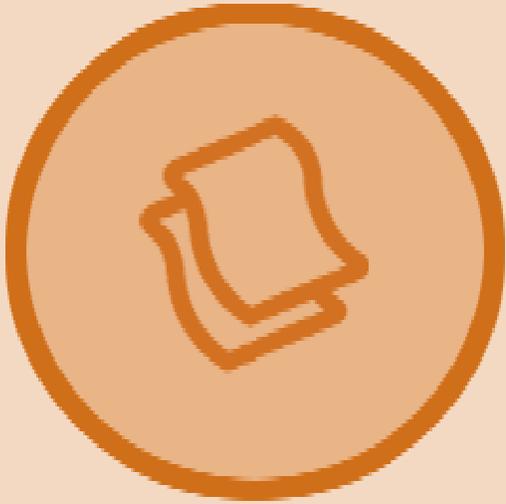


Prepare

Resumes and Letters



Insider Advice for Resume Writing

What is a Resume?

A resume has traditionally meant a brief account of your professional work experience and qualifications. How-

ever, in today's job market, your resume must be much more. In order to stand out, your resume needs to be a demonstration of your ability to fulfill a certain role and achieve results that will make a positive impact on the bottom line of a company. Before writing your resume it is essential that you know the career field you are seeking and understand the skills, abilities, and experience required. You must analyze your professional experience and determine which elements best demonstrate your qualifications for the position. Your resume must communicate your accomplishments, achievements, skills, abilities, and talents in a way that sets you apart from other candidates in your field.

A resume is often the first formal communication with prospective employers. Its purpose is to demonstrate the value you can add to the company, and convince them to invite you for an interview. A resume is also a demonstration of the quality of your work. Be sure your writing is clear and succinct and that your resume has a professional presentation.

A resume will do two things for you during your job search. First, it will be a sales brochure, advertising the best reasons to consider you for a position. Remember that, on average, a hiring professional will spend about 30 seconds reviewing your resume; so you have a very limited amount of time to convince a prospective employer that it's worth his or her time to add you to the interview list.

Second, your resume will provide a guide for the interview. Employers often base their interview questions on the skills and experience listed in your resume. Use your resume to lead interviewers to ask questions about your most impressive and relevant qualifications or achievements. Prioritize the most relevant information at the top of your resume.

"A resume is often the first formal communication with prospective employers."

Writing a Winning Resume

The first step in writing a winning resume requires you to define the position or type of position you are looking for and assess your top qualifications. If you are applying for several types of jobs, consider writing a different resume for each. Your resume will be most effective when you target a specific type of job, and then describe how your skills, abilities, and experience qualify you for that position.

For each job type, research the job responsibilities and requirements for the position. You

The best resumes describe your accomplishments and experience in terms of an Action-Benefit statement...

can find this information by browsing through the job advertisements for your occupation. Determine what your responsibilities will be, what skills, abilities, and knowledge you'll need, and what personal and professional characteristics are required for success. Once you have determined the requirements of the position, analyze your past experience, accomplishments, education, and training for examples of work and personal characteristics and begin building your resume in a way that best demonstrates your ability to succeed.

The best resumes describe your accomplishments and experience in terms of an Action-Benefit statement, which is a precise description of an action you took that produced a tangible and measurable result that benefited your company.

Writing Powerful Action-Benefit Statements

Action-Benefit statements use your accomplishments and experience to demonstrate the positive impact you can have on a company's bottom line. An Action-Benefit statement consists of:

Action:

A job responsibility or specific action that you took when faced with a situation, problem, or opportunity that enabled you to achieve a positive result.

Benefit:

The positive result or benefit to the organization, such as an increase in revenue, a reduction in costs, streamlined processes or systems, or improved morale.

An Action-Benefit statement might read "Analyzed declining sales and developed campaign that increased orders by 30% in less than one month." This statement describes the situation or challenge you faced (declining sales), the Action

you took (developed a campaign), and the Benefit of your actions (a 30% increase in orders). Always quantify or qualify the accomplishments and achievements described in your Action-Benefit statement.

