

Writing a Winning Resume: What you need to know

Writing a winning resume takes thought, planning and organization. Your resume is a “living document”, and the sooner you accept this fact, the better. This means that it is flexible to changing times and needs; therefore it will always require a few modifications here and there. You will undoubtedly make several drafts before you create a document that you are pleased with, so no need for frustration with rewrites and edits.

We've created this tool to assist you in writing your winning resume. We first define the meaning of the word “resume” and describe the four types of resumes. We then dissect the resume, explaining each component in detail. Finally, we offer ten tips to guide you as you being to put pen to paper. Each section is designed to help you gain more insight into the making of a winning resume.

What is a Resume?

A resume is a summary of your work experience and skills relevant to a particular job or job industry. It is how you market or promote yourself to potential employers. Your resume is often the first impression an employer has of you.

There are four types of resumes:

Chronological Resume - This resume works well for the person with several years of relevant experience. By presenting your career information by dates, beginning with your present or most recent position, employers will easily see the jobs held by the individual and the increasing amount of responsibility.

Functional Resume - If you have a work history that is mixed it is difficult to link positions held, so the functional resume will work best for you. This resume design also works well when there are gaps in work experience.

Combination Resume - The combination resume allows you to highlight skills relevant to the job that you are applying for and also provide the chronological work history which is much easier to follow.

Targeted Resume – Let's establish the fact that all resumes should be targeted. Every type of resume should list only the skills, education, work experience and other supporting accomplishments related to a specific job. However, consider using the targeted resume to contact a company on your target list even without

a specific job opening in mind. This allows you to reach out and let them know you're interested in working for them when a job becomes available.

Anatomy of a Resume

Every resume must contain certain categories of information. These categories make up the body of the resume. Below is a list of suggested categories of information with a brief explanation of each.

Contact Information - First and last name, mailing address, your most accessible phone number, maybe a second phone number, and email address.

Career Objective or Professional Objective (optional) – This tells an employer what you want in a career. Write a few sentences detailing what type of job you are seeking, your aspirations and what you want to do. Craft the sentences with information about the job that you are applying for. Focus on the employers' wants and not your own. Although this category is optional many experts believe it should be a part of every resume.

Summary of Qualifications or Career Highlights - This section summarizes or highlights your most desirable skills, experience, qualities and accomplishments relevant to the position. The employer will know right away what type of candidate you are. You only want to include the "highlights". You can include minor pieces of relevant information in other sections of the resume.

Professional Accomplishments – Accomplishments are more than job duties. Job duties show what you did. Accomplishments show what you did, how well you did it and the results of doing it. If you have copies of your recent or prior job evaluations use it to help identify your accomplishments.

Work Experience– When listing work experience chronologically, or organized by time, start with the most recent experience and work backwards. Older workers should think only in terms of whether or not work experience is relevant to the job applying for when listing work experience. Each listed experience should show:

Job title

Name of Employer, city and state

Dates – usually the starting and ending month and year of employment is necessary.

Duties –job responsibilities are now converted into accomplishments.

Start with the most important accomplishment first and work backwards.

For example:

Project manager
ABC Company
New York, New York
August 2006 – December 2011
(If you are still working there use “current” instead of putting an end date)

Skills – You may list additional training that is relevant to the position like computer skills, certifications, typing speed or language fluency.

Education – List your highest degree of education. There is no need to list high school if you graduated college, include academic honors ex. Suma or Magna Cum Laude, school graduated from, city and state, relevant professional certifications, and licenses.

References– (optional) Rarely, are the names and contact information of references listed on a resume anymore. Use only if requested. Therefore there is no need to list the once used phrase, “references available upon request.” Some employers will disqualify your resume if you list unsolicited references. It is preferred that you have that information available on a separate sheet if called for an interview.

Possible Resume Formats

Below are suggested resume formats using the categories of information and the types of resumes discussed above. Choose the resume that best highlights your circumstances, skills and work experience:

Chronological Resume Design

Contact Information
Career Objective (optional)
Work History/Work Experience
Education
Skills

Targeted Resume Design

Contact Information
Summary of Qualifications
Work History/Work Experience
Education

Functional Resume Design

Contact Information
Summary of Qualifications
Professional Accomplishments
Education

Combination Resume Design

Contact Information
Summary of Qualifications
Professional Accomplishments
Work History/Work Experience
Education

This information is meant to educate you about the components of a resume. The components are types of information that may appear on a resume. Consider reviewing sample resumes to decide which components to use.

Ten Tips for Writing a Winning Resume

#1 Use the Words, and Titles used in the job description

Take the job description and highlight or underline phrases and keywords that match your skills and use them in your resume. Employers will recognize their own jargon. Almost all employers are using software that searches for keywords and if your resume doesn't have those words it will not be selected to go to the next level. It may help to search for this same job posting in other venues to get a more detailed description of the position.

