

RÉSUMÉ WRITING

A GUIDE TO MARKETING YOURSELF

RESUME OBJECTIVE

A resume is your opportunity to tell employers about your skills, abilities, and experience; a chance to show them that you belong in that job more than anyone else. It may be your only chance to impress them, so do not hold back; sell yourself, be creative, and accentuate the positive. The resume is not the place to express why the job is perfect for you; you need to focus on the employer's point of view. What can you do for them? What needs can you solve for them? Why should they spend precious time interviewing you? With so many applicants, employers are looking for ways to screen you out. Your resume will determine whether you end up in a filing cabinet or in an interview room. This is the purpose of the resume. It will not get you the job, but it will give you the opportunity to demonstrate your abilities in an interview.

ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS OF A RESUME

It is not as difficult to create an effective resume as you might imagine. It is like baking a cake. If you follow the recipe, it will turn out fine. Like all recipes, making a resume requires specific ingredients. To be successful, your resume should:

- Have a clear *Career Objective*.
- Focus on the needs of the employer and outline specific benefits you can offer.
- Present evidence to support those benefits.

- Be honest, without emphasizing negatives.
- Move the employer to take action.

Your *Career Objective* should relate directly to the type of position you are seeking. It should express to the employer how you intend to fit into their organization. This will give employers the impression that you want *their* job rather than just *any* job.

It is important for your resume to focus on the needs of the employer. Once you decide what characteristics you think the employer is looking for, you should indicate that you have the skills to excel in those areas. Your claims must be backed up with evidence from your past education and experiences.

Always be honest in your assertions. Do not exaggerate the importance of your achievements and never include experiences you have not had. Employers know if your claims are realistic or not, and can easily check the validity of your information. This does not mean that you should expose your weaknesses in your resume, though. You can address any flaws you feel the employer should know about in the interview.

The purpose of your resume is to give you the chance to meet with an employer. Your resume must therefore raise the employer's curiosity level enough to entice them to call you in for an interview.

RESUME STRUCTURE

There are several ways to structure an effective resume, so the structure of your resume will depend largely on your own personality, creativity, and job seeking situation. One effective method that relates to a wide variety of career search situations is the *Skills-Based Resume*, which includes the following details:

- Name, Address, and Telephone Numbers.
- Career Objective.
- Highlights of Qualifications.
- Skills and Experience.
- Work History.
- Education.

Career objective. After the necessary contact information, your resume should include a *Career Objective*. Your *Career Objective* should be a brief statement specifically detailing what type of work you are seeking. This helps the employer understand what you want to do for them, where you would fit within their organization, and how they should approach your qualifications. The *Career Objective* will also give you focus for developing the rest of your resume. Only include information in your resume that relates to your stated *Career Objective*.

If you are not quite sure what you want to do, then you are not ready to begin your resume. Take some time to figure out your purpose so you can give your resume a focus. If you do not know what you want, then chances are the employer will not know either. If you have several different goals, then you need to create several resumes, each tailored to a specific objective.

Highlight of qualifications. The *Highlights of Qualifications* section is a summary of your three to five most notable qualifications relative to your *Career*

Objective. The intention here is to grab the attention of the employer by clearly emphasizing the benefits of hiring you. This will entice the employer to keep reading. A helpful technique for formulating these highlights is to imagine how your best friend would explain your qualifications to another friend who had a job opening. They would probably describe your notable accomplishments, special expertise, or related experience.

Skills and experience. One's work experience is often presented in a chronological format, but that method works best for people with an abundance of experience who want to stay in their field of work. For people who have limited experience in their desired career, or who want to change careers, the nucleus of the resume should be the *Skills and Experience* section. This section organizes your experience by the skills necessary to perform your *Career Objective*. Employers are interested in the skills that you have, not a listing of past duties. Remember, you want to focus on the employer's needs, so if they are interested in your skills, it is to your advantage to list them. You should list three to five skills, including areas of knowledge, mental abilities, physical skills, or personal traits. Anything that you feel is necessary to perform the job well is considered a skill.

Under each skill category, you should list three to five accomplishments that prove you are proficient in that skill. It is important to provide evidence to show that you excel in these skill areas. The accomplishments should include things you are proud of that you have done on the job, in a class, in community service, or in pursuit of a hobby. It is always helpful to include benefits that employers have realized due to your efforts. If your actions helped to gain a monetary saving, a more

efficient workplace, or a reduction in problems, then you should list them.

