

## CREATING AN OUTSTANDING RESUME

By

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The resume is a tool with one specific purpose: **to win an interview.**

A resume is an advertisement, nothing more, nothing less.

A great resume doesn't just tell them what you have done but makes the same assertion that all good ads do: **If you buy this product, you will get these specific, direct benefits.** It presents you in the best light. It convinces the employer that you have what it takes to be successful in this new position or career – to make the company money or save the company money.

It stimulates interest in meeting you and learning more about you. It inspires the prospective employer to pick up the phone and ask you to come in for an interview. If it doesn't do that, it isn't an effective resume.

### WHAT IT ISN'T

It is a mistake to think of your resume as a history of your past, as a personal statement or as some sort of self expression. Write from the intention to create interest, to persuade the employer to call you. If you write with that goal, your final product will be very different than if you write to inform or catalog your job history.

Most people write a resume because everyone knows that you have to have one to get a job. They write their resume grudgingly, to fulfill this obligation. A great resume can be your ticket to getting exactly the job you want, so muster some genuine enthusiasm for creating a real masterpiece, rather than the feeble products most people turn out.

### HOW TO KNOCK THE SOCKS OFF A PROSPECTIVE

Research shows that only one interview is granted for every 200 resumes received by the average employer. Research also tells us that your resume will be quickly scanned, rather than read. Ten to 20 seconds is all the time you have to persuade a prospective employer to read further.

The decision to interview a candidate is usually based on a quick screening that so impresses the reader and convinces them of the candidate's qualifications that an interview results. As a result, the top half of the first page of your resume will either make you or break you. By the time a prospective employer or recruiter has read the first few lines, you have either caught their interest, or your resume has failed.

To write an effective resume, you have to learn how to write powerful but subtle advertising copy. Not only that, but you must sell a product in which you have a large personal investment: you. Given the fact that most of us do not think naturally in a marketing-oriented way, you are probably not looking forward to selling yourself.

## **FOCUS ON THE EMPLOYER'S NEEDS, NOT YOURS**

Imagine that you are the person doing the hiring. The person who makes the hiring decision is usually the person responsible for the bottom line productivity of the project or group you hope to join. This is a person who cares deeply how well the job will be done. You need to write your resume to appeal directly to him or her.

**Ask yourself: What would make someone the perfect candidate?** What does the employer really want? What special abilities would this person have? What would set a truly exceptional candidate apart?

If you are seeking a job in a field you know well, you probably already know what would make someone a superior candidate. If you are not sure, you can gather hints from the ad you are answering or from asking other people who work in the same company or the same field. It is very important to do this step well. If you are not addressing their real needs, they will not respond to your resume.

## **BASIC RESUME FORMATS**

There are three basic types of resumes: Chronological, Functional, and "combined" Chronological - Functional. To see what these styles look like, get a resume book. They are usually terrible guides for how to write an excellent resume, but they are good to see different formats.

### **CHRONOLOGICAL**

The chronological resume is the more traditional structure for a resume. The Experience section is the focus of the resume; each job (or the last several jobs) is described in some detail, and there is no major section of skills or accomplishments at the beginning of the resume. This structure is primarily used when you are staying in the same profession, in the same type of work, particularly in very conservative fields. It is also used in certain fields such as law and academia. It is recommended that the chronological resume always have an Objective or Summary, to focus the reader.

The advantages: May appeal to older, more traditional readers and be best in very conservative fields. Makes it easier to understand what you did in what job. May help the name of the employer stand out more, if this is impressive. The disadvantage is that it is much more difficult to highlight what you do best. This format is rarely appropriate for someone making a career change.

## **FUNCTIONAL**

The functional resume highlights your major skills and accomplishments from the very beginning. **It helps the reader see clearly what you can do for them, rather than having to read through the job descriptions to find out.** It helps target the resume by lifting up the key skills and qualifications from all past jobs to help prove you will be successful in this new direction or field. Actual company names and positions are in a subordinate position, with no description under each. There are many different types of formats for functional resumes. The functional resume is a must for career changers, but is very appropriate for generalists, for those with spotty or divergent careers, for those with a wide range of skills in their given profession, for students, for military officers, for homemakers returning to the job market, and for those who want to make slight shifts in their career direction.

Advantages: It is a very effective type of resume, and is highly recommended. The disadvantage is that it is hard for the employer to know exactly what you did in which job, which may be a problem for some conservative interviewers.

## **COMBINED**

A combined resume includes elements of both the chronological and functional formats. It may be a shorter chronology of job descriptions preceded by a short "Skills and Accomplishments" section (or with a longer Summary including a skills list or a list of "qualifications"); or, it may be a standard functional resume with the accomplishments under headings of different jobs held.

There are obvious advantages to this combined approach: It maximizes the advantages of both kinds of resumes, avoiding potential negative effects of either type. It can be repetitious: Accomplishments and skills may have to be repeated in both the "functional" section and the "chronological" job descriptions.

