent articles from established business magazines sometimes did not agree.

Differences between the sources

Despite a great deal of overlap between the information found in the business articles and the university guides, there were also some substantial differences. The main difference was that the university guides were meant to be comprehensive, covering every part of different types of resumes, with examples of different resumes written for specific circumstances. Many were not simply resume guides, but career guides, and included sections on cover letters, interviews, and other aspects of job hunting. Many included sections on language, with lists of action verbs and sections on how to compose the various parts of the resume. The longest, from the University of Oxford, was 152 pages, with the next two longest (Columbia University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology) at 92 pages each, coincidentally.

A second difference between the business articles and the university guides was the intended audience. The business articles were aimed at people who were already in the workforce and perhaps had not updated their resumes for years. The university guides were aimed at students. More attention to education was included in the university guides and the sample resumes found in them, with discussions about whether or not to include grade point averages or specific courses taken, to name two examples. The business articles made no mention of these details, and some of them recommended that graduation dates be left out, in order to avoid age discrimination.

Because the business articles were so rarely comprehensive, most did not describe every element that should be included on a resume. Most business articles, for instance, did not bother with recommending common elements of resumes, such as contact information. Because of this, I explained to the students that just because a source did not recommend something, it did not imply that the source recommended against including it. Findings that stated something was recommended against meant that the text clearly stated that it should not be included on a resume, or removed from it.

The intention of this review was not to compare resumes across countries in the English-speaking world, which would not be practical with its unequal representation of countries. A study comparing variation in resume-writing conventions across the English-speaking world would be interesting research, although for these students not nearly as appropriate as learning the basic elements of a typical resume in English, regardless of country. Nevertheless, one difference according to country among the university guides and articles was relevant to discuss with the students: the name of the document itself.

Resume or CV?

In English, many Mexicans are accustomed to calling a resume a 'CV' or simply 'curriculum'. There are several reasons for this. First, in Spanish a resume is called a 'curriculum'. The English 'resume,' in fact, is a false cognate, as the Spanish *resumen* means 'summary'. Furthermore, as mentioned, the textbooks in the Department of Languages are designed for preparation for the Cambridge Examination, and are written in British English. Any mention of this document in lower-level textbooks would certainly use 'CV'.

According to the sources, however, resumes and CVs are different documents, at least in American English. In general, a resume is a one- or two-page summary of a person's professional experience. Here, the cognate of the Latin-based Spanish word *resumen* (summary) comes into play. A CV, on the other hand, may be much longer, up to 25 pages, and is used by academics, scientists, doctors, and performing artists. Seven sources explained this difference. This is also reflected by the Latin roots of the word; in Latin, *curriculum vitae* means 'course of life'.

In British English (including Australia), the term 'resume' is not used—the resume is called a 'CV'. This too is only one or two pages, and aside from the name, the information contained in them is basically the same, aside from details such as including references. In British English, an Academic CV is the longer, more comprehensive document. Canada is an interesting case, as Canadian English is somewhat of a mix between American and British English. For instance, Canadian English uses British spelling, but the accent is far closer to American English.

Of the three Canadian guides analyzed for this research, one used 'CV' and not 'resume' (in the British style), one used 'resume' and not 'CV' (in the American style), and one explained the difference, also in the American style. I explained these differences to the students at the beginning of my presentation of the results of this research, and in class we used the term 'resume'.

What is a resume?

A resume is generally defined as a marketing tool (Kelly, 2018; Renzulli, 2019; Umoh, 2018, University of London, 2017; University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2016;) that makes a first impression (Cain, 2018; Januchowski-Hartley et al., 2019; Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2017; Union College, 2018; Vasel, 2018) and summarizes the story of a person's professional life (Crowley, 2018; Joseph, 2018; Ryan, 2018b; Tillotson & Osborn, 2012). Resumes must be free of mistakes (Carey, 2018; Gillett & Cain, 2018; George Brown College, 2017; Indiana University, 2018; London School of Economics and Political Science, 2018; McMaster University, 2016), customized for each job offer (Bahler, 2019; Cornfield, 2018; Fisher, 2018; Harvard Extension School, 2018; Oxford Brooks University, 2018; University of California, Berkeley, 2016; University of Nottingham, 2018; the University of Texas at Dallas, 2017), and written for a specific purpose, which is to receive a job interview (Columbia University, 2016; Kansas State University, 2017; University of Oxford, 2018; McGill University, 2019).

