

CANDIDATE RESOURCES

.....
FOR TODAY'S LEADERS



Writing Your Resume

Putting it Together

Developing a resume is the first step in any successful job search. The average resume is written out of necessity. Everyone knows you have to have one to get a job. In fact, most employers require a resume before accepting any application, regardless of the position or its pay. You need a resume, and you need it now. Opportunities can (and most certainly will) arise unexpectedly. You must be prepared for anything at any time. Having a resume handy from the outset of a job search enables you to take advantage of what may come along the way.

When you're hunting for a job, the resume is your introduction. An effective resume gets employers interested in making person-to-person contact with you. Research suggests that most resumes are scanned very quickly—less than a minute. Thus, the decision to interview a candidate is usually based on an overall first impression of him or her. The resume must clearly, concisely and strategically present your qualifications, and show how you can help employers solve the problems they currently face in their business. In short, you must prove your worth as a potential employee in order to progress to the interview stage of the job search.

Your resume is one way of communicating the value you offer a prospective employer and of differentiating yourself from the field of job seekers. Therefore, your resume needs to convey three things:

1. You have the skills, talent and personal qualities to accomplish those things that are important to an employer.
2. You have a history of education, accomplishments and/or experience to substantiate this claim.
3. You will be an asset to the organization insofar as you facilitate its operations, have positive work attitudes and get along with others.

The resume is part employability profile and part promotional device. To write effective resumes, you must learn how to write powerful yet subtle advertising copy. You have to sell yourself. Remember, employers are hiring *you*, not a piece of paper. Think of the resume as a personal advertisement, which promotes you and what you can do—those qualities enabling you to produce tangible results in the workplace.

The following resume-writing guide is intended to help you sort out, clarify and describe your qualifications to prospective employers. It is designed to help you think about and address employers' real needs so that you can convey to them how and why you're a truly exceptional candidate for the job.

Resume Writing Guide

Step 1 - Contact information

Include your name, address, phone number and email address in the header of your resume. Look over the information you are giving very carefully. In most cases, it's best to use your legal name, which is the one that appears on your records and social security card. You don't want to confuse employers by using several versions of your name, and you want them to be able to readily access your records from previous employers, educational institutions, etc. The phone number and email address that you list are important. This is how employers contact you. Therefore, it is advisable to give a number and email address where you can be reached between the hours of 8 am and 5 pm, Monday through Friday. You don't want employers to discard your resume because they can't reach you.

Step 2- Writing your objective

We strongly encourage you to include an objective at the beginning of your resume. It can be written in a way that is targeted to a specific position or it can be more general and therefore appropriate for pursuing a broad range of jobs. The trick is to make sure that the statement is carefully constructed. Below are two examples of objectives.

Targeted Objective: To pursue a position as a meeting planner in which I may employ my organizational strengths and practical experience for the benefit of your company.

Generalized Objective: To secure a position in publishing in which I may fully utilize my proven writing, proofreading, and research abilities as well as my creativity, computer skills, and awareness of cultural diversity.

Notice that the first objective is very targeted, and the type of position the person is seeking is clearly and specifically stated. By contrast, the second objective highlights only the types of skills or industry experience the person has. Nonetheless, an employer could quickly classify the job seeker's credentials into several key categories, such as writing, proofreading, and research.

Step 3- Presenting your educational background in the best light

Highlight your education at the top of your resume, after your objective. Here's the formula for listing your educational credentials:

- Name of the college or university, followed by the city and state in which it's located
- Degree (e.g., BA, BS, MA, etc.), followed by concentration (e.g., Literature, Chemistry, Marketing, etc.)
- Graduation Date

If you have an exceptional GPA-higher than 3.0, highlight it in your educational background. If your major GPA is over 3.0, highlight it and put your overall GPA below it. If you do not have an exceptional GPA-less than 3.0, be prepared to explain what you could have done better to improve your GPA. While this is slippery ground, you must acknowledge reality while emphasizing your strengths and skills. Think about how you can emphasize activities and accomplishments and work experience outside of the classroom.