When you are quantifying results, consider the impact of your work in measurable terms and include the numbers, percents, dollars, and other values that represent your experience in the best possible light.

Before:

Supervised a large staff of retail employees covering multiple territories. Effectively managed business unit P&L and consistently grew profits.

After:

Ten years experience managing 15 employees across multiple territories. Effectively managed P&L of \$10 million business unit. Consistently generated 30-35% gross profit.

Alternatively, when you are qualifying accomplishments, consider describing the process, depicting the environment, and including the personal characteristics that a future employer would consider valuable.

Before:

Increased sales through cold-calling, follow-up, and account management.

After:

Consistently grew revenue and profits in a rapidly changing environment through aggressive cold-calling, persistent follow-up, and relationship-focused account management.

When writing an Action-Benefit statement, it is unnecessary to provide details on how you solved the problem. You can provide this infor-

mation at the interview. Focus on the results as opposed to the process. If your Action-Benefit statements are powerful enough, employers will invite you in for an interview just to see how you achieved the results.

How Long Should a Resume Be?

A resume should be as long as needed to list your best and most relevant qualifications for the job you are seeking. For recent graduates or those with only a few years of experience, you should be able to put all your relevant experience on a single page. If you have extensive experience in your field, you may require a two-page resume to list all of your relevant experience. Instead of considering the length of your resume, make sure that it is clear and concise, and that the information is relevant to the position you are seeking. The most important consideration for a resume is not length, but whether it sufficiently describes your best qualifications for the job.

What Type of Resume Should I Use?

There are three basic types of resumes: chronological, functional, and combined. This section describes each type of resume and their advantages and disadvantages.

Chronological Format

Chronological is preferred by most employers because it clearly demonstrates your work history and professional growth. The chronological format focuses on the chronology of your work history by highlighting dates of employment, places of employment, and job titles. This format directly ties responsibilities and accomplishments to companies and time frames. This is usually the preferred format if you are applying for a similar or more advanced position in the same field.

Use this format if:

You want to highlight stability, consistency, growth, and development in your career.

Your most recent position is the one most likely to impress prospective employers.

You are looking for a similar or more senior position within the same industry.

Advantages:

Enables an employer to determine, at a glance, where and when you've worked and what you accomplished at each job.

Is the most common and widely accepted format.

Provides the employer with a clear sense of your career progress.

Disadvantages:

Limited work experience and employment gaps are obvious.

Could reveal a history of changing jobs frequently.

Could reveal if you were in the same job too long or have held the same type of job too long.

Does not highlight skills and accomplishments as much as it highlights work history.

Functional Format

If you are changing careers, or have gaps or other inconsistencies in your work history, a functional resume is recommended. The functional format emphasizes your skills, capabilities, and accomplishments, and de-emphasizes your job titles, employers, and dates of employment. The functional format allows you to prioritize your experience and accomplishments according to their impact and significance, rather than chronology. ■

“There are three basic types of resumes: chronological, functional, and combined.”

A resume should be as long as needed to list your best and most relevant qualifications...

The functional resume format takes the focus off gaps or inconsistencies in your work history.

Use this format if you:

- Have changed jobs frequently in the past few years.
- Have gaps in your employment history.
- Have limited work experience in your job target.
- Are changing careers.
- Gained significant experience outside your career path.

Advantages:

- Highlights accomplishments, skills, and experience most relevant to your career objective.
- Takes focus off gaps or inconsistencies in your work history.
- Draws from a range of paid and non-paid experiences.

Disadvantages:

- Experience is not directly tied to specific job titles and dates of employment which can lead employers to suspect you're trying to hide something.
- Does not emphasize promotions and career growth.
- Makes it difficult for hiring managers to tell exactly what the candidate did in each job.

