

# Firefighter Resume Review Guide

The Complete Checklist to Land Your First  
Fire Department Interview

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*From the team at FireFighterNOW.com*

*Based on hundreds of real firefighter resume reviews*

Inside this guide:

- Formatting rules that hiring captains expect
- The exact keywords departments scan for
  - Certifications that make you stand out
  - Section ordering strategy
- Common mistakes that get resumes tossed
  - A complete self-review checklist

# 1. Formatting Rules

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Fire department hiring managers and captains often review dozens (sometimes hundreds) of resumes for a single opening. Your formatting needs to make their job easy. Here are the rules:

## Keep It to One Page

Unless you have 10+ years of career firefighting experience, your resume should fit on a single page. This is non-negotiable for most departments. If you need to trim:

- Reduce font size (but never go below 11pt)
- Cut irrelevant experience (more on this below)
- Use shorter bullet points (1 line each if possible)
- Remove your professional summary if needed to save space

## Use Short Bullet Points, Not Paragraphs

Under each job or experience, use 2-3 short bullet points instead of full sentences or paragraphs. Each bullet should be a single line if possible. Start each bullet with a strong action verb.

Good example:

*"Respond to medical calls and accidents, providing emergency medical care as needed"*

Bad example:

*"In my role as a volunteer firefighter I was responsible for responding to various emergency calls including medical emergencies and vehicle accidents where I would provide first aid and CPR to victims on scene..."*

## Put Your Strongest Section at the Top

The very first thing someone reads on your resume should be your strongest qualification. Nine times out of ten, that means:

- If you have firefighter/EMT experience, put that section first
- If you are fresh out of the fire academy, put Education first
- If you have great certifications but limited experience, lead with those
- Unrelated work experience (retail, construction, etc.) goes at the bottom

## Use a Clean, Simple Design

Your resume template should be timeless and professional. Avoid overly flashy or distracting designs with lots of colors, graphics, or unusual layouts. A clean black-and-white template with clear section headers works best. The content matters far more than the design.

## Include Specific Accomplishments

Wherever possible, include specific numbers, percentages, or measurable accomplishments in your bullet points. This makes you stand out:

- "Trained 15+ volunteers in CPR and emergency response protocols"
- "Responded to 200+ emergency calls during 2-year volunteer period"

- "Maintained 100% equipment readiness across 3 apparatus bays"

## 2. Essential Keywords

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Many fire department leaders scan resumes very quickly, looking for specific words and phrases that signal you understand the job. Including the right keywords can be the difference between your resume getting a closer look or being passed over.

### Core Keyword Phrases

These four phrases demonstrate the qualities every department is looking for. Try to weave them into your bullet points naturally:

- **Teamwork** - Every department wants a team player. Find ways to show you can operate in a team setting. Use phrases like "collaborated with," "supported crew," or "coordinated with team members."
- **Problem Solving** - At its core, all firefighters are problem solvers. Being able to clearly think through a problem and come up with a plan IS the job. Show examples of critical thinking under pressure.
- **Customer Service** - There is a commonly held belief that first responders are just another form of customer service. Any experience serving the public, working with patients, or handling people in distress is valuable.
- **Following Through / Grit** - Departments want to know you will not quit when it gets hard. If there is any way to demonstrate determination, commitment, or perseverance, highlight it. Long-term volunteering, completing certifications, finishing a degree all count.

### Industry Keywords to Include

In addition to the phrases above, try to include these specific terms in your resume where applicable. Place them near the beginning of your bullet points for maximum visibility:



### Where to Place Keywords

- Put keywords near the BEGINNING of your job description bullets, not buried at the end
- Remove anything irrelevant to firefighting to make room for relevant keywords
- Only include "Paramedic" and "Wildland" if you actually have that training/experience
- The goal is natural integration, not keyword stuffing. Hiring captains can tell the difference.

## 3. Certifications That Stand Out

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Fire departments love to see certifications on your resume. They show you are serious about the profession and have invested time in your training. Here are the key certifications to pursue:

### Priority Certifications

- **Firefighter I and II** - The foundation certifications. If you can only get a few certs, start here. Most departments consider these essential.
- **EMT (Emergency Medical Technician)** - Extremely valuable. A huge percentage of fire department calls are medical, so having your EMT shows you can handle the full scope of the job.
- **Paramedic** - The next step up from EMT. This is a significant investment but gives you a major edge, especially for departments that run their own ambulance service.
- **Hazmat Operations** - Shows you can handle hazardous materials incidents. Not required everywhere, but a great differentiator.
- **Core Rescue** - Technical rescue certification. Another great way to stand out from other applicants.

