

How to Prepare an Effective Resume

I. Resume Essentials

Before you write, take time to do a self-assessment on paper. Outline your skills and abilities as well as your work experience and extracurricular activities. This will make it easier to prepare a thorough resume.

II. The Content of Your Resume

Name, address, telephone, e-mail address, web site address

All your contact information should go at the top of your resume.

- * Avoid nicknames.
- * Use a permanent address. Use your parents' address, a friend's address, or the address you plan to use after graduation.
- * Use a permanent telephone number and include the area code. If you have an answering machine, record a neutral greeting.
- * Add your e-mail address. Many employers will find it useful. (Note: Choose an e-mail address that sounds professional.)
- * Include your web site address only if the web page reflects your professional ambitions.

Objective or Summary

An objective tells potential employers the sort of work you're hoping to do.

- * Be specific about the job you want. For example: To obtain an entry-level position within a financial institution requiring strong analytical and organizational skills.
- * Tailor your objective to each employer you target/every job you seek.

Education

New graduates without a lot of work experience should list their educational information first.

- * Your most recent educational information is listed first.
- * Include your degree (B.A., B. S., etc.), major, institution attended, minor/concentration.
- * Add your grade point average (GPA) if it is higher than 3.0.
- * Mention academic honors.
- * List relevant coursework.
- * Describe your Independent Study.
- * If you studied away from campus, add it to this section.

Experience

Briefly give the employer an overview of work and any other experiences (volunteer, committee membership, etc.) that has taught you skills. Use action words to describe what you did. Include your experience in reverse chronological order—that is, put your last experience first and work backward to your first, relevant job. Include:
(See next page)

- * Title of position.
- * Name of organization.
- * Location of work (town, state.)
- * Dates of employment.
- * Describe your responsibilities with emphasis on specific skills and achievements.

Other Information

A staff member at your career services office can advise you on other information to add to your resume. You may want to add:

- * Key or special skills or competencies.
- * Leadership experience in volunteer organizations.
- * Participation in sports.

References

Ask people if they are willing to serve as references before you give their names to a potential employer. Do not include your reference information on your resume. You may note at the bottom of your resume: "References furnished on request."

III. Resume Checkup

You've written your resume. It's time to have it reviewed and critiqued by a career advisor. You can also take the following steps to ensure quality:

Content

- * Run a spell check on your computer before anyone sees your resume.
- * Get a friend (an English major would do nicely) to do a grammar review.
- * Ask another friend to proofread. The more people who see your resume, the more likely that misspelled words and awkward phrases will be seen (and corrected).

Design:

These tips will make your resume easier to read and/or scan:

- * Use white or off-white paper.
- * Use 8-1/2- x 11-inch paper.
- * Print on one side of the paper.
- * Use a font size of 10 to 14 points.
- * Use non-decorative typefaces.
- * Choose one typeface and stick to it.
- * Avoid italics, script, and underlined words.
- * Do not use horizontal or vertical lines, graphics, or shading.
- * Do not fold or staple your resume.
- * If you must mail your resume, put it in a large envelope.

What do Employers Look For?

THE ENTIRE PACKAGE: What do employers want to see when they begin evaluating college candidates for employment? The entire package! Extracted from responses to the question, “What are the five most important skills or competencies that a candidate needs to possess in order to be considered for employment?”, the “total package” includes these skills:

The Total Package: Candidates need to be academically prepared in their discipline as it pertains to their employment – this is considered a given by employers. Plus,

1. Communication skills (228 comments) that demonstrate solid verbal, written and listening abilities. The capstone is presentation skills that include the ability to respond to questions and serious critique of the presentation material.
2. Computer/technical aptitudes (124 comments) based on the level required for the position being filled. Computer ability is now perceived as a given core skill, right up there with reading, writing and mathematics. The ability levels (expectations) for computer knowledge and application continue to rise.
3. Leadership (82 comments) – the ability to take charge or relinquish control (followership) according to the needs of the organization; closely aligned with possessing management abilities.
4. Teamwork (70 comments) – working cooperatively and collaboratively with different people while maintaining autonomous control over some assignments.
5. Interpersonal abilities (80 comments) that allow a person to relate to others, inspire others to participate or mitigate conflict between coworkers.
6. Personal traits. The shape of the above competencies are molded by a combination of personal traits, specifically demonstrate initiative and motivation; flexible/adaptable to handle change and ambiguity; hard-working (work ethic) and reliability; honesty and integrity; and ability to plan and organize multiple tasks. Emerging as a key personal trait is an individual’s ability to provide “customer service” – anticipating customer needs and the demeanor to respond positively to customer concerns.

The Wrapping: Several skills or experiences bind the package and are essential to holding it together. Without these skills, a candidate may not be able to deliver the package.

1. Critical thinking/problem solving – the ability to identify problems and their solutions by integrating information from a variety of sources and effectively weigh alternatives.
2. Intelligence and common sense.
3. Willingness to learn quickly and continuously.
4. Work-related experiences that provide an understanding of the workplace and serve to apply classroom learning.

