Resume Writing

Imagine a harried manager who is told on Friday afternoon that she must sort through 75 resumes and choose the five candidates she will interview the following week. If she's like most employers, she will spend **no more than 30 seconds** on each resume. This means that your resume must be **concise**, **targeted**, **focused on accomplishments** and **visually approachable**.

Make it concise.

A resume highlights your accomplishments to show a potential employer that you are qualified for the job you want. It is not a biography of everything you have done. You can pick and choose what items to put on your resume and where to put them, depending on the employer's needs and your experiences.

Target your resume.

Know your audience; know what they are looking for. Read the job description carefully. What are the skills that are needed for this job? How can you demonstrate that you have those skills? Study the organization's literature or web site. What qualities do they value in their employees?

Focus on your accomplishments, not just your duties.

INSTEAD OF: "Created spreadsheets, researched company data, filed documents" CONSIDER USING: "Redesigned speadsheet layouts, allowing staff members to see all relevant data in one layout rather than three; provided investment managers with well-researched company profiles in very short turn-around time, using Lexus/Nexus and Bloomberg databases."

Make your resume visually approachable.

A crowded or visually unappealing resume sends the wrong impression, before the employer has even read a word!

- Leave space in between the separate items and category headings on your resume.
- Use boldface to highlight job titles or company names.
- If your experience fits into specific, descriptive categories, you can use those. For example, a job seeker interested in the management consulting field might use "Finance Experience" and "Leadership Experience" as two of her categories.
- Condense to one page (two pages maximum if you have extensive experience).
- Center and balance your resume on the page, leaving approximately one-inch margins.
- Originals should be produced on a high-quality printer. Duplicates should be professionally photocopied.
- Design your resume for easy skimming: emphasize by boldfacing, capitalizing and italicizing. Use 81/2"x11" white or light-colored bond paper.
- Proofread carefully.
- Select the format that best highlights your skills and experiences.

Resume Language

- Be concise; use telegram rather than narrative style.

- Use "action verbs".
- Stress your abilities and accomplishments.
- Avoid unnecessary personal information such as marital status and date of birth.
- Emphasize the data relevant to your objective.
- Avoid using the pronoun "I".
- Cite numbers to make a point (e.g., number of people supervised; size of event).
- Include "buzz" words only if you are sure of their meaning.
- Tailor separate resumes to fit each career field in which you are job searching.

The Sections of a Resume

Name and Address

- Put your name in at least 18-point font. Recruiters often must look through stacks of resumes in search of a particular one. Make it easy for them to see your name.
- If you are still in school, be sure to include both your school address and phone number, as well as the address and phone number where you can be reached during school vacations or after you graduate.
- Include your e-mail address. If you check your e-mail during school vacations, you may want to center the address on your resume in a way that implies it is not just associated with your school address.

Objective

This section is optional. If you have worked out a clearly targeted job objective, then definitely include it.

- Avoid pronouns and flowery language.
- Focus on what you have to offer rather than on what the job can offer you. This may sound backwards, but employers are not so much interested in what you hope to get out of a job with them, as much as they are interested in knowing whether you fit their needs.
- Example: OBJECTIVE: Editorial assistant position in the publishing industry, utilizing my academic background in literature and my three years of experience writing for campus and local newspapers.
- If you are not clear on your career goals, you probably should not include an objective on your resume. You should work with a career counselor to focus your interests and objectives.

Education

- This section goes first on your resume as long as you are in school, and from one to three years after you graduate, depending on such factors as whether your education was relevant to your career field and how impressive your work experience has been in the intervening years.
- As a graduating senior, your GPA can be mentioned, as long as it is above 3.0. Most recruiters will assume that it is below 3.0 if they do not see it on your resume. (The phrase "3.2/4.0" indicates that you have a 3.2 GPA on a scale that runs up to 4.0. Some schools use a 5.0 scale.)
- "Courses Studied" or Relevant Coursework" is an optional section. If you have taken courses outside your major that are relevant to the job, you would benefit from including this section. For example, if you were a Philosophy major trying to find work in the computer industry, and you had taken three courses in the Computer Science department, you should include them in a "Relevant Courses" section.

- Significant honors and awards can be included as a sub-category of your Education section.

Experience

What should you include in this section?

- List in reverse chronological order pertinent experiences. Be sure to include places of employment, city and state, as well as dates employed. Elaborate on major responsibilities.
- Don't feel that you must limit this section to paid work experiences, especially if you are still in college or a recent graduate. Employers understand that the most valuable or most challenging experiences often occur in internships, volunteer work or other extra-curricular activities.

How should you describe your experiences?

- Be concise; use telegram rather than narrative style.
- Use action verbs.
- **IMPORTANT:** Stress your abilities and accomplishments. Imagine that you are a recruiter looking through a large pile of resumes, trying to choose the few people you will interview. Would you choose the applicant who described her internship merely in terms of duties -- "created spreadsheets, researched company data, filed documents", OR would you choose the applicant who described the same position in terms of accomplishments and contributions -- "redesigned speadsheet format, allowing staff members to see all relevant data in one layout rather than three; provided investment managers with well-researched company profiles in very short turn-around time"?
- Emphasize the data relevant to your objective.
- Avoid using the pronoun "I".
- Cite numbers to make a point (e.g., number of people supervised; size of event).
- Include "buzz" words only if you are sure of their meaning.

Activities / Volunteer Work

- If you choose to separate your work experience from your extra-curricular activities or volunteer work, they can go in a separate section. **REMEMBER**, though, that some of these activities may demonstrate your skills just as well or even better than your paid work experience.
- You do not need to demote these activities to the bottom of your resume. Employers spend an average of 15 -30 seconds looking at each resume. Information positioned at the bottom of your resume may get little, if any, attention.

Skills

Computer Skills:

- List the systems (Macintosh, IBM, UNIX, etc.) and software (Filemaker Pro, Microsoft Word, Pagemaker, HTML, Excel, PowerPoint, etc.) with which you are capable.
- If you know programming languages, list those as well.

- You may even want to use italicized sub-categories:*Systems:*
Applications:
Programming Languages:

Languages:

- List languages in which you have more than just some basic ability. In other words, if you are able to carry on a conversation in that language, list it.
- Indicate your level of ability ("basic conversational ability," "proficiency," "near-fluency," "fluency") or the number of years of college-level study.

Laboratory Skills:

- If you are applying for scientific or laboratory positions, you may want to create a list of your lab skills. A biology major might break those skills down into sub-categories such as "histology," "cell culture," and "staining." Of course, the sub-categories and skills mentioned should be relevant to the particular job.
- Always check your skills list with a professor or mentor, unless you have significant professional experience in that career field.