Combined Format

To highlight specific skills, abilities, or accomplishments, you could choose a combined format, which adds sections for the areas you would like to emphasize at the top of your resume. The combined format includes the traditional Experience section of a chronological resume as well as the skills and accomplishments sections of a functional resume. This format is the most flexible, allowing you to highlight those sections of your resume that are most relevant to your career objective. This is an increasingly popular format for resumes.

Use this format if you:

- Are a senior-level professional or executive and have significant accomplishments.
- Want to highlight your relevant abilities during a career transition.
- Are targeting your resume to fit specific job requirements while displaying the continuity of your career history.
- Want to emphasize skills and abilities you have not used in recent jobs.
- Have been free-lancing, consulting, or performing temporary work.

Advantages:

- Highlights your primary skills and accomplishments at the top of your resume.
- Format can be arranged to emphasize either skills and abilities or work history, whichever is most appropriate for your career objective.
- Groups qualifications into categories that relate directly to your career objective.

Disadvantages:

- Resume could become longer than necessary and may lose the employer's interest.
- Resume may contain redundant information or lack focus.

“To highlight specific skills, abilities, or accomplishments, you could choose a combined format...”

Gathering Material for Your Resume

The material you gather for your resume can come from a variety of sources, both personal and professional. When deciding which qualifications best demonstrate your ability to succeed in your new position, consider the following topics:

Skills: The necessary tools, areas of expertise, or proficiencies that enable you to excel in your position.

Capabilities: The job responsibilities you have performed and the results you are able to achieve based on your skills.

Accomplishments: Achievements and the results of your work that had a positive impact on the company.

Experience: A combination of your job responsibilities, abilities, accomplishments, and the ensuing measurable results as they apply to each position in your work history.

Education: Your academic background.

Publications: A listing of articles, books, or portions of books which you have written, and have been published.

Training: Relevant personal or professional training you have received.

Licenses: Licenses, certifications, or other documentation required for your position.

Honors: Any relevant personal or professional honors and awards you have received.

Affiliations: Affiliations with organizations that demonstrate your familiarity with a career field or illustrate a personal characteristic that future employers would consider valuable.

Volunteer Work: Any volunteer work that is relevant to the position you are seeking or that demonstrates some quality you would like to highlight.

Reviewing Your Resume

Once you have made any necessary edits to your resume, give it to several people for review.

Ask them for suggestions on ways you can improve your resume. In many cases a fresh set of eyes can catch errors or obvious omissions.

Once you have finished writing your resume, consider the following points as you review:

- Have you included all the best reasons for hiring you?
- Is all information relevant to your job target?
- Does the resume flow from one section to the other in a logical fashion?
- Are the statements you made in your summary elaborated in the body of your resume?
- Are there any spelling, typing, or grammatical errors?

“Which of the following characteristics would an employer see in you as they review your resume?”

In addition to demonstrating your experience, qualifications, and achievements, ensure that your resume illustrates the personal and professional characteristics that employers look for in a candidate.

Which of the following characteristics would an employer see in you as they review your resume?

Reliability: The ability to follow through on your commitments, and keep management informed of potential problems so that they can be resolved in time to get the job done.

Analytical Skills: The ability to evaluate a situation, consider different alternatives, and come up with a reasoned approach.

Communication: The ability to clearly present ideas both verbally and in written form both to team members and to management. ■

Dedication: The ability and desire to do what it takes to get the job done.

Once you have made any necessary edits to your resume, give it to several people for review.

Most successful resumes are written with a specific occupation in mind...

Team Building: The ability to build rapport with others and work well as a member of a team.

Integrity: Being honest and taking responsibility for your actions.

Confidence: Being self-assured, confident, and poised when communicating with employees of all levels within the company, customers, and the general public.

Efficiency: A desire to identify and improve systems or processes in an effort to save time, reduce costs, and improve products and services.

Leadership: Capability to direct and motivate a team and provide guidance toward a successful outcome.

Knowledge: Expertise or knowledge in a specific area or the ability to gain new knowledge quickly.

