

Developing a Scannable Resume

To sort through—and winnow down—numbers of resumes, many employers use scanning and recognition technology as part of the recruitment process. This technology operates on the principle of labeling. The employer lists required and desired information in the form of labels or buzzwords for a computer program, which then scores and ranks resumes according to how many of the designated words appear there. The more required or desired words included in a resume, the better chance the applicant has of making the first cut of potential candidates.

To describe the duties, responsibilities, and accomplishments of a job, you probably know to use action verbs such as “managed,” “oversaw,” “planned,” “maintained,” and “organized.” But the labels used in scannable resumes are nouns, and occasionally adjectives, that state specific skills. While some are more general, like “leadership,” “self-starter,” “communication skills,” or “entrepreneurial,” most are very specific to particular occupations and positions. For a librarian, the list might include “Reference Desk” and “Online Library System.” A position for a social worker might contain “Clinical Experience,” “Family Services,” “Crisis Intervention,” and “LCSW.” For an accountant, the list could include terms like “CPA,” “Microsoft Excel,” “Peachtree,” or “Lotus.”

Because employers give each individual position its own list of labels according to the requirements of the job, no guaranteed, generic list of appropriate terms exists. Thus, you have to determine what labels might be included in the list. How do you go about this task?

- By reading the advertisement closely, identifying the requirements, and carefully considering how each requirement might be met and described.
- By carefully analyzing your expertise in your field.
- By looking at similar advertisements to see what terms or phrases they use.
- By researching a company to learn more about it. What does it do? What does it value? What image does it project?
- By researching the profession through talking with others in the field and reading professional literature (especially good for projections about future concerns, challenges, problems, opportunities).

Also, use a plain font, like Times New Roman, because some programs are unable to read script or more ornate fonts. Be aware that some programs cannot distinguish italics or bold lettering.