

10 Keys to a Writing a Resume - A Guide For Your Candidates

Introduction

Employers are so inundated with resumes, it often takes weeks—or even months—to sort through them all.

Despite the administrative headaches and delays caused by processing resumes, companies rely heavily on the resumes they receive to screen for potential candidates. Given the choice of two candidates of equal ability, hiring managers always prefer to interview the one with the most artfully constructed and attractive resume.

For that reason, candidates with superb qualifications are often overlooked. And companies end up hiring from a more shallow pool of talent—a pool made up of those candidates whose experience is represented by powerfully written, visually appealing resumes.

But unless you can afford to rely on your "reputation," or on the recommendation of a recruiter, you need more than the right qualifications to get the job you want—you need a terrific resume. In today's competitive employment market, your resume has to stand out in order to get the attention of the decision maker and create a strong impression. And later on, when you meet the prospective employer face to face, a strong resume acts as a valuable tool during the interviewing process.

Build a Stronger Case

To get the most mileage out of your resume, emphasize certain aspects of your background. Present your qualifications in the most favorable light, and help give the employer a better understanding of your potential value to his or her organization. You can build a stronger case for your candidacy by highlighting the following areas of interest.

Professional achievements of particular interest to your reader – For example, if you're in sales, the first thing a hiring manager wants to know is your sales volume, and how it ranks against your peers. If you've won awards, or reached goals, let the employer know. If you're in management, let the reader know the number of people you supervise, and what their titles are.

Educational accomplishments – List your degree(s) and/or relevant course work, thesis or dissertation, or specialized training. Be sure to mention any special honors, scholarships or awards you may have received, such as Dean's List, Cum Laude or Phi Beta Kappa.

Additional areas of competency – These might include computer-software fluency, dollar amount of monthly raw materials purchased or specialized training.

Professional designations that carry weight in your field – If you're licensed or certified (CPA, CPM, or PE, for example) or belong to a trade organization (such as ASTD or ASQC), let the reader know.

Tell the Truth

In addition to providing a factual representation of your background, your resume serves as an advertisement of your availability. It's common sense to honestly and clearly document your credentials. Don't make exaggerated claims about your past.

The best way to prepare a good resume is not to change the facts—just make them more presentable. This can be accomplished in two ways:

1. By strengthening the content of your resume.
2. By enhancing its appearance. Remember, your resume is written for the potential employer. Its main purpose is to answer the following questions: How do you present yourself to others? What have you done in the past? And what are you likely to accomplish in the future?

10 Keys to a Writing a Resume

To help you construct a better, more powerful resume, here are ten points to consider for content and presentation.

1. **Position title and job description** – Provide your title, plus a detailed explanation of your daily activities and measurable results. Since job titles are often misleading or their function may vary from one company to another, your resume must say exactly what you've done. (Titles such as account manager, business analyst, and internal consultant are especially vague.)
2. **Clarity of dates and place** – Document your work history accurately. Don't leave the reader guessing where you were employed, or for how long. If you've had overlapping jobs, find a way to pull them apart on paper—or eliminate mentioning one—to avoid confusion.
3. **Detail** – Specify some of the more technical or involved aspects of your past work or education. Have you performed tasks of any complexity or significance? If so, don't be shy. Give a one- or two-sentence description.
4. **Proportion** – Give appropriate attention to jobs or educational credentials according to their length or importance. For example, if you wish to be considered for a position at a bank, don't write one paragraph describing your current job as a loan officer, followed by three paragraphs about your high school summer job as a lifeguard.
5. **Relevancy** – Confine your curriculum vitae to that which is job-related or clearly demonstrates a pattern of success. For example, nobody really cares that your hobby is spear fishing or that you belong to an activist youth group. Concentrate on the subject matter that addresses the needs of the employer.
6. **Explicitness** – Leave nothing to the imagination. Don't assume the resume reader knows, for example, that the University of Indiana you attended is in western Pennsylvania, or that an "M.M." is a Master of Music degree, or that your current employer, U.S. Computer Systems, Inc., supplies the fast-food industry with order-taker headsets.
7. **Length** – Fill up only a page or two. If you write more than two pages, it sends a signal to the reader that you can't organize your thoughts, or you're trying too hard to make a good impression. If your content is strong, you won't need more than two pages.
8. **Spelling, grammar and punctuation** – Create an error-free document that is representative of an educated person. If you're unsure about the correctness of your writing (or if English is your second language), consult a professional writer or copy editor. At the very least, use a spell-check program, and always proofread what you've written.
9. **Readability** – Organize your thoughts in a clear, concise manner. Avoid writing in a style that's either fragmented or long-winded. An unreadable resume will virtually assure you start at the back of the line.
10. **Overall appearance and presentation** – Select the proper visual format, type style and stationery. Resume readers have become used to a customary and predictable format. If you