These are the characteristics of resumes in general. Their specific characteristics, according to the sources for this research, are described in the following sections. The Figure below shows these

characteristics, which constitute the conventions of resume writing in English from these 40 sources, along with student performance in including them (or not) on their first and second resumes.[4]

RESUME CONVENTIONS	Information in Sources (of 40)		Student Resumes (of 18)	
Item	Recommend	Recommend against	First resume	Second resume
One page	18	–	14	18
Two pages OK (if necessary)	16	2	3	0
Three pages (or more) OK (if necessary)	1	8	1	0
Perfect spelling / no mistakes or typos	25	–	8	15
Use simple, clear, easy-to-read format	24	–	10	18
'Curriculum Vitae' as title	–	7	5	0
Name: Address: etc. as intros	–	1	10	0
Photograph	–	9	11	0
Age / Date of birth	–	11	12	0
Marital status	–	5	5	0
Nationality	–	4	3	0
LinkedIn	16	–	0	0
Other social media	4	3	3	0
Educational background (university)	23	–	18	18
High school information	3	1	11	3
Secondary school information	–	–	7	2
Elementary school information	–	–	6	1
Work experience	25	–	17	18
Accomplishments and achievements	29	–	1	5
Duties, tasks, and responsibilities	7	5	7	8
Objective statement	7	8	2	0
Professional profile	19	–	7	10
Soft skills	8	4	11	5
Hard skills	23	–	11	11
Additional experience	19	–	14	9
Hobbies or interests	15	3	5	4

Table 1: Resume conventions and student performance

Formatting

Nine sources mentioned that a template should not be used for a resume. There were two reasons for this; a template makes the resume harder to be scanned by software, and also many job seekers may use the same template, which may reflect badly on their originality. In fact, two of my students used the same template for their first resume. Another student sent me a 3-page resume with the final page of the .pdf empty except for the template outline, a careless misuse of a template not anticipated by the sources.

Twenty-four sources stressed the importance of using a simple, clear, and easy-to-read format. Seven explicitly stated that 'Curriculum Vitae' should not be written at the top, and

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[4] The boxes contain a –, rather than a zero, because when something was not mentioned, it did not necessarily imply that it was either recommended for or against. This was especially true for the business articles, most of which were not meant to be comprehensive. For instance, when an article did not mention that resumes should be one page, it did not mean that the article implied that resumes should never be one page, or if a guide did not mention the need for perfect spelling, that it recommended against perfect spelling.

no examples in any source included the words 'Resume' or 'Curriculum Vitae' as a title. One article advised to not write words like 'Name:' before the name, 'Address:' before the address, and so forth. No examples from guides or articles included these.

<u>Three essential parts</u>

According to all 20 university guides, resumes should include work experience and educational background[5]. The third essential element, contact information, was given less direct attention, although it was included on every example. These constitute the three essential parts of a resume (according to the sources): contact information, work experience, and educational background. This may seem obvious, but both the details and the presentation of these three parts must be done properly in order to compose an effective resume.

Contact information generally comprised the name, mailing address, phone number, and email address. Thirteen sources mentioned the importance of having a 'professional' email address, and one specified a 'non-foreign' email address.

An interesting point of disagreement between guides and articles was the mailing address. Six articles stated that a mailing address should not be included, and two of these specified that only the city and state should be listed. Ten guides explicitly stated that a complete mailing address should be included, while two recommended against it. All guides, however, included a mailing address on their examples.

Sixteen sources recommended including LinkedIn on the resume, and many more included LinkedIn on their examples or, in the case of career guides, as part of the overall job search. Three articles stated that no other social media besides LinkedIn should be included and no articles recommended any other social media besides LinkedIn. Four university guides stated that other social media is acceptable as long as it is professional or relevant. All four mentioned Twitter; only one mentioned Facebook.

Regarding work experience, the generally accepted elements were the job title, company name, company location, and dates of employment. The jobs should be listed in reverse chronological order.

Twenty-nine sources recommended including accomplishments or achievements instead of duties, tasks, or responsibilities. In fact, five sources explicitly stated that duties, tasks, and responsibilities should not be included, although seven mentioned that these should be included.

Regarding education, it was generally agreed upon that only university-level or relevant supplemental education should be included. No sources recommended including information about middle or elementary school, and only three university guides mentioned including high school, although they specified that it should be on resumes for first- and second-year university students only. Many guides recommended including details about courses or academic work; no articles mentioned these, and they were not found on their examples.

<u>Other elements to be included</u>

After the contact information, it was common to find either an objective statement or a professional profile on the sample resumes found in the sources. This one-sentence statement was also a cause for disagreement. It appears that a professional profile, instead of an objective statement, is currently in fashion, with nineteen sources recommending it. Of these, seven mentioned that it was optional.