#2 Quantify your Accomplishments

Quantify means to express the number, degree or amount of something. By using numbers you enable employers to see how much work you do, the degree of difficulty and how you have benefited your current and past employers. In order to quantify your responsibilities and achievements think about time, effort and money. Think about time and money in terms of how either were saved, earned or increased. By showing numbers you also show the amount of effort that you put into these responsibilities. Give your accomplishments the attention they deserve.

Example: Conducted participant workshops.

Quantified: Conducted weekly workshops for over 100 participants per workshop.

Example: Increased membership.

Quantified: Increased \$40 membership by 30% in one year resulting in \$50,000 increase to the budget.

Example: Assisted customers over the phone.

Quantified: Assisted 20- 30 customers daily over the phone.

Example: Assisted in writing successful grants.

Quantified: Co-wrote 5 grants in 2009 that resulted in securing \$150,000 dollars in additional funding.

#3 Consider Targeting all Resumes

Regardless of which resume format you choose, it should be targeted at a specific job or employer. You want to customize your resume to emphasize your accomplishments and skills as they relate to a particular employer or position.

How to target your resume:

- Choose a job opening as your target

- Review the job description, highlight and make a list of each requirement
- Review your resume for the same or similar skills that match the requirements
- Use your identified skills and accomplishments relevant to the job opening in your targeted resume

#4 How a Resume should look

Your resume should be well organized and easy for the eye to find the information that is most important. Steer clear of long paragraphs. You can always browse the internet for free resume samples for design ideas.

Here are a few tips:

- The font should be no less than 12 points. Don't be tempted to decrease the font in order to get more info in. Bad idea!
- Arial, Times New Roman or Verdana are acceptable font styles
- Use bullet points followed by short sentences
- One to two page resumes are the norm now but don't crowd your resume just to keep it on one page. You also don't want the "War and Peace" resume version to give to employers either. Individual situations dictate the length of a resume. Use the rule of relevancy when adding information to a resume.
- Use quantifying symbols like \$ and %. The eyes are drawn to numbers, percentages and dollar amounts.
- Do not overuse capital letters, underline, italics or bold print.
- Use white or off white 8 1/2 by 11 paper
- Leave about 1 inch of space in tops, bottoms and side margins
- You probably have been told not to go back farther than 15 years when listing your work experience. Using a random number of years may cause you to leave out valuable experience. When listing experience consider whether or not the experience is relevant to the job that you are applying for.
- If your address or phone number has changed, redo your resume. Don't think it is ok to handwrite the new information.

#5 Prioritize Information

When organizing the contents of your resume it is pertinent that you place the most important information first under each category. Prioritize your most important skills and accomplishments in order of importance. Many job postings will list the most important qualifications first in the description.

#6 Your Resume is Part of your Brand

You may have heard the phrase “Dress for the job that you want, not for the job that you have.” This phrase applies to your resume too. Let your resume show that you belong in that organization and you can do the job. It is a composite of who you say you are and what you want people to know about you. Your resume should match the image that you are trying to project. This image makes the statement that I am worth the stated salary and I can do the job!

#7 Use Action Words to Add Power

Action words are all the rage, replacing outdated resume phrases like “duties include” or “responsible for”. By using action words you show that you actually did something! You may use present tense and end the words with “ing” or past tense using “ed” at the end. Type the phrase “action words” into any search engine for an exhaustive list of words.

#8 Proofread your Resume

You would be surprised at how many people submit resumes with errors. It is easy to miss your own mistakes. It is critical that 2 other people read your resume before you submit it as a finished product. Don't let a typo, grammatical error, a misspelled word or spacing error blemish your resume and discredit your hard work.

#9 Highlight Achievements instead of Responsibilities

Today's resumes are achievement or accomplishment oriented as opposed to being focused on duties or responsibilities. Try listing the relevant achievements instead of the duties/responsibilities of the job. Quantifying your duties helps to turn them into achievements. Don't be shy about showing off your skills and accomplishments. Isn't that's really the purpose for writing a resume?

#10 Don't lie on your resume

In a competitive job market it is tempting to stretch the truth on your resume. It might get you an interview but think of the embarrassment in the middle of an interview when you are asked questions that you can't answer. Awkward! Exaggerated job titles, duties, or your education can easily be investigated. It would be humiliating for you to get the job only to be fired a few months later, having to take the walk of shame, while being escorted out the door by security and in front of all your new coworkers. It's just not worth it, besides it is dishonest, and probably illegal. Falsifying credentials can get you in a lot of trouble and the least of these is being sued for reimbursement of pay you received based on your overstated credentials.