Motivation: A desire to take on extra challenges and to succeed at what you are doing.

Ownership: Taking pride and ownership in your work and wanting to always do the best job possible.

Common Resume Myths

I should be able to create my resume in just a few hours.

Describing your experience in a way the best demonstrates your qualifications for a position requires significant amount of careful thought and hard work. Most successful resumes are written with a specific occupation in mind, emphasizing the job seeker's areas of experience most relevant to the requirements of the job. If your last resume emphasizes your relevant skills and accomplishments in a clear and quantifiable way, and you are

applying for a similar position, you might be able to make the necessary modifications fairly quickly.

On the other hand, if you are starting from scratch, changing careers, or have a resume that is not written using powerful Action-Benefit statements that present you in the best possible light, you may need to spend more time polishing your resume into a successful marketing tool for your career.

It's okay to exaggerate the truth on your resume.

Many people think it's acceptable to exaggerate the truth on a resume. Understand that in today's competitive job market, an employer will usually check the employment history and references of candidates, and employers are skilled at asking interview questions that reveal inconsistencies in your resume. Even if you initially get away with exaggerating your experience, your company may eventually discover the truth, which could have a negative effect on your career or even result in your termination.

A resume should be limited to one page.

Your resume should be as long as you need to present your important and relevant qualifications for a job. Don't leave out important qualifications just to keep your resume under one page. Also, placing too much information on a page makes it much harder to read. It is better to have a two-page resume that is neatly laid out with plenty of white space than a one-page resume that is dense and difficult to read.

To apply for a job, I just need to send in my resume.

When applying for a job, you need to do more than just send in your resume. You will also need to write a cover letter that clearly describes how the qualifications on your resume match the requirements of the position. You will also need

"...in today's competitive job market, an employer will usually check the employment history and references..."

to follow up by calling the company to determine if they received your resume, inquire if there is any additional information you can provide, and to ask for an interview.

One resume is all I need.

If you are applying for only one type of position, or several positions with exactly the same requirements, you can probably use the same resume. However, if you are applying for a variety of career fields, you should have several different resumes that present your qualifications for each type of career in the most effective manner.

I should include my salary history and expectations when asked.

You should always avoid listing your salary history and expectations. You want to discuss salary during your interview after you have had a chance to sell yourself and have learned more about the roles and responsibilities involved in the position. If pressed, explain that you are confident once the requirements of the job are explained and your talents and experience are demonstrated, that you will be able to reach a reasonable salary figure. If you list a desired salary in your resume, you might either price yourself out of the position or receive less money than you might otherwise be able to negotiate.

Your resume is a work history.

You want to use your resume to focus the reader on the best reasons for hiring you. Your entire work history might not be relevant to the job you are seeking, so consider de-emphasizing irrelevant experience. Some of your personal history, such as volunteer work or hobbies, might represent important and relevant experience for your next career, so include it. You need to decide

for yourself what represents your best qualifications and include that information in your resume. As a general rule, make everything in your resume a reason that a future employer would want to hire you.

You should always use a Chronological resume.

How you construct your resume depends on which elements of your experience qualify you for the job you are seeking. Your most important experience should be listed first, whether it is work-related, educational, or from your personal life. When considering how to position your skills, experience, and accomplishments in the best possible light, review the Chronological, Functional, and Combined resume formats, which each offer different strategies for presenting your qualifications.

“You want to discuss salary during your interview after you have had a chance to sell yourself...”

The person that will land the job is the one most qualified.

The person that can, using both their resume and interview skills, sell his or her skills and experience and demonstrate the ability to achieve results, and add value to the company, will usually get the job. Additionally, don't underestimate the necessity of establishing rapport with your future manager and demonstrating how you fit into the company culture. Sometimes the relationships you have established are the deciding factor.

An employer won't read my cover letter.