How carefully an employer will evaluate your educational background will vary depending on whether the job you're seeking requires specific academic training. Bear in mind that employers often scan the first half of a resume quickly before deciding whether to continue reading. Consequently, you want the material at the top to pique the employers' interest so they will not only continue reading but invite you in for an interview.

The education section of your resume doesn't just have to be a list of degrees and certification you've received. It can also include things like courses you took that are especially relevant to the field in which you want to work, if you completed any special projects employers might be impressed by, or if you studied abroad. However, be sure the additional education-related data you include on your resume isn't just filler. Employers hate reading filler, and you don't want anything to turn employers off to your candidacy.

Step 4- Accomplishments

Understand what you have accomplished both academically as well as the significant accomplishments in your life. Be prepared to state them in a bulleted format. Obviously, an employer is looking for work related accomplishments but do not ignore personal accomplishment. Decide which achievements to include. Include both individual and team accomplishments. Whenever possible use numbers - what percentage, what dollar amount, how many people, how many total dollars in project budget, what was the ranking by percentile, how much was the sales, savings and/or profit increases, etc. The more you quantify your results the more clearly you convey your accomplishments. Applaud yourself for all your achievements at work or academically. Be specific. You want the potential employers to focus on what you've accomplished so that they anticipate what you can accomplish for them. Don't focus on activities (duties, responsibilities); rather focus on the bottom line - what **you** accomplished.

Step 5 - Other Possible Sections of Your Resume

Everyone's background is unique. In fact, you may want to include information on your resume that someone else might not choose to include there. When you introduce additional categories, you are identifying additional skills sets. Therefore, the challenge is to determine how to organize such information in categories, which will allow employers to quickly find the information they believe is most pertinent to hiring decisions. You might consider including categories like internships, special projects, honors and awards, certifications, computer skills etc.

As a rule of thumb, your resume shouldn't exceed one page in length...You should avoid adding pages to your resume for the sake of introducing supplementary categories. Less is definitely more when it comes to resume writing. Use space wisely (and spare your readers the hassle of skimming) by including information that potential employers will want and need to read.

NOTE: You should never include personal information on your resume. Topics that are out of bounds include: height, weight, age, and political or religious affiliation. Not only are such things "filler" items, they also create the potential for discrimination. Remember, you don't want to give potential employers any reason not to hire you.

Step 6- References

Your resume gets you the job interview. The references get you the job.

Who should you list as references?

References should be from academic, work, volunteer or work related associations. Those listed should have knowledge of your work or educational background and performance and be able to relate some information about your skills and/or credentials for the job you are seeking. Choose former supervisors, colleagues from work-related associations or former professors. A reference should have known you at least one year, but longer is preferable.

How do I know what type of reference the person will give me?

Before listing a person as a reference, contact him or her and ask permission. Also, verify their address, phone, email and any other contact information so that prospective employers will be able to contact them easily. You should relate a little about your current job search. (The reference may know of some opportunities in your field.) Ask if they are willing to give you a good reference. If the reference is a former employer, refresh their memory about your dates of employment and if there is a specific aspect of the job you would like them to emphasize, let them know what it is. You may want to get someone you know to call your references so that you can verify what your reference says about you. If any one you list as a reference gives less than a glowing report, this could be the deciding factor between you and another qualified candidate. If you are not sure what your reference will say about you then choose someone else.

Don't underestimate the power of your references.

Follow up with your references. When you get your new position, make sure to call your reference and advise them of your new position. Keep them posted about your career, so if you need them in the future, they will remember you.

Should I use a personal friend or relative as a reference?

List only business and professional references, not character references. List people familiar with your work, work related or academic credentials.