## **A GREAT RESUME HAS TWO SECTIONS**

In the first, you make assertions about your abilities, qualities and achievements. You write powerful, but honest, advertising copy that makes the reader immediately perk up and realize that you are someone special.

The second section, the evidence section, is where you back up your assertions with evidence that you actually did what you said you did. This is where you list and describe the jobs you have held, your education, etc. This is all the stuff you are obliged to include.

The juice is in the assertions section. When a prospective employer finishes reading your resume, you want them to immediately reach for the phone to invite you in to interview. The resumes you have written in the past have probably been a gallant effort to inform the reader. You don't want them informed. You want them interested and excited.

In this era of word processing, there's no excuse not to adapt your resume to each position that you apply for. Have an objective that is perfectly matched with the job you are applying for. Remember, you are writing advertising copy, not your life story.

## THE SUMMARY

The "Summary" or "Summary of Qualifications" consists of several concise statements that focus the reader's attention on the most important qualities, achievements and abilities you have to offer. Those qualities should be the most compelling demonstrations of why they should hire you. It gives you a brief opportunity to telegraph a few of your most sterling qualities. It is your one and only chance to attract and hold their attention, to get across what is most important, and to entice the employer to keep reading.

This is the spiciest part of the resume. **This may be the only section fully read by the employer, so it should be very strong and convincing.** The Summary is the one place to include professional characteristics (extremely energetic, a gift for solving complex problems in a fast-paced environment, a natural salesman, exceptional interpersonal skills, committed to excellence, etc.) which may be helpful in winning the interview. Gear every word in the Summary to your targeted goal.

How to write a Summary? Go back to your list that answered the question, What would make someone the ideal candidate? Look for the qualities the employer will care about most. Then look at what you wrote about why you are the perfect person to fill their need. Pick the stuff that best demonstrates why they should hire you. Assemble it into your Summary section.

## SKILLS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In this final part of the assertions section of your resume, you go into more detail. You are still writing to sell yourself to the reader, not to inform them. Basically, you do exactly what you did in the previous section, except that you go into more detail.

In the summary, you focused on your most special highlights. Now you tell the rest of the best of your story. **Let them know what results you produced, what happened as a result of your efforts, what you are especially gifted or experienced at doing.** Flesh out the most important highlights in your summary.

You are still writing to do what every good advertisement does, communicating the following: if you buy this product, you will get these direct benefits. If it doesn't contribute to furthering this communication, don't bother to say it.

## **A FEW GUIDELINES FOR A BETTER PRESENTATION**

**The resume is visually enticing**, a work of art. Simple clean structure. Very easy to read. Symmetrical. Balanced. Readable.

**There is uniformity and consistency in the use of italics, capital letters, bullets, boldface, and underlining.** Absolute parallelism in design decisions. For example, if a period is at the end of one job's dates, a period should be at the end of all jobs' dates; if one degree is in boldface, all degrees should be in boldface.

**There are absolutely no errors.** No typographical errors. No spelling errors. No grammar, syntax, or punctuation errors. No errors of fact.

**All the basic, expected information is included.** A resume must have the following key information: your name, address, phone number, and your email address at the top of the first page, a listing of jobs held, in reverse chronological order, educational degrees including the highest degree received, in reverse chronological order. Additional, targeted information will of course accompany this. Much of the information people commonly put on a resume can be omitted, but these basics are mandatory.

**Jobs listed include a title, the name of the firm, the city and state of the firm, and the years.** Jobs earlier in a career can be summarized, or omitted if prior to the highest degree, and part-time jobs (unless directly related to the job you are applying for) can be omitted. If no educational degrees have been completed, it is still expected to include some mention of education (professional study or training, partial study toward a degree, etc.) acquired after high school.

**It is targeted.** A resume should be targeted to your goal, to the ideal next step in your career. First you should get clear what your job goal is, what the ideal position or positions would be. Then you should figure out what key skills, areas of expertise or body of experience the employer will be looking for in the candidate. Gear the resume structure and content around this target, proving these key qualifications. If you have no clear goal, take the skills (or knowledge) you most enjoy or would like to use or develop in your next career step and build the resume around those.

**Strengths are highlighted / weaknesses de-emphasized.** Focus on whatever is strongest and most impressive. Make careful and strategic choices as to how to organize, order, and convey your skills and background. Consider: whether to include the information at all, placement in overall structure of the resume, location on the page itself or within a section, ordering of information, more impressive ways of phrasing the information, use of design elements (such as boldface to highlight, italics to minimize, ample surrounding space to draw the eye to certain things).

**It has focus.** A resume needs an initial focus to help the reader understand immediately. Don't make the reader go through the whole resume to figure out what your profession is and what you can do. Think of the resume as an essay with a title and a summative opening sentence.

