

RESUME WRITING: Tips on Content and Style

75-80% of all resumes received by company executives are discarded! Why? Sometimes it's because the company doesn't have a need, but all too often it's because the applicants have not described themselves effectively.

Many candidates are not rejected because they lack the qualifications required, but rather because they haven't presented themselves well. Employers are much more likely to favor an applicant who submits a succinct and well-organized resume.

Brevity is a must!

Personnel managers are bombarded by stacks of resumes every day. At best, you'll have about 30 seconds to convey your message. As an example of what not to do, consider the following story: When learning how to prepare resumes, a college business writing class was handed the resume of a 47-year-old male. It was eight pages long! This guy went all the way back to his childhood paper route.

A resume is a profile—not a biography.

Remember, your resume is designed to peak an employer's interest. While eight pages certainly might get you noticed, it lacks appeal. Who in their right mind would read it? Stick to relevant experiences that show-off your most valuable assets. Wow the employer with information that demonstrates your skills and abilities, and shows why the employer can't afford to be without you. Prove that you are worth interviewing.

Emphasize experiences that would be of interest to a potential employer.

When writing about past experiences look for activities and events that clearly highlight your qualities. Ask yourself these questions:

- What have you done that shows responsibility?
- Have you had any leadership experience?
- Are you a team player?

To demonstrate your skills, cite specific examples of things you have done that prove you have the skills you claim. Point to as many tangible and meaningful accomplishments as possible.

Avoid information that does not relate to your career goals. No matter how fascinating your experiences might be, they waste valuable space if they don't show-off your credentials. The interview will provide you with ample time to tell the employer what an interesting person you are. It's good to show diversity and demonstrate that you're "well-rounded," but don't get carried away. Emphasize those experiences that would be of interest to a potential employer.

Don't air your dirty laundry.

Exclude all negative information from your resume. You must be honest, but there is no need to point out potential problems to the employer. Your resume is designed to be a selling tool. However, be prepared to answer questions about all your past experiences, good and bad, during your interview. The interview gives you the opportunity to explain why something less than wonderful may have occurred in your past. Often you can use the interview to turn a negative into a positive!

Skip the photo.

Do not include your photograph. Because the federal government has ruled that pictures on resumes are discriminatory, all photographs must be removed by the prospective employer. So even if you are the best looking person on the block, skip the photo. Your picture may lead a prospective employer to ignore your resume, or it may give the impression that you don't understand the business world. Remember, in your resume, you are selling your experience, knowledge and abilities. Let these speak for themselves.

Some Tips on Style

The appearance of your resume is critical. If it looks sloppy or is hard to read, it will probably be thrown out! No matter how wonderful your background might be, if your resume lacks style, it won't attract an employer's attention. The resume is your career portrait—you want it to be neat and attractive. Make an extra effort to prepare a carefully typed presentation on good quality paper. Use Microsoft Word to create a well-organized document with visual appeal.

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Also, make the most of white space. A resume that says too much is almost as bad as one that says too little. White space, or the area on the page without type, can be used to enhance the appearance of the text. For example, which of the following boxes appears more attractive:

Box A

Use White Space Effectively. Use areas without text to make the most of a document's appearance. Use white or blank areas to offset the text that you really want to emphasize. White space makes such a difference.

Box B

Use White Space Effectively

- Use areas without text to make the most of a document's appearance.
- Use white or blank areas to offset the text that you really want to emphasize.
- White space makes such a difference!

As you can see, the white space in Box B enhances the eye-appeal of the written text. While you should not substitute style for substance, use white space to make your resume as attractive as possible.

Tone it down.

The tone of your writing is also important, so be careful not to appear arrogant in your resume. Although you may have had some great experiences in your life, you're probably not the only one who has had them. You never know who will be reading your resume, so avoid statements that sound like you think you're "better" than others. If you stick to writing about your specific accomplishments in a positive and professional tone, the quality of your experience will come shining through.

Use an accepted resume format.

Employers have to read thousands of resumes. They become very proficient at quickly scanning a resume and pulling out the important information. By blazing your own trail, you may wind up annoying your reader. Look professional by demonstrating that you know how to properly prepare a resume.

Every rule seems to have an exception. Such is the case with resume formatting. If you are looking for a position in a field where creativity is essential (e.g., graphic arts, advertising), you can and should be creative in your resume formatting. In creative fields, the appearance of the resume can have as great an effect on the reader as the content.

Check your resume...then check it again!

Take care to use proper spelling and grammar. No matter what type of position you seek, you must still communicate effectively. If you demonstrate poor command of the English language, you are not likely to get hired. You're an educated individual—prove it!

While it's important to use the spell-checker in Microsoft Word, don't rely on it! Spell-checking programs are great, but they do not edit content. It's easy to make a typo, or leave a blank space that totally changes the meaning of a sentence. Too often the spell-checker misses key errors. Be sure to proofread your text carefully. In addition, have one or more friends critique your resume to review both your use of English and your content. You will be surprised at what great advice people can give you just by adding their perspective to your writing.

Resume-Writing Do's & Don'ts

Do...

- ☑ Be concise. Use powerful action verbs to maximize the impact of your words.
- ☑ Write about experiences demonstrating skills and abilities relevant to the job.
- ☑ Use concrete examples to show you have the skills the employer needs.
- ☑ Be neat. Stick with an accepted resume format and use white space effectively.
- ☑ Be honest. Don't stretch the truth.
- ☑ Be complete. Don't leave time gaps.
- ☑ Check spelling. Proofread carefully.

Don't...

- ☑ Use more than two pages for your resume; one page can be ideal.
- ☑ Overburden your resume with too much detail or irrelevant anecdotes.
- ☑ Draw your own conclusions about past experiences; stick with the facts.
- ☑ Sound like a braggart or appear arrogant. Be straightforward and factual.
- ☑ Include negative information.
- ☑ Include your photograph.
- ☑ Rely on your computer to catch errors.