List between three and five References (Fill in as much information on each as possible):

Full Name

Title or Function

Company Name

Street Address

City State Zip

Daytime Telephone Number

E-mail address

Next Reference

Step 7- Composing Your Cover Letter

First is last. Now that you have created your resume and highlighted your objectives and accomplishments, it is time to create a cover letter. Cover letters should be more than just wrapping paper for your resume. They should set you apart from other candidates by providing a sense of how you think and your eagerness to work for a particular organization. Most of all, they should give readers a compelling reason to want to interview you, one that includes both your qualifications and the vitality you can bring to a job.

Unlike a resume, cover letters are narratives. You can use highly descriptive and persuasive sentences to evoke a positive response from your reader. Moreover, this format allows you to incorporate information, which reflects your knowledge of the target company (e.g., its industry, relevant issues, potential opportunities, etc.). The cover letter is an opportunity to provide customized information beyond what's in your resume—information that can tweak an employer's interest in your candidacy. Like a resume, a cover letter contains several critical components.

Heading: Remember to put your full name, address, phone number and e-mail at the top of the page. If your address changes during your job search, send another resume and cover letter for the position that interests you. HR departments won't bother to change the information on your first version.

The First Paragraph. This is the introductory section of your cover letter. In the first paragraph, you should state how you learned about the job opening and your reason for sending the employer your resume. If you're applying for a specific position, be sure to include that information in the first sentence of your introduction.

- If you've researched the company, be sure to mention why you're interested in it. You will differentiate yourself from the pack by making allusions to the company's products, philosophy or reputation. Be sincere, and employers will appreciate your interest in their organizations.
- If you know someone at the company, feel free to drop a name-if that person appreciates you and will speak highly (and unambiguously) of your abilities.

The Second Paragraph. Among hiring officials, the buzz word these days is "value offered." Explain the particular benefits you offer an employer. Not only will it get the employer's attention, it will distinguish you as a job hunter whose goal to do the job rather than just get a job. Use this section of your cover letter to discuss your value as an employee over and above the information in your resume.

- Talk about your transferable skills, such as being a self-starter and having excellent organizational abilities. Cite a specific reason why you're the ideal candidate for the position, then customize your letter to prove or demonstrate that point.
- Don't rehash your resume. Focus instead on two or three qualities that distinguish you most. Also, try to connect these qualities to the position's key requirements. If you have a particular area of expertise, this is the place to bring it up.

Consider writing one standard cover letter and personalizing it as necessary. Your standard letter would include a general description of your skills and abilities. It would also highlight the most marketable aspects of your background. The primary advantage to writing a standard cover letter is that you only have to write a great letter once. Once you've created it, all you will have to do is modify the introduction the next time you want to send your resume to a perspective employer. Of course, you don't want the employer to assume that the cover letter is part of a mass mailing campaign. Including the company's name and the position you're interested in makes your cover letter seem as though it was written specifically for that prospective employer and his or her company.

Quick Resume-Writing Tips

Resumes are a special kind of written discourse, so they don't follow the same rules as other kinds of writing. Here are three ways that resumes differ from everyday writing:

Resumes never use the personal pronoun "I." Even though you do not use "I" in your resume, you still need to use the first-person verb form-the speaking "I" is implied. For example, it is appropriate to say "Manage a staff of 100", but not "Manages a staff of 100." You're speaking for yourself, not about yourself. The verb tense that you use should be timely. If you are writing about the present, use the present tense; if you are writing about past events or accomplishments, use the past tense. Make sure to use the past tense even if the events you are describing occurred while you were in your current job.

Resumes do not use vague words like "etc." or phrases like "same as above." Although you have limited space in you resume, you don't want to seem lazy. You need to create vivid impressions about your capabilities in the minds of potential employers. "Etc." and "same as above" are shortcut phrases that sound vague and unoriginal.

Resumes do not include "filler" information. Do not add information that is irrelevant or unnecessary just to fill space. This includes using typical "filler words" that have no meaning and add no value.