The objective statement seems to be falling out of favor, with eight sources recommending against it. Seven sources did recommend it, but only university guides, not articles, and four of them stated that it was optional.

Mexican resumes often include a small section in which four or five very general skills or personality traits are listed, such as 'punctual,' 'hard-working, and 'responsible'. Indeed, 11 out of 18 of my students included this section on their first resumes. Thirteen of them were taught to include this section on a

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[5] As noted, unlike the university guides, most business articles were not meant to be comprehensive. Only five articles mentioned work experience and three articles mentioned educational background. As with contact information, they apparently took these elements for granted, and consistently included them in their examples.

resume in Spanish, and 17 believed it should be included on a resume in Spanish. Nine were taught to include this section on a resume in English, and 17 believed it should be included on a resume in English.

Meanwhile, although eight sources stated that soft skills should be included, four sources stated that they should not. The reasoning against including soft skills or personality traits is that these are much better shown through accomplishments. Instead of a person outright stating to be hard-working, it can be shown through details about professional or educational accomplishments. Personally, if someone claims to be something as general as 'responsible,' I automatically assume that they are not responsible, especially if they have never had a job before. Likewise, if someone claims to be 'honest' or 'intelligent,' I assume the opposite, believing that a truly honest person would not consider their honesty as something worth mentioning, and every intelligent person I have met would never point out his or her intelligence.

A better option is including a section on specific or 'hard' skills, such as speaking additional languages or competence with technology. This was recommended by 23 sources, far more than the eight that recommended soft skills, and no source recommended against including hard skills.

Nineteen sources stated that additional experience should be listed, such as volunteering, participation in sports or clubs, membership in professional organizations, or any certifications earned. Listing hobbies and interests was another point of disagreement. More sources recommended including them than those that did not. Fifteen sources stated that these should be included, with three stating that they should not. Among the sources that recommended including hobbies and interests, some mentioned that the purpose was for a potential employer to get to know the candidate, that the hobbies and interests should be interesting and unique (not general, such as liking movies, music, or sports), and that political or religious affiliations should be left out.

Other elements to not be included

Nine sources stated that a photograph should not be included, and no resume examples in any of the 40 sources included a photograph. Several did mention that a photograph may be necessary for finding a job in non-English-speaking countries.

Eleven sources stated that the candidate's age or date of birth should not be listed, five stated that marital status should not be listed, and four stated that the candidate's nationality should not be listed. No examples in any of the 40 sources included age, date of birth, marital status, or nationality.

Whether or not to list references, or to add the phrase 'References available upon request,' was another point of disagreement between the sources. Nine sources said no, while five said yes.

Additional advice

An interesting piece of advice, which certainly would not be found in resume-writing guides or articles from the 1990s or perhaps the early 2000s, was that keywords from the job description should be included on the resume. Many resumes are now scanned by software before being scrutinized by human eyes, a first filter for job offers that may receive hundreds or even thousands of responses. Twelve sources recommended doing this, although one article recommended against it.

Scanning by software was yet another point of disagreement: whether the file should be saved as a .pdf or an MS Word document. Seven sources recommended sending a .pdf, while four recommended sending a Word document.

The reasoning behind using a .pdf was that it preserves the formatting better than a Word document. The reasoning behind using a Word document was that they are easier for software to scan. As with the other points of disagreement, the candidate must consider these reasons and then decide.

Seven sources mentioned that the document should have an original file name. One suggested that the file be named with the candidate's name, the company name, the month and the year.

Finally, 25 sources stressed the importance of the resume having perfect spelling and no typos. Seventeen mentioned checking the formatting for consistency, simplicity, and clarity.