**Use power words.** For every skill, accomplishment, or job described, use the most active impressive verb you can think of (which is also accurate). Begin the sentence with this verb, except when you must vary the sentence structure to avoid repetitious writing.

**Show you are results-oriented.** Wherever possible, prove that you have the desired qualifications through clear strong **statement of accomplishments**, rather than a statement of potentials, talents, or responsibilities. Indicate results of work done, and quantify these accomplishment whenever appropriate. For example: "Initiated and directed complete automation of the Personnel Department, resulting in time-cost savings of over 25%." Additionally, preface skill and experience statements with the adjectives "proven" and "demonstrated" to create this results-orientation.

**Writing is concise and to the point.** Keep sentences as short and direct as possible. Eliminate any extraneous information and any repetitions. Say what you want to say in the most direct way possible. For example: "coordinated eight city-wide fund-raising events, raising 250% more than expected goal" rather than "was involved in the coordination of six fund-raising dinners and two fund-raising walkathons which attracted participants throughout St. Louis and were so extremely successful that they raised \$5,000 (well beyond the \$2,000 goal)."

**Use short punchy sentences.** Use phrases rather than full sentences when phrases are possible, and start sentences with verbs, eliminating pronouns ("I", "he" or "she"). Vary words: Don't repeat a "power" verb or adjective in the same paragraph. Use commas to clarify meaning and make reading easier. Remain consistent in writing decisions such as use of abbreviations and capitalizations.

**Make it look great.** Use a laser printer or an ink jet printer that produces high-quality results. A laser is best because the ink won't run if it gets wet. It should look typeset. Use a standard conservative typeface (font) in 11 or 12 point. Don't make them squint to read it. For mailed resumes, use off-white, ivory or bright white 8 1/2 x 11-inch paper, in the highest quality affordable.

You must have a .txt or .rtf form of each resume. If you use a Word or WorkPerfect document to post online, web browsers will make "hay" of your formatting. Ideally, you should have a .pdf version of each resume to post, if your system will allow you to save a document as a .pdf.

**Shorter is usually better.** Everyone freely gives advice on resume length. Most of these self-declared experts say a resume should always be one page. That makes no more sense than it does to say an ad or a poem should automatically be one page. Do what works.

Sometimes it is appropriate to have a three pager, but unless your life has been filled with a wide assortment of extraordinary achievements, make it shorter. One page is best if you can cram it all into one page. Most Fortune 500 C.E.O.s have a one- or two-page resume. It could be said that, the larger your accomplishments, the easier to communicate them in few words. The only useful rule is: **Do not write one more word than you need to get them to pick up the phone and call you.** Don't bore them with the details. Leave them wanting more. Remember, this is an ad to market you, not your life history.

**Experience before education...usually.** Experience sections should come first, before education, in most every case. This is because you have more qualifications developed from your experience than from your education. The exceptions would be 1) if you have just received or are completing a degree in a new professional field, if this new degree study proves stronger qualifications than does your work experience, 2) if you are an undergraduate student, or 4) if you have just completed a particularly impressive degree from a particularly impressive school, even if you are staying in the same field, for example, an MBA from Harvard.

**Telephone number that will be answered.** Be sure the phone number on the resume will, without exception, be answered by a person or an answering machine Monday through Friday 8-5pm. In most cases, list your cell phone number as you do not want your roommates, partners or children answering a phone call from a prospective employer.

If you look at the caller ID and don't recognize the caller and if you are not in a position to respond to a prospective employer with your full attention, let the message go to voicemail and return the call as soon as you can when you are in a place without distractions. Try to have your resume in front of you when you are on the phone so you can respond to questions without hesitation. Make sure the message on your voicemail is very professional, giving your name but without cute additions.

**Email Address.** You will also want to include a "new" email address, obtained specifically for your search and with a professional address. No "cutiepie21@xxx.com, OK?? Something more like johnqsmith@gmail.com. Remember that you can establish a free email on yahoo.com or Google -- use it exclusively for your search and check it at least twice each day, including weekends (keep in mind that recruiters work nights and weekends!)

### **A FEW MORE TIPS**

Try not to include anything on the resume that could turn the employer off, anything that is controversial (political, etc.) or could be taken in a negative light.

Put the most important information on the first line of a writing "block" or paragraph. The first line is read the most.

Use bold caps for your name on page one. Put your name at the top of page two on a two-page resume. Put section headings, skill headings, titles or companies (if impressive), degrees, and school name (if impressive), in boldface.

Spell out numbers under and including ten; use the numerical form for numbers over and including 11 (as a general rule), unless they are the first words in a sentence. Spell out abbreviations unless they are unquestionably obvious.

### **WHAT NOT TO PUT ON A RESUME**

- The word "Resume" at the top of the resume
- Fluffy rambling "objective" statements
- Salary information
- Full addresses of former employers
- Reasons for leaving jobs
- A "Personal" section, or personal statistics (except in special cases)
- Names of supervisors
- References