Work history. The next section is *Work History*. This is simply a list of your previous jobs, including volunteer work. This list will provide the evidence for the assertions made in the *Highlights of Qualifications* and *Skills and Experience* sections. Each entry should include the years you were employed, your job title, the name of the organization you worked for, and the city. Your most recent job should be listed first, followed by previous jobs back to graduation, entry to your field, or re-entry to the workforce.

Education. The final section of the resume is *Education*. This section is also used to provide evidence to back up your *Highlights of Qualifications* and *Skills and Experience*. You should list your degree, major, graduation date, school, and city. If you have not completed a degree, you can still list number of course hours, major, dates of attendance, expected graduation date, school, and city. If you are a recent graduate, you can list academic honors and your GPA, if it was over 3.0. You should also list any professional certifications or licenses you have attained. The *Education* section is not as important for job seekers who are in mid-career, so it should be placed at the bottom. If you are seeking your first job after graduation, however, this section is of prime importance. In this instance, it should be placed directly after the *Career Objective*. Also, the *Highlight of Qualifications* section may be replaced with a list of pertinent course work.

USEFUL TIPS

Now you have enough information to create your resume. Here are a few tips to make it more effective:

- Relate everything to your *Career Objective*. Leave out irrelevant details.
- Emphasize relevant skills.
- Back up the skills with evidence from your experience.
- Use action verbs to describe your experience; for example, “created,” “developed,” “increased,” “solved,” “trained,” “organized.”
- Minimize jargon and abbreviations.
- Be concise.
- Limit yourself to one page; two if absolutely necessary.

RESUME FORMAT

The information in your resume is very important, but unless it is attractively laid out, employers will not give it a second glance. Here are some ideas on formatting:

- Put your name and address at the top using larger font than the resume body.
- Place section titles in a column on the left and text in a column on the right.
- Use boldfaced headers to aid scanning.
- Use bullets to list entries.
- Leave white space for a clean look.

PRINTING TIPS

Employers will judge you by your resume, so it is important to give it a professional appearance. This includes the paper and printing. Here are a few tips on how to use printing to project a professional image:

- Produce the original using a carbon film typewriter ribbon, laser printer, or ink jet printer. Do not use a cloth

typewriter ribbon or a dot matrix printer.

- Print copies using a high quality copier or commercial printer.
- Use white or off-white 20 lb. cotton paper.
- Use black ink.

COVER LETTER

If your resume is going to be mailed, it should be accompanied by a cover letter. The purpose of the cover letter is to encourage the employer to read your resume and call you in for an interview. It also gives you the opportunity to tailor your message to the specific job at hand. There are three essential components of a cover letter. Your letter should:

- Catch the reader's attention.
- Build interest by explaining why the employer should hire you, and support your assertions with evidence.
- Move the employer to action.

In the first paragraph you need to attract the reader's attention. You can do this by referring to any previous contact you may have had with the employer. If they know you, they will be more likely to interview you. Otherwise, you can mention the name of an acquaintance of the employer who encouraged you to send a resume. If you are responding to an ad, you should enthusiastically state how well you can meet specific requirements mentioned in the ad. If you have done research on the organization, you can mention how your qualifications will help a specific situation about which you have heard or read.

Once you have the reader's attention you need to build enough interest to entice them to read your resume. This can be done by describing the benefits they will gain by

hiring you, and supporting these claims with evidence. Without repeating your résumé, mention a few skills that are necessary for the job and detail experiences and accomplishments that prove you have those skills. Always refer the reader back to your resume for further information.

Finally, your cover letter should move the employer to call you for an interview. You should request an interview and state how you may be reached. If you are not responding to an ad, always follow up your letter with a telephone call to discuss your career interests. When responding to an ad, only call if a telephone number is given.

MORE INFORMATION

There is some good literature available on resume writing, most of which will be available at your local library. Some helpful titles are:

- *What Color is Your Parachute?*
by Richard Bolles.
- *Resumes Made Easy*
by Marler and Mattia.
- *High Impact Resumes & Letters*
by Krannich and Banis.
- *The Damn Good Resume Guide*
by Yana Parker.

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