Below are examples of two typical resume samples from the university guides. These were found in the guides from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Princeton University, which can be compared with two formats found on a commercial website.
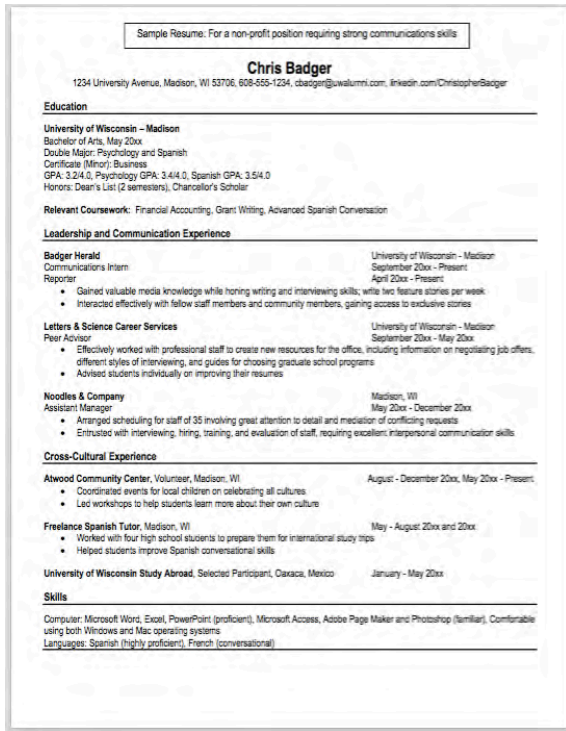
University of Wisconsin-Madison (2016)
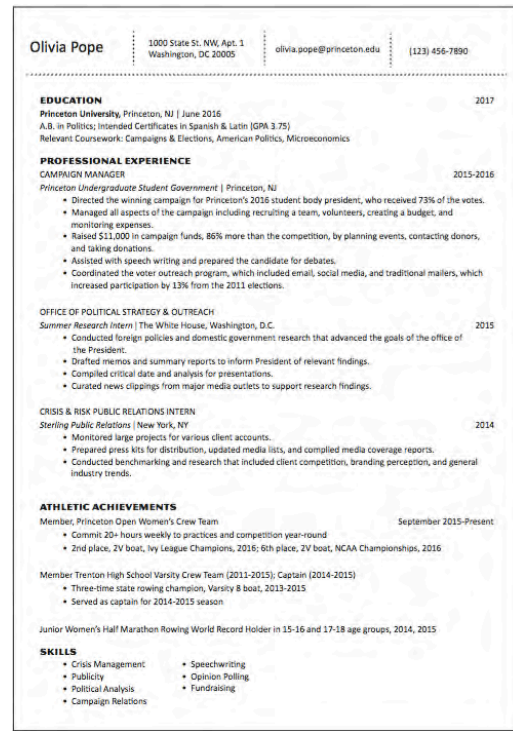
Princeton University (2018)

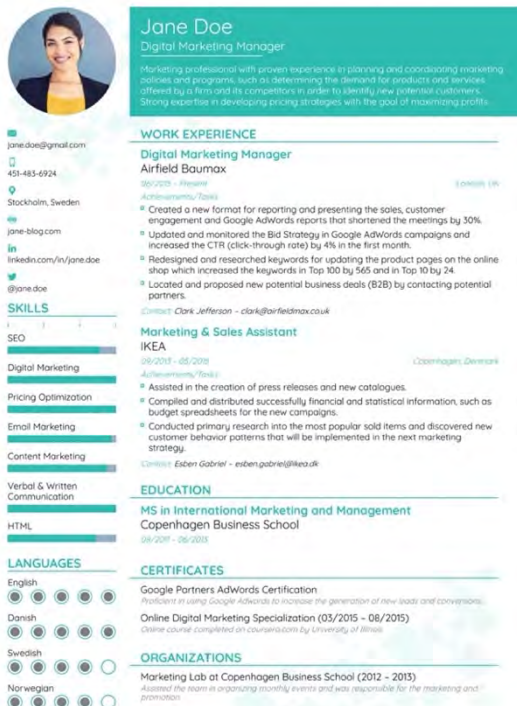Figure 1: University guide resume examples

https://novoresume.com/resume-templates

Figure 2: Resume format examples

Data collection

The data for this research came from three sources: a questionnaire answered by each student before the resume lesson, and two resumes written by each student, one before the resume lesson and one after.

The questionnaire asked the students which specific elements (such as hobbies or a photograph) they had been taught to include on a resume in Spanish and in English, and which elements they believed should and should not be included on a resume in Spanish and in English. It also contained questions about whether they had used a resume in Spanish or English to get a job, how they learned what to include on their resumes (if not from a teacher), and what they believed the differences were between resumes in Spanish and in English.

Before presenting to the students the results of the review of the sources on resume writing, I assigned a resume in English as homework. Everyone would receive 100 points on the assignment for turning it in on time. I told the students that if they already had a resume in English, to simply print it, revising it beforehand to the extent that they considered necessary. If they did not have a resume in English, then they could translate from their resume in Spanish. If they did not have a resume in Spanish, then I told them to write one in English, doing their best. No further instructions were given, other than that the resume should be professional and written with a specific job in mind. After I collected their resumes, I asked them to email me a copy, both for a record and also so I could analyze their email communication, check their email address (whether it was professional or not), and check the file name and file type they used.

