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How to Write a Resume

What is a Resume?

A resume is a summary of a person's business or professional qualifications, educational background and work experience. A resume in itself will not land you a job. The purpose of a resume is to get a prospective employer interested enough to contact you. Your resume is the primary marketing tool that advertises your capabilities, qualifications and credentials to potential employers.

The Effect of the Internet.

The Internet has had a profound impact on the job search process, the use of resumes and the way employers recruit and screen applicants. The popularity of Internet Job Boards inundates hiring managers with hundreds of relevant and irrelevant resumes for each job posting. It is imperative that your resume accurately reflects your skills and interest while "cutting through the clutter" of a very competitive job market. The best approach is the use of "keywords". An explanation of the use of keywords is detailed later in this document.

Types of Resumes.

There are three basic types of resumes: *chronological*, *functional* and *combined*. A *chronological* resume lists your work experience in reverse chronological order beginning with your present or most recent position. Include the name and address of the company, the dates of employment, job titles and a description of your responsibilities in order of importance.

A *functional* resume emphasizes your accomplishments and duties instead of your employers, employment dates and job titles. This format is useful to draw attention away from work areas you do not wish to highlight and is commonly used when changing career fields.

A *combined* resume is a hybrid of the *chronological* and *functional* resume. This format is especially useful for individuals who have a long work history. It highlights aspects that are most relevant to a desired position as well as summarizing the career history.

In general, you should use a *chronological* resume unless:

- Your employment history is erratic or extremely long
- You are seeking to change career fields
- You are attempting to return to a previous career field

- You possess an unusual combination of skills that you wish to emphasize rather than a linear progression of your career.

The First Step in Writing a Resume.

The first step in writing a resume is to assess your skills. In order to sell yourself to a potential employer you need to communicate your strong points, skills and accomplishments. Make a list of your personal strengths. Make a list of “keywords” common and in vogue in your professional area of interest. Your resume needs to communicate how your personal strengths will benefit the employer.

Using Keywords.

Every discipline and profession has its own language or jargon. Use of specific keywords relevant to your profession can kick your resume “to the top of the pile” for consideration. A word of caution- do not use industry specific terms such as *inventory management*, *database extraction* or *market analysis* unless you truly understand them and have experience in them.

Elements of a Resume:

- **Personal Information-** Lead with this at the top of each page. Include your name, address, phone number and e-mail address (if you have one).
- **Objective-** An objective statement is used to define the position you are applying for. It should be a clearly written, concise statement that communicates your career objectives.
- **Experience-** List your work experience in chronological order, with your most recent experience first. If you are applying for your first job list any odd jobs, volunteer work and other unpaid work experience you may have performed in the past. College students should include any work-related experience that helped finance their education. Give a description of the job function that details and demonstrates your skills.
- **Skills-**Skills can be listed in the experience section, where the job description is given or in a separate section. You might want to consider listing skills at the top of the resume after the objective section to highlight skills relevant to the job opening.
- **Education-** State your highest level of education (high school/college) and the dates of attendance. Give your date of graduation if you have graduated. Or, you can give the year of your expected graduation. If you are a student with a GPA of 3.0 or higher you can list it.
- **Extracurricular Activities or Accomplishments-** This is a miscellaneous section where you should list achievements, awards and activities.
- **References-** Have a separate sheet ready with names and phone numbers of references. Make sure you contact your references and ask permission to use their names first.

Resume Length

One of the most commonly asked questions about a resume is “how long should it be”. Traditionally, job seekers were told that a resume should never exceed one page. Those who broke this golden rule were destined for the circular file. Times have changed and so has the criteria for resume length.

The new guideline is simply that a resume should be long enough to entice hiring managers to call you for job interviews. As vague as that sounds there is no hard-and-fast length rule that works for everyone. Factors to consider include career objective, occupation, industry, years of experience, number of employers, scope of accomplishments and education or training.

Consider a One-Page Resume if:

- You have less than ten years of experience.
- You are pursuing a radical career change and your experiences are not relevant to your new goal.
- You have held one or two positions with one employer.

Consider a Two-Page Resume if:

- You have ten or more years of experience related to your goal.
- Your field requires technical or engineering skills and you need space to list and prove your technical knowledge.

Put the most important information at the top of the first page. Lead your resume with a career summary so your key credentials appear at the forefront of the resume. On the second page, include a page number and include your name and contact information.

Consider a Three-Page Resume or Longer If:

- You're a senior-level manager or executive with a long track record of leadership accomplishments.
- You are in an academic or scientific field with an extensive list of publications, speaking engagements, professional courses, licenses, patents or projects.

Multiple-page resumes can use addendum pages after page two. Job seekers can decide whether or not to send the full document or just the first two pages to a potential employer, based on the job opportunity requirements.

Some Resume Do's:

- Do target your resume for the job you are applying for.
- Do keep a copy on disk.
- Do use a laser printer (if possible) for professional looking copy.
- Do stress accomplishments. Include figures to substantiate your claims.
- Do use strong action words (See the attached list).
- Do make the resume attractive and well organized for the eye. However, don't get too fancy with italicized words, fonts and special graphics as they do not scan well on many employer's computers and printers.

Some Resume Don'ts:

- Don't forget to proofread for errors including having someone else review your resume.
- Don't mention salary.
- Don't volunteer too much information up front. Include only enough information to encourage an employer to find out more.
- Don't include references. Reference requests are generally made when there is an actual hiring interest.
- Don't forget to contact the Career Development & Counseling Center in Founders, Room 121 to arrange an appointment with a counselor for help in putting your resume together!