

How to Win the Resume Battle

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The resume is a summary of your qualifications designed to market yourself to employers for a specific type of work. It should describe who you are and what you have to offer an employer. Besides generating job interviews, a resume has other important uses:

- A review of your experience so you can communicate your value to employers during interviews.
- An accompaniment to application letters, inquiries to employers and employment applications.
- A reference to give professional and personal contacts, friends, relatives, classmates, and alumni who might be able to refer you to employers.

There isn't one perfect resume format but an effective resume will focus on the employer's needs; communicate your competencies for the kind of work you want; indicate your career direction and interests; create a favorable first impression by being concise, easy to read and professional looking; and demonstrate a sense of direction in your career.

Resume development involves two stages: preparation and writing. Preparation is where most people falter by not generating sufficient foundational information for their resume. Thorough preparation involves a comprehensive self-inventory, including a review of your work, education and extracurricular experiences, plus a clear understanding of your achievements and skills. Preparing a resume should not be a last-minute effort. To develop your resume, follow these steps:

STEP 1:

Assemble Relevant Information

Write down all the details of important facts that you could include on a resume. Go for volume and condense the information later. Keep track of your:

- **Contact Information:** Full name; permanent and temporary addresses; day and evening telephone numbers and a place where messages can be left for you; email address.
- **Career or Job Objective:** This is very important. We will address this further down but seek a career counselor if you need help.
- **Education:** Degrees; majors and minors; graduation dates; GPA; schools; locations; extracurricular activities, honors, awards, research, publications and significant projects. Place highest or most recent degree first. Omit high school information unless it supports your objective.
- **Work Experience:** Paid and non-paid experience - full time, part-time and summer employment; student teaching; internships; volunteer work. Indicate job title, organization and location. Describe work performed, contributions/achievements, demonstrated skills and abilities and dates of service. Repeat items for each work experience. List promotions, expansion of duties, etc.
- **Military Experience:** Rank, service, assignments, number of years served, significant achievements, demonstrated skills and reserve status.
- **Community Service:** Titles, organizations, dates, significant contributions, projects, demonstrated skills and abilities.
- **Professional Affiliations and Status:** Membership, organization names, offices held, projects, certifications and licenses.
- **Special Skills:** Foreign languages, computer competencies, statistics, research, etc.
- **Interests and Activities:** Career related avocations and hobbies.

- **Miscellaneous:** Are you willing to relocate? Where? When can you be available to start work? May your present employer be contacted for a reference? Have you identified individuals who can attest to your past or present performance as a student or employee? Anything else you think is important.
- **Skill Identification:** Your effectiveness in generating job interviews and offers will depend upon your ability to communicate your skills to employers. Most candidates seldom look beyond job titles, however most job titles do not reflect the complexities of a position and can be misleading. If you know your skills you will discover that they are transferable from one work environment to another. Expand your thinking about the kinds of work environments and organizations that could use someone with your skills.

How can you identify your strongest skills and the ones you enjoy using? Make a list of specific activities or achievements in which you performed well and you found satisfying. Then, focus on the five to seven most significant ones and identify the specific skills and competencies you demonstrated in each. Look for patterns and use the information to strengthen your resume.

STEP 2:

Select the Most Appropriate Resume Format

Again, no one resume style is suitable for everyone; each person is unique and each resume should be custom-tailored. Consider your qualifications, objective, work history, and the kind of employer you are seeking before you select a style. The most common resume formats are chronological, functional and combination:

CHRONOLOGICAL

Jobs and education are listed in reverse chronological order (most recent first). List employment dates at the end of each position description. What you did is more important than when you did it. This easy to write format highlights a steady employment record and provides a concise guide for interviewing. Employers generally prefer the chronological format. However, it can reveal employment gaps and may put undesired emphasis on less significant experiences. Skills may be difficult to highlight unless written into descriptions.

FUNCTIONAL

This style highlights qualifications, skills and related achievements with little emphasis on employment dates. It is difficult to write without thorough knowledge of your skills. But it can stress selected skill areas that are in demand and incorporate non-paid, relevant experiences. Employers are less familiar with this format and may want to see additional work history information.

COMBINATION

This format is similar to the functional resume, but employment history is included in a separate section. It emphasizes your most relevant qualifications while including work chronology and functional descriptions. However, it usually is difficult to write and the functional and chronological areas must be described in detail without overlapping. Since it takes longer to read, an employer may lose interest unless it is concise, well written and attractive.

STEP 3:

Write a First Draft of Your Resume

There are probably dozens of resumes sitting on an employers desk. The challenge is to make your resume stand out positively from the rest. The text should support your objective with specific documentation, just as you would support comments in a research paper with references to relevant evidence in the literature:

- Place the most important information first. If your education is most supportive of your objective, put it first. If you have relevant work experience, that should come first.

- Lengthy, detailed descriptions can be a liability rather than an asset. Get to the point. Emphasize areas of expertise beneficial to the employer. Keep it neat and organized. Appearance counts.
- Format should remain consistent (tense of verbs, order of information, layout, etc.)
- Height, weight, color of hair, state of health and other personal characteristics are irrelevant. Omit them.
- Do not use abbreviations. Use full descriptions.
- Names of references should not be included on your resume. Write: "References available upon request" or omit this item altogether.
- Important aspects of your experience should be clear by glancing at the resume. Include brief job descriptions, centered headlines, generous borders, and underline or boldface where needed.
- Describe your experience in terms of what you accomplished. Use action verbs to strengthen descriptions of your experiences (designed, improved, researched, organized, wrote, managed, conducted, etc.). Employers are interested in results.
- Eliminate the pronoun I and do not use full sentences. Use short, clear phrases starting with the past tense of action verbs. Avoid introductory and wind-up phrases like, "My duties included...". List achievements whenever possible. Use some jargon of the chosen field (e.g., can program in C++ and JavaScript). If you are a veteran however, do not use military jargon. Redefine your military experience in civilian language.

Objective Statement

Your objective statement is more important than you think. It specifies that type of work you desire and what you have to offer. It suggests that you have purpose and direction in your job search. Your objective should be centered around your work, not yourself, and it should not contain trite terms that emphasize what you want (opportunity for advancement, position working with people, a challenging position, etc.).

Objectives may be stated in various styles and sophistication levels. A basic objective may be stated as an occupational designation - Mechanical Engineer, Elementary Education Teacher or Accountant. It may be stated as an occupational designation with a specialty area - Electrical Engineer in Research and Design or Special Education Teacher in Learning Disabilities or Public Accountant - Taxes. The objective for a person with generalist background may simply specify a position and then present two or three skill areas that should be used in any setting - A public relations position that will maximize opportunities to develop and implement programs, to organize people and events, and to communicate positive ideas and images.

STEP 4:

Critique Your Resume

After you are satisfied with your first, typed draft, ask several individuals who are familiar with your career to evaluate your resume.

STEP 5:

Write a Final Draft and Make Your Resume Look Professional

Incorporate feedback from the critique into the final draft. Edit ruthlessly and make every word count. Use space attractively. Generate your resume on a word processor and a laser printer. The master copy must be error free, with clear, dark type. Reproduce your resume onto high quality bond paper, preferably in white, ivory, or pale gray. Consider purchasing matching stationary and envelopes for your cover letters. Your resume does not guarantee you a job, but it can open or close the first door.

Good luck.