If a resume captures an employer's attention, they will read the cover letter and sometimes a powerful, well-crafted cover letter is enough to get you an interview. Hiring managers may also review your resume and cover letter after the interview to refresh their memory, compare you to other potential candidates, and evaluate your writing abilities.

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I should include the phrase References available upon request.

It is obvious to today's hiring managers that references are available from a job seeker. Since an employer will assume you have references, you do not need to include this information on your resume.

Common Resume Mistakes To Avoid

Misspellings, typing, and grammatical errors.

Always have several people proofread your resume. You cannot count on the spell-checking or grammar-checking functions of your word processing system alone. Remember that a single error can land your resume in the reject pile.

Using pronouns and articles.

Resumes should always be written in the third person without the use of I or me. A resume should also be concise with minimal use of articles such as the, a, or an. Instead of a writing "I was responsible for managing a 12-person production department where the result was a more streamlined operations unit," write "Managed 12-person production department, which resulted in 26% increase in productivity."

Omitting keywords.

Given the number of companies that are storing the resumes they receive electronically, simply including the proper keywords may be enough to get your resume pulled for review. Keywords are mostly nouns that describe what you do, your experience, your skills and abilities, and the processes and software in which you are knowledgeable. You can determine appropriate keywords by reading job descriptions for the type of job you are seeking and including keywords in

your resume, either interspersed throughout the resume or listed in a separate Skills section.

Overusing bold, italic, or underline text formatting.

Drawing attention to everything is the same as drawing attention to nothing. Use highlighting such as bold, italics, and underline sparingly for maximum effect on specific areas you want to draw attention to and be consistent in your highlighting technique.

Including too much or irrelevant information.

A resume should only include information that will help convince an employer to interview you. Descriptions of relevant skills and accomplishments should be concise and to the point.

Including irrelevant experience and lengthy descriptions will bury the important information. Only include personal information where it demonstrates an important personal quality or qualification. A resume should represent what you can do on the job, not what you do in your personal life.

Including Negative information.

Never include any negative information about yourself or anyone else. Your resume should only make positive statements about you, your qualifications, and should never imply anything negative about former employers.

Missing an opening statement at the top of the resume.

If you are a recent graduate or have limited experience in your career, you should include a Job Objective statement at the top of your resume, which will help focus the reader's attention and describe what type of position you are looking for. If you have experience in your career field, you want a powerful Summary statement

"Remember that a single error can land your resume in the reject pile."

that illustrates your best qualifications for the position at the top of the resume. A well-crafted opening statement should convince an employer to keep reading.

Using Clichés.

Avoid using adjective clichés like “self-motivated” or “dynamic.” Instead, demonstrate these qualities through powerful and measurable Action-Benefit statements in your Skills, Capabilities, Accomplishments, and/or Experience sections.

Using a lengthy list of job responsibilities.

The best resumes describe experience using Action-Benefit statements, which describe an action you took in response to a challenge or opportunity, and explain how your action had a positive benefit for your company. This method brings your experience statements to life and demonstrates how you can achieve success and produce results.

Repeating the same Action Words.

Never use the same action word repeatedly. Instead of using a word like directed over and over, use synonyms such as controlled, supervised, guided, or managed. Use a thesaurus to help you select appropriate action words.

Using a chronological resume when a functional resume was needed.

If you are looking for a job for which you have relevant experience and a consistent work record, then the chronological resume is probably your best choice. If you are seeking a job for which you have no recent experience, a functional resume might be better. A functional resume allows you to de-emphasize your work history, recent jobs, and any gaps in employment. It also enables you to list your relevant skills and experience at the top of your resume where a potential employer will notice it first.

Describing the reason you left your former job.

If discussed at all, discuss your reasons for leaving previous employers at your interview, and always put your departure in a positive light. Rather than focus employers on the negative aspects of your former job, discuss the exciting opportunities you see in your new job or career.

“A well-crafted opening statement should convince an employer to keep reading.”

If you have experience in your career field, you want a powerful Summary statement that illustrates your best qualifications...