

# How to Handle a Job Gap in Your Resume or Interview:

Job gaps happen for most of us. In fact, **90% of working age people have been unemployed at some point** (Bureau of Labor Statistics). Family and life events happens, health issues pop up, layoffs, relocations, or personal reasons cause people to leave the workforce. If you worry that your job gap may give employers pause, consider some of these strategies for addressing the gap in your employment history. **Remember, your situation is unique! Do what you believe is best for you.**

## Options for addressing employment gaps:

- 1. MINIMIZE the job gap on your resume:** Consider listing your work experience in year-only format to draw less attention to partial year gaps. Consider omitting experience that is older than 5-10 years. Or consider using a “functional resume” format that places more emphasis on your skills than your job titles and dates. These strategies can hide or deemphasize a gap.
- 2. FILL IN gaps with volunteering or projects:** Showcase your academic or independent projects on your resume just like you would a job. Fill gaps with certificates, contract work, serving on committees, volunteering, or community leadership. Remember to create tailored sections to best organize and showcase your non-work experiences (e.g., “Fundraising Experience,” “GIS & Mapping Projects,” “Medical Trainings.”)

*Surathkal Beach Mapping Project, General Oceanography and Coastal Engineering, Oregon State University (Sept. 2020 - Dec. 2020)*

- Under supervision of oceanography faculty, mapped 5 kilometer stretch of the Surathkal Beach in Karnataka state. Traversed area, mapped physically, and verified using GPS.
- Took plot points 100 meters apart. Recorded beach features such as width and slope.
- Collected soil samples for geotechnical properties and measurement of wave parameters.

*Invasive Species Removal, Institute for Applied Ecology, Corvallis, OR (2019-2020)*

- Served on a team of 20 volunteers removing invasive species such as Himalayan blackberry and scotch broom from riparian areas of the Willamette River basin.
- Traversed uneven terrain and performed in adverse weather conditions.

- 3. ADD caregiving as experience:** If the reason you left the workforce was to be a fulltime parent or caregiver to a family member, that’s admirable! You do NOT have to list this on your resume, but you can if you feel it contextualizes a bigger gap.

*Full Time Caregiver, Albany, OR (2013 – 2017)*

- Took intentional time away from accounting to serve as primary caregiver for family, managing household and providing early education for children.
- Served as reading assistant and field trip leader for local school.
- Learned skills such as juggling competing priorities, organizing, and adaptability.

- 4. EXPLAIN the job gap in a cover letter or interview:** You don’t have to be the first to bring up the job gap, but in some instances, you may decide it’s best to address it upfront. Some employers may appreciate the explanation.



*Cover letter example: I spent some time as the primary caregiver for a family member with cancer. During this time, I felt honored to be there for my family but always knew I wanted to return to the sociology field. I am eager to transition back into doing the work I'm passionate about.*

5. **RESPOND regarding a termination or layoff:** You do NOT need to disclose that you were laid off or fired, but if you think it's important to address, here is sample language. Make sure to demonstrate self-awareness, positive relationships with colleagues, and skills you learned from the job. Avoid talking negatively about your employer or yourself. Keep explanations BRIEF.

*Interview explanation (layoff): The employer went through a restructuring that unfortunately eliminated my position. While this was unexpected, I left with very relevant skills in computer programming that are highly useful to your organization.*

*Interview explanation (fired): After serving in the position for a year, it became clear that the employer and I had different expectations. I learned a lot from this experience about myself and the type of future role I'm looking for. I still have a great relationship with several of my colleagues and supervisors from the company.*

6. **SPLIT your experience into two sections:** Create a tailored section of your most relevant experience that is not part of your work experience section. For example, you pull together an internship, a class project, and a really relevant job from 5 years ago and put them in a section called "Writing Experience." And you move less relevant experience into a section called "Additional Professional Experience." Both sections are chronological within themselves. Breaking into two sections helps you highlight your most relevant experience first and deprioritizes other experience.
7. **ADDRESS only what is comfortable for you.** There is no legal requirement that you must disclose personal information to a new employer. It's a good idea to think through what feels authentic and safe for you to share in advance so you feel prepared for any questions that may arise.

*Mental or physical health break explanation:* "I took some time off from work to focus on my health. I'm really glad I took that time for myself. Now, I feel very ready to contribute fully to your team."

Or, "At that time, I decided to take some time off for personal reasons, but now I'm eager to start adding value at your company."