The resume was assigned in this way, with minimal instructions, in order to have a diagnostic, to see how their resume would look before they learned the results of the review of the sources on resume writing. I also wanted to see an example of what they would use, or had already used, in a real-world job search. I explained that later in the semester we would study job interview strategies, and they would need a resume for when I gave them a mock interview.

After analyzing their first resumes, I returned them to the students and spent an entire class session of nearly two hours presenting the results of the review of sources on resume writing in a PowerPoint presentation. In this presentation, we not only discussed what elements are typically included or not on a resume in English, but also some reasons for them, such as avoiding discrimination (Derous & Decoster, 2017; Risavy, 2017) and making the resumes easier for software to scan (Jie et al., 2018).

During this time, I asked them to make notes on their first resume, because they would revise it according to what they believed should be changed. Regarding the points of disagreement between the sources, such as whether or not to include hobbies or a full mailing address, they would have to decide what was appropriate. Later, when they would use the resume to look for an actual job, they would also have to decide whether to include elements of resumes expected in Mexico (even on resumes in English) but not in the English-speaking world, such as a photograph.

At the end of the presentation, I showed them 10 examples of resumes taken from the sources, so they could see the application of these elements on resumes. For comparison, I also showed them two formats I downloaded from a commercial website; one was the same format used by two students.

Finally, I presented the results of the analysis of their first resume, in order to contrast what they had done with what is generally accepted as good practice for resumes in the English-speaking world. I believe that this part of the presentation had the most impact, based on their reactions of laughter, gasping, and even good-natured embarrassment when I showed them data such as that 10 out of their 18 resumes had spelling mistakes, six had information about their elementary schools, and five committed the redundancy of listing their both age and date of birth.

Data analysis

I prepared a spreadsheet of 39 items in order to analyze the two resumes written by the students, marking them according to whether common elements of resumes, or possible mistakes on resumes, were included or not. The first 36 items were the same as the items I analyzed on the sources for resume

writing[6], such as the length of the resume, elements of contact information, elements of employment and educational history, different types of skills, and additional elements such as a photograph, age or date of birth, marital status, hobbies or interests, and references. The final three items were related to their email communication and whether they had given an original name to the file they emailed me.

I counted the occurrence of each item for all the students for both resumes in order to compare them; in other words, to see which changes were or were not made by the students as a group. Similarly, I totaled their answers on the questionnaires to see what they had been taught and what they believed about resume writing in both English and Spanish.

Results

The results of this research came from the questionnaire given to the students and the comparison of the two resumes produced by the students.

Questionnaire results

Of 18 students, 13 learned how to write a resume in Spanish in high school, four learned in university, four from the internet, three from family and friends, and one from nobody. None of the students learned how to write a resume in English in high school, four learned in university (three in the same class), eight learned from the internet, and five from nobody (These numbers add up to more than 18 because some students learned from more than one source.).

The questionnaire also included questions about each specific element of the resume. In the interest of brevity, information for only five elements will be included here, which many students changed for their second resume after the presentation. These elements are the photograph, date of birth, elementary school, marital status, and hobbies.

Regarding the photograph, 16 were taught to include it on a resume in Spanish. Thirteen believed it should be included on a resume in Spanish. Eight were taught to include it on a resume in English, and 12 believed that it should be included on a resume in English.

Fifteen students were taught to include their date of birth on a resume in Spanish. Twelve believed it should be included on a resume in Spanish. Two were taught to include it on a resume in English, and twelve believed that it should be included on a resume in English.

Regarding elementary school, 13 were taught to include it on a resume in Spanish. Seven believed it should be included on a resume in Spanish. Three were taught to include it on a resume in English, and seven believed that it should be included on a resume in English.

Marital status followed a similar pattern as elementary school, with 12 taught to include it on a resume in Spanish and eight who believed it should be included on a resume in Spanish. Three were taught to include it on a resume in English, and eight believed that it should be included on a resume in English.

Finally, hobbies had more mixed results, similar to the review of sources, some of which recommended for and some against including them. Eleven students were taught to include it and nine believed it should be included on a resume in Spanish. Five were taught to include it and ten believed it should be included on a resume in English.

Below is a table showing these data.

Spanish	Photograph	Age / DOB	Elementary school	Marital status	Hobbies
Taught to include it	16/18	15/18	13/18	12/18	11/18
Believe it should be included	13/18	12/18	7/18	8/18	9/18
English					
Taught to include it	8/18	2/18	3/18	3/18	5/18
Believe it should be included	12/18	12/18	7/18	8/18	10/18

Table 2: Selected questionnaire results

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[6] The spreadsheet used for analyzing sources included five additional items, corresponding to advice I could not analyze on the students' resumes, such as whether using keywords was mentioned and whether the article or guide explained the difference between a resume and a CV.