deviate too much, or your resume takes too much effort to read, it might end up in the trash, even if you have a terrific background.

Resume writing can be tricky, especially if you haven't done it before. Write several drafts, and allow yourself the time to proofread for errors and think over what you've written. Practice makes perfect. If you have a professional associate whose opinion you trust, listen to what he or she has to say. A simple critique can save you a great deal of time and money.

Objectives

Most employers find that a carefully worded statement of purpose will help them quickly evaluate your suitability for a given position. An objective statement can be particularly useful as a quick-screen device when viewed by a manager responsible for staffing several types of positions. ("Let's see; accountants in this pile, programmers in that pile, plant managers in that pile...")

While a stated objective gives you the advantage of targeting your employment goals, it can also work against you. A hiring manager lacking in imagination or who is pressed for time often overlooks a resume with an objective that doesn't conform to the exact specifications of a position opening. That means that if your objective reads "Vice President position with a progressive, growth-oriented company," you may limit your options and not be considered for the job of regional manager for a struggling company in a mature market—a job you may enjoy and be well suited to. If you're pretty sure of the exact position you want in the field or industry you're interested in, then state it in your objective. Otherwise, broaden your objective or leave it off the resume.

Format

Your resume can be arranged in one of two basic formats: summary or chronological.

1. **Summary or functional resume** – This resume distills your total work experience into major areas of expertise and focuses the reader's attention on your accumulated skills.
2. **Chronological resume** – This resume presents your skills and accomplishments within the framework of your past employers. (Actually, it should be called a reverse chronological resume, since your last job should always appear first.)

Although the information you furnish the reader may essentially be the same, there's a big difference in the way the two resumes are constructed, and the type of impact each will have. The chronological resume brings the best results, since it's the most explicit description of the quality and application of your skills within a specific time frame. The summary resume works well if you've changed jobs or careers often and wish to downplay your work history and highlight your level of expertise.

If a prospective hiring manager is specifically interested in a steady, progressively advancing employment history—as most are—then the summary resume will very likely work against you, since the format will seem confusing and might arouse suspicions as to your potential for longevity. However, if the employer's main concern is your technical or problem-solving ability, the summary resume will serve your needs just fine. Either way, you should always follow the guidelines mentioned earlier regarding content and appearance.

Beware of Artificial Fillers and Additives

So far, we've talked about ways to enhance or adjust the content of your resume. Now let's look at what should be left out, or at least minimized.

- **Salary history or salary requirements** – There is no good reason to mention your past, current or expected salary. If you see a classified ad that says, "Only resumes with salary history will be considered," don't believe it. If your resume is strong enough, you'll be contacted. Once contacted, be forthright.
- **References** – If you have high-impact or well known professional references, fine. Otherwise, "References: Available Upon Request" will do just fine. Avoid personal references like your minister or your attorney, unless they happen to be Billy Graham or Sandra Day O'Connor.
- **Superfluous materials** – When submitting a resume, avoid enclosing such items as your thesis, photos, diplomas, transcripts, product samples, newspaper articles, blueprints, designs or letters of recommendation. These are props you can use during your interview, but not before. The only thing other than your resume that's acceptable is your business card.
- **Personal information** – Leave out anything other than the absolute essentials such as, "Married, two children, willing to relocate, excellent health." By listing your Masonic affiliation, right-to-life activism or codependency support involvement, you could give the employer a reason to suspect that your outside activities may interfere with your work.

Remember, the greater the relevancy between your resume and the needs of the employer, the more seriously your candidacy will be considered.

The keys to a dynamite resume are complete, accurate content and appropriate, professional appearance.