### Additional Training Worth Listing

- FEMA / ICS / NIMS Training - Incident Management and Firefighter Training
- NWCG (National Wildfire Coordinating Group) - Wildland Firefighter Training
- Swiftwater Rescue Technician
- CPR Instructor certification
- CDL (Commercial Driver's License) - especially Class B
- FAA Part 107 UAV/Drone Pilot License

### How to List Certifications

Don't dedicate an entire line to each certification. Instead, group them by category to save space:

*FEMA / ICS / NIMS - Incident Management and Firefighter Training  
Emergency Medical & Rescue - EMT-B, Wilderness First Aid, CPR Instructor  
Additional - Class B CDL, Hazmat Operations*

This format saves valuable space while still showcasing everything you have earned.

### Don't Have Certifications Yet?

That's okay. Your education, volunteer work, and related experience still matter. A 4-year degree shows you can commit to something long-term. Volunteer firefighting experience shows initiative. Focus on what you DO have and consider pursuing certifications while you apply.

## 4. Common Mistakes

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After reviewing hundreds of firefighter resumes, these are the most common mistakes we see. Avoiding these puts you ahead of the majority of applicants:

- **Resume is too long** - This is the #1 issue. A 2-3 page resume for someone with less than 10 years of experience signals that you do not know how to prioritize information. Cut it to 1 page.
- **Full paragraphs instead of bullets** - Nobody is reading a wall of text. Convert every job description into 2-3 short, punchy bullet points.
- **Irrelevant experience taking up space** - If a job has nothing to do with firefighting, emergency services, leadership, or teamwork, consider removing it or keeping it to just 1 bullet.
- **Missing keywords** - If someone scans your resume for 10 seconds and does not see words like "firefighter," "EMT," "teamwork," or "emergency response," you may not get a second look.
- **Weak section order** - Burying your firefighter experience below unrelated jobs is a missed opportunity. Lead with your strongest qualifications.
- **Name and email do not match** - Make sure the name on your resume matches your email address. Use a professional email address, not something informal.
- **Overly flashy design** - Creative resume templates with colors, graphics, and unusual layouts can be distracting. A simple, clean design lets your qualifications speak for themselves.
- **No measurable accomplishments** - Generic duties like "responsible for maintenance" are forgettable. Specific accomplishments with numbers stick, like "maintained 12 pieces of apparatus with 100% readiness."

### The "So What?" Test

Read every bullet point on your resume and ask: "So what? Why would a fire captain care about this?" If you cannot answer that question, either rewrite the bullet to show WHY it matters for firefighting, or remove it.

## 5. Self-Review Checklist

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Use this checklist to review your resume before submitting any application. Check off each item:

### Formatting

- Resume fits on 1 page (unless 10+ years experience)
- Font size is 11pt or larger
- Using short bullet points (not paragraphs)
- 2-3 bullets per job/experience maximum
- Clean, simple, professional design
- Consistent formatting throughout (same font, spacing, bullet style)
- Name and contact info are at the very top
- Professional email address

### Section Order

- Strongest qualification is the first section after contact info
- Firefighter/EMT experience is near the top (if applicable)
- Irrelevant experience is at the bottom or removed
- Education section is positioned strategically

### Keywords

- Resume includes "teamwork" or demonstrates team collaboration
- Resume includes "problem solving" or shows critical thinking
- Resume shows customer service or public-facing experience
- Resume demonstrates grit, commitment, or follow-through
- Industry keywords are present: Firefighter, EMT, PAT, Rescue, etc.
- Keywords appear near the beginning of bullet points

### Certifications

- All relevant certifications are listed
- Certifications are grouped efficiently (not 1 per line)
- Most impressive certifications are visible on the first half of the page

### Content Quality

- Every bullet passes the "So what?" test
- Specific numbers and accomplishments are included where possible
- Action verbs start each bullet point
- No spelling or grammar errors
- No irrelevant personal info (hobbies, photo, age, etc.)

## Final Check

- Someone else has proofread it
- Printed it out to check how it actually looks on paper
- Saved as PDF (not Word doc) for submission

# You've Got This.

Getting hired as a firefighter is competitive, but a strong resume gets your foot in the door. The tips in this guide are based on real feedback from hundreds of resume reviews by active firefighters. Follow the checklist, focus on what makes you stand out, and keep applying.

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