In the final question on the first page of the questionnaire, the students were asked how they believed resumes in Spanish and English were different, and whether the information contained in them should be the same. Seven students answered that resumes in Spanish were longer and resumes in English shorter. One mentioned that resumes in Spanish contain unnecessary information.

Two students wrote that resumes in English do not have a photo. Two wrote that resumes in English focus more on recent employment and education. For resumes in English, two wrote that interests should be included, two wrote that social media should be included, and one wrote that objectives should be included. The implication is that these should not be included on resumes in Spanish.

Two students wrote that the format is different. Three wrote that the resumes should be the same, with one of these three specifying that only the language would be different.

The students' first resume

Of 18 students, 17 turned in a resume printed from a computer. One gave me a resume that was typed on a typewriter, with white-out and corrections visible on the page and a photo pasted on. Obviously, this student did not email me a copy (I photocopied this resume for my records.).

Of the 17 resumes that were prepared on a computer, three had a bad print job, with smudges, lines, or faded ink. Eight students emailed me their resume with no message, only the attachment. One student sent two emails, because he forgot to include the attachment in the first. Fourteen students sent MS Word documents, and three sent .pdfs. Four resumes had a generic file name (such as 'resume.doc'), and eight had a file name that included the student's first name only. This means that only five students sent me a file with an original and distinct name.

I judged three students to have unprofessional email addresses, with the words 'love,' 'girl,' and '*baterista*' (drummer) mixed with numbers and parts of their names. I attribute this rather low proportion of unprofessional email addresses to the fact that I taught many of these same students in the previous semester, in English 9. During this course, I gave them several homework assignments to send to me by email, and unprofessional email addresses was among the elements I noted and presented to the group. I believe that three out of 17 is a low proportion based on my email correspondence with students and even teachers at this university, where one teacher has a variant of 'crazy woman' (in English) as the email address she uses for academic correspondence.

Fourteen resumes were one page, three were two pages, and one was three pages but with only two pages of actual content, because a blank page of the format was included as the third page. Ten had spelling mistakes, which were especially evident in the Word documents by the red line added by the spell checker. I judged that 16 had formatting problems, such as inconsistent spaces, fonts, and sizes of tables; mistakes or inconsistency with capital letters and punctuation; and so forth. I judged that 10 resumes had a simple design, while eight were badly cluttered.

Five had 'Curriculum Vitae' written at the top, as a title. Ten had unnecessary words such as 'Name:' before the name and 'Phone number:' before the phone number. Ten had confusing or redundant information, such as including both age and date of birth, listing work experience out of chronological order, having additional experience mixed with jobs, or listing high school information twice.

Contact information fared better, with all eighteen resumes including the name, phone number, and email address (albeit with three unprofessional email addresses). One student did not include a mailing address, which is in line with the recommendations of some business articles. Three included social media, although only Twitter or Facebook, not LinkedIn.

Eleven had a photograph, some dark or out of focus. Twelve included age, date of birth, or both. Two included the place of birth. Three included their nationality, and five their civil status, that they were unmarried.

All 18 gave university information. Eleven gave high school information, seven middle school information, and six elementary school information. I found it interesting, and mentioned this to the students during the presentation of results, that someone believed middle school to be important, but not elementary school.

In fact, information about grade school is often necessary in Mexican work culture, and anecdotes abound of job seekers being asked for not only high school, but also middle and elementary school transcripts during the hiring process. This does not imply, however, that valuable space on a one-page resume should be taken up by this information.

Seventeen included a job section, in which seven included a description of responsibilities. Only one listed accomplishments. Eleven had a section of general or soft skills, and 11 had specific or hard skills. Fourteen listed additional experience, such as language level, and five included hobbies or interests. Seven had a professional profile, and two had an objective statement.

Below are six examples of the students' first resume, ranging from moderately acceptable to flagrantly unacceptable, based on how they compared to the results of the review of sources on resume writing. The final two were from downloadable formats, and the final one is only the first of three pages, of which the final page was left blank. I have blocked out their names, photographs, and contact information.

Figure 3: Examples of the students' first resume: Moderately acceptable

Figure 4: Examples of the students' first resume: Unacceptable

Figure 5: Examples of the students' first resume: Flagrantly unacceptable

The students' second resume

I saw notable improvements in the students' second resume, although with some problems remaining. Three of these second resumes had spelling mistakes, an improvement over the ten first resumes with spelling mistakes, although obviously none should have had any spelling mistakes at all.