This list should be no surprise to anyone – these skills and competencies have been bantered about since the new economy began to emerge in the late 1980s. Why this section needs our attention is the context in which many employers expressed their qualifications. Because the economy is moving so quickly, candidates must enter their position already demonstrating their command of these competencies. There is neither time nor the luxury of training a highly qualified academic candidate in these skills. Employers demand that the “total package” be delivered at graduation.

Action Words

Use action words to describe your experience and accomplishments.

achieved	acquired	adapted	addressed
administered	analyzed	anticipated	assembled
assisted	audited	budgeted	calculated
centralized	changed	collaborated	composed
condensed	conducted	constructed	contracted
converted	coordinated	created	cultivated
demonstrated	designed	developed	devised
discovered	doubled	drafted	edited
eliminated	enforced	established	evaluated
expanded	explained	forecasted	formed
founded	generated	guided	hired
implemented	improved	informed	insured
interpreted	interviewed	launched	maintained
managed	marketed	minimized	motivated
negotiated	obtained	operated	organized
originated	oversaw	performed	planned
prevented	produced	programmed	promoted
provided	publicized	published	recruited
reorganized	reported	researched	resolved
reviewed	selected	separated	set up
simplified	solved	surveyed	staffed
supervise	taught	tested	trained
used			

HOW TO WRITE AN ELECTRONIC RESUME

LEARN TO THINK NOUNS, NOT VERBS

Action words such as accelerated, arbitrated and launched are out. In scannable resumes, nouns are dominant. Computers search for descriptive words such as accounting, manager, Price Waterhouse.

USE LABELS OR KEYWORDS

Keywords are an extension of the noun concept and are also called buzzwords or descriptors. Keywords are words employers search for when trying to fill a position. They are the essential characteristics required to do the job: education, experience, skills, knowledge and abilities. The more keyword marketing points you present about yourself, the more likely you are to be chosen from an electronic resume database now or in a year from now.

LESS IS MORE

Avoid decorative or uncommon typefaces. Don't underline. Steer away from italics. Stick to white or beige paper, if you are producing a scannable resume.

KEEP THE DESIGN SIMPLE

Avoid graphics and shading -- the equipment is set to read "text" not "graphics." If you use complex tables with leader dots (...), computers may trip over them.

MINIMIZE USE OF ABBREVIATIONS

Except the more common ones like BA (Bachelor of Arts). Do, however, maximize the use of industry jargon.

PUT NAME FIRST AND CONTACT INFORMATION ON SEPARATE LINE

USE WHITE SPACE

Computers like white space. They use it to recognize that one topic has ended and another has begun.

USE COMMON LANGUAGE

Not all systems have a full-fledged synonym table so try to maximize the "hits" between a position search and your resume by using words everyone knows.

A ONE PAGE RESUME IS STILL THE MOST SOUGHT AFTER LENGTH

How to Write Cover Letters

The preliminary application for a professional position generally consists of two documents: a cover letter and a resume. The cover letter allows you to tailor your application to each specific job and introduces your resume. Your resume gives more complete details about your education and experiences. Effective cover letters are constructed with close attention to:

Purpose, Audience, Content, and Format.

Purpose

Your cover letter and resume usually provide all the information which a prospective employer will use to decide whether or not you will reach the next phase in the application process: the interview. While your goal is an interview and, ultimately, a job offer, the more immediate purpose of your cover letter, in some cases, may simply be to gain an attentive audience for your resume.

Audience

A cover letter provides, in a very real sense, an opportunity to let your prospective employer hear your voice. It reflects your personality, your attention to detail, your communication skills, your enthusiasm, your intellect, and your specific interest in the company to which you are sending the letter.

Therefore, cover letters should be tailored to each specific company to which you are applying. You should conduct enough research to know the interests, needs, values, and goals of each company, and your letters should reflect that knowledge.

Content

A cover letter should be addressed to the specific company and the specific individual who will process your application. You can usually find this through research or simply by calling the company to find out to whom you should address your letter.

The letter should name the position for which you are applying and also make specific references to the company. Indicate your knowledge of and interest in the work the company is currently doing, and your qualification for the position. You want the reader to know:

- * why you want to work at that specific company
- * why you fit with that company
- * how you qualify for the position

In addition to tailoring your application to a specific job with a specific company, the cover letter should also

- * highlight the most important and relevant accomplishments, skills, and experience listed in your resume
- * point to the resume in some way ("as detailed in the enclosed resume")
- * request specific follow up, such as an interview

Format

A cover letter should be in paragraph form (save bulleted lists for your resume) with a conversational, though formal, tone.

The first paragraph should be brief, perhaps two or three sentences, stating

- * what job you are applying for and how you learned about it
- * any personal contacts you have in or with the company
- * your general qualifications for the job

The body of your letter should consist of one to three longer paragraphs in which you expand upon your qualifications for the position. Pick out the most relevant qualifications listed in your resume and discuss them in detail, demonstrating how your background and experience qualify you for the job. Be as specific as possible, and refer the reader to your resume for additional details.

The concluding paragraph of your letter should request an interview (or some other response, as appropriate). State where and when you can be reached, and express your willingness to come to an interview or supply further information. Close by thanking your reader for his or her time and consideration.