

Writing Your Resume

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

You should assume that the reader of your resume is a busy decision-maker who wants to find out about you and your abilities very quickly. Most resumes, even if effective, get about 30 seconds of attention. Because its time on an employer's desk may be so brief, your resume should be very carefully edited, proofread, and tailored to fit the job for which you are applying. Try to keep your resume to a single page. If it runs longer, consider deleting information that is not specifically relevant to the job. However, do not sell yourself short; if your resume must go onto a second page, it may. Your goal is not only to efficiently summarize your employment and experiences, but also to show, politely and confidently, that you are competent and a good "fit" for the job. Mistakes and extraneous information will detract from this impression before you even have a chance to meet your potential new boss.

ASK FOR HELP

Career services counselors, people who work in the field in which you are interested, professors, parents, and friends can all help you with knowledge about resume writing and job fields. Talk to these people. Ask questions. Show them drafts. Take all the advice you can get and sort it out using your common sense.

CUSTOMIZE

You will have a better chance of being hired if you customize your resume on a job-by-job basis. If you are applying for a job that requires research, emphasize your research skills. If you are applying for a job that requires you to do a lot of writing, play up your writing experience. If the job requires you to balance eggs on a spoon, highlight your familiarity with all types of cutlery. Be honest about your qualifications, but try to address all the advertised job specifications in a positive manner. In order to customize efficiently, get access to a computer and store a generic master copy electronically. You can then create different versions of your master as needed. Keep both an electronic and paper copy of the master and each version for future use (and in case your computer crashes).

MAXIMIZE YOUR QUALIFICATIONS

List the duties, responsibilities, and achievements of your past job experience in such a way that they are dynamic, yet easy to read. For **readability**, use the appropriate verb tense. If you are describing an ongoing activity, use the present tense: "*install* automotive systems." If you are describing a past activity, use the past tense: "*installed* automotive stereo systems." Avoid "-ing" verb forms: "*installing* automotive stereo systems." Write your job descriptions and duties in the first person: "Trained 15 math and science tutors each semester." The pronoun "I" is understood in the context of a resume, so there is no need to add it.

In order to make your resume **dynamic**, use the job descriptions to focus on your achievements. Begin descriptions of your duties and accomplishments with active verbs which stress your involvement. For example, write "*designed* fund-raising programs," rather than "*responsible for*

fund-raising programs” or “*design of* fund-raising programs.” Whenever possible, anchor your duties and accomplishments in the concrete and quantifiable. For example, rather than “wrote grant proposals,” write “wrote and obtained a \$30,000 grant for computer acquisition.”

USE KEYWORDS

Many companies these days scan resumes into a computer system to create a database of applicants and to automate the initial screening process, even ranking applicants before the interview phase. The computer programs that perform this task are programmed to search your resume for “keywords,” usually simple noun phrases that will match your education and experience to the job requirements. This is one more reason to be specific and accurate in your resume. For example, if an employer is looking for someone knowledgeable in Word Perfect, but you only have the phrase “computer skills” on your resume, you might not initially be selected as qualified for the job. Likewise, if you are applying for a job as a cost accountant, but your resume contains only the word “accountant” or “accounting” without the word “cost,” you may appear less qualified than you really are. Speak with career counselors, professors, and people working in the field you wish to enter in order to compile a current list of keywords you will want to include in your resume.

INCLUDE A COVER LETTER

The person reading your resume may be in charge of hiring for any number of different jobs. Make it easy for him or her to move your application through the process by including a cover letter with your resume. In the first paragraph of this letter, explain who you are, which job you are applying for—use the official job title if you know it—and how you can help the employer if you are hired. In the second and, if needed, the third paragraph, discuss the skills and attributes that qualify you for the position. Your cover letter should follow the same principles as the resume itself: it should be concise, mistake-free, and customized. If there is one piece of information on your resume that you believe especially qualifies you for the job, briefly highlight it; however, do not make the mistake of rewriting your entire resume in your cover letter. In the final paragraph, thank the employer for his or her time and attention, express your desire for an interview, and indicate how, where, and when you can be reached. Attention to these details will help you get your foot in the door and ensure that you will not miss the big call, fax, E-mail, or letter.

STRIVE FOR PROFESSIONALISM

Presenting your resume in a funky typeface on brightly colored paper might draw attention away from your employment and experience history. Stick with bond-quality white paper, black ink and a traditional, conservative typeface like Times New Roman or Palatino. If you are applying for a job that requires creativity or artistic talent, save your wild and crazy side for the portfolio you will probably have to provide anyway. Use a font size no smaller than 10 points and no larger than 12, except for headings. Experiment with format and layout until you feel your resume maximizes the amount of information presented and minimizes distractions.