All 18 second resumes were only one page, following the recommendation that two or more pages were only for people with extensive experience, which none of my students had. Nine resumes still had formatting problems, although this was an improvement over the 16 first resumes with formatting problems.

A noteworthy improvement was that no second resume had 'Curriculum Vitae' written at the top or words like 'Name:' before their name. Also, no second resume contained a photograph, nor their date of birth or age, place of birth, nationality, or marital status. No second resume contained social media, which suggests that the students agreed with some sources that social media besides than LinkedIn should be removed, but they did not want to open a LinkedIn account.

Three resumes still had high school information (compared to 11 first resumes), two still had middle school information (compared to seven first resumes), and one still had elementary school information (compared to six first resumes).

Four had hobbies, a change from five of the first resumes. While the number of resumes with specific or hard skills stayed the same at 11, only five of the second resumes included general or soft skills, down from 11 of the first resumes. Five included accomplishments and eight included responsibilities in the job section, an increase from one and seven, respectively.

Below are two examples of the second resume, each from students whose first resume was included in the previous section, one that was originally moderately acceptable and one that was originally flagrantly unacceptable.
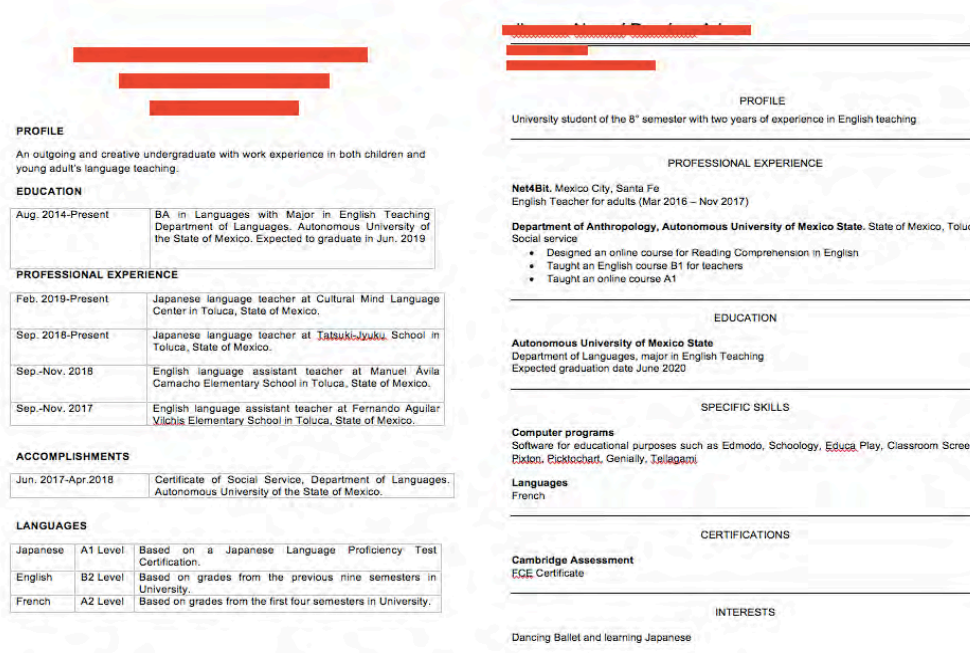
Figure 6: Examples of the students' second resume

Conclusions

The results show that these 18 students, the majority in their final semester of university, were unprepared to write an effective resume in English, as indicated by their beliefs and practices. Some students believed that there were no substantial differences, besides the language, between resumes in Spanish used in Mexico and resumes in English used in the English-speaking world. The survey of sources shows, however, that there are substantial differences between resumes in English and the first resumes produced by these Mexican students.

In general, the students' first resume differed greatly from a typical resume in English (as determined by the review of the 40 sources), and not only in the information presented, but also in length, formatting, and the number of mistakes, which indicated a lack of proofreading. Their second resume fared much better, with notable improvements such as more relevant information, clearer and more consistent formatting, fewer mistakes, and the removal of inappropriate or unnecessary elements like a photograph, date of birth, and the title 'Curriculum Vitae'.

Based on the changes they made to their first resumes, it is clear that many students agreed with the recommendations of the sources and applied them to their second resumes. It is also clear that some did not, due to either disagreement or lack of interest.

Certainly, this small sample size cannot be used to generalize about resume writing practices in Mexico. Research would be required regarding what Mexicans are taught should be included on a resume, and what is typically included on a functional Mexican resume. Relating these findings to English resumes would likewise be interesting.

Also, it must be recognized that these students may not have put as much effort into preparing a resume for homework as they would have for an actual job, although several students did mention they had used the same resume previously. I would hope that in a real-life situation, there would be fewer spelling mistakes and more care given to the resume's appearance on the printed page.

Nevertheless, the results of the questionnaire show that many students were taught incorrect information about the content of resumes in English. This suggests that not only were the students unprepared to write a resume in English, but that their teachers were unprepared to teach resume writing. The results of the analysis of the students' first resume show that many agreed with the incorrect information they were taught, since they included inappropriate or unnecessary elements on their resumes.

Of course, certain elements, such as hobbies, were a cause of disagreement among the 40 sources surveyed to determine the conventions. Others, however, were not. None of the 40 sources recommended items such as elementary school, marital status, or a photograph on a resume in English, and many students were taught in school that these very elements were necessary, and they included them on their first resumes.

Although a review of 40 sources cannot be considered a definitive guidebook for resume writing, it likely constitutes an accurate representation of what a general, 'real-world' resume would be in the English-speaking world. A variety of credible sources was necessary, and not only to find concordance, but also to emphasize the subjective nature of the resume, and that the ultimate decision maker in resume writing was the students themselves. This was done by recognizing and discussing the elements that were not fully agreed upon by the sources, such as including hobbies or a mailing address. That is to say, some resume writing conventions were well-established, while others would depend on the resume writer's choices. Besides, trends and tendencies change rapidly, which is also demonstrated by the points of disagreement between sources, particularly in the business articles.

The amount of conflicting information in these sources, such as which file format to use, whether or not to include an objective statement or a professional profile, and whether or not to include hobbies, means that each resume writer must make his or her own choices (Fen et al., 2017). Add this to the common advice that each resume much be customized to each job offer, and the practice of resume writing becomes even more subjective. In a course devoted fully to professional development, with more time to spend on resume writing, teachers could provide actual job offers, so the students could practice adapting their resumes multiple times, in order to understand that the document should be in constant revision and always dependent upon a specific circumstance.

The subjective nature of the resume was again apparent by the non-uniform changes made by the students to their second resumes. Not all conventions were followed by all students. Once the students learned the conventions and saw their application on a variety of examples of resumes, further necessary decisions regarding their resume had to be made, through considering their specific needs as future university graduates who will use an English resume in Mexico.

Indeed, these students will face an additional and possibly more relevant set of choices. Although the review focused on how to write a resume in English for use in English-speaking countries, most of these students will use their English resume in Mexico, as it is common for Mexican companies to ask for resumes in English, especially for positions in English teaching or translation.

Some elements that are not included on resumes in English are expected in Mexico, such as the photograph and the date of birth, and any resume without these may not be acceptable in Mexico. My resume in Spanish, incidentally, does contain a photo, although not my date of birth.

On the other hand, some elements taught or believed to be correct in Mexico may not actually be appropriate. It is unlikely that average white-collar Mexicans already in the workforce have the name of their elementary school on their resume. And some elements can be removed for the simple fact that they add nothing of value, such as the title 'Curriculum Vitae' or the word 'Name:' before the person's name.

Therefore, job seekers preparing their resumes in English for use in Mexico must navigate a sea of conflicting information, using their own best judgement and knowledge of the job offer to decide what should and should not be included on this indispensable document. Because of this, lessons on resume writing in English for Mexican university students, especially those studying English, can better help them make these decisions, provided that the information about conventions in English-speaking countries comes from up-to-date, credible sources. It is also helpful to present not only the agreed-upon conventions, but also those that cause disagreement between the sources, so students can better understand that there is no catch-all prescription for resume writing, but that they must make decisions for themselves, and take all advice for what it is: advice, and not instructions.

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Appendix 1

List of Universities Used in the Study

Australia
       Curtin University, Perth
Canada
       George Brown College, Toronto
       McGill University, Montreal, Quebec
       McMaster University, DeGroote School of Business, Hamilton, Ontario
United Kingdom
       London School of Economics and Political Science, London
       Oxford Brookes University, Oxford
       University of London, London
       University of Nottingham, Nottingham
       University of Oxford, Oxford
United States (private)
       Columbia University, New York, NY
       Harvard Extension School, Cambridge, MA
       Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA
       Princeton University, Princeton, NJ
       Smith College, Northampton, MA
       Union College, Schenectady, NY
United States (public)
       Indiana University Bloomington, School of Public Health, Bloomington, IN
       Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS
       The University of Texas at Dallas, Dallas, TX
       University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, CA
       University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI