

Writing a Resume that Will Inform, Impress and Intrigue

The next time you submit your resume to a company, imagine two piles of paper on the hiring manager's desk. The tall stack has hundreds of resumes, for which their authors will receive carefully worded rejections (if acknowledged at all). The short stack, perhaps less than an inch high, has resumes that will ultimately lead to interviews. What gets your resume into the smaller pile is an understanding of what it can and cannot do for you. Consider this: A resume should not tell the reader every detail about you and your prior experience - its purpose is to get you an interview.

Resume readers want to know three things within the first few seconds:

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Your current or past level

Level is generally measured in years of experience, title or other responsibility, which may tell the reader how flat or steep your learning and earning curve is.

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The roles and functions you can perform

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Settings in which you have performed them

In many cases, past settings reflect the kinds of places you want to work. If similar to the company to which you're applying, staffing people are likely to believe you can repeat your previous triumphs. The following guidelines suggest this thought is at the forefront of every hiring manager's mind: The best evidence of what you can do for me in the future is what you have already done in the past. Thus, you will impress decision makers by avoiding common resume blunders.

Perception is the first truth for the resume reader

Whether you call them achievements, results, accomplishments or contributions, including quantifiable results in your resume is one of the best ways to land that initial interview. One method, which has been around for a long time, is an approach called SMART: Specific, Measurable, Action oriented, Realistic and Time based. Listing accomplishments using each of the above points ensures your resume has impact.

Use hard numbers whenever possible

They grab the reader's attention and highlight professional achievements. Stay away from overused percentages. As long as you are not giving away proprietary information, hard figures enhance your résumé's credibility. They are definite, objective and measurable. It is arguable whether you "significantly improved productivity." It is better to let numbers speak for themselves (e.g., increased unit sales 32% in six months, while simultaneously increasing market share by 6%). Let the resume reader decide whether that is a

significant productivity improvement. Numbers are presumed to be true. Since resume readers can easily verify them, they figure you would not be naive enough to embellish or make them up.

Do not use out of date and poorly written objective statements

Far too many resumes use objective statements, such as: "A challenging accounting position utilizing abilities developed through my experience and education, with the opportunity for professional growth based on performance." This type of statement is valueless because it says nothing about the person's skills, experience level or ability to quickly contribute. It does not separate you from hundreds of others, nor does it clearly illustrate how you can enhance an employer's bottom line.

Since most objective statements are self serving, consider the following scenario: Imagine looking for a new car and being greeted by a salesperson who says, "I'll give you three excellent reasons to buy a car from me: You can reduce my inventory, allow me to go on vacation with a clear mind, and help me win a sales contest." Would you care? Certainly not. You only want to know about features of various cars.

Well, guess what? Employers feel the same way. An Achievement Based Resume (ABR) is the best way for you to highlight the benefits of hiring you. An ABR formatted resume allows you to incorporate a summary statement, which is a thumbnail sketch of who you are and what you can do. Position it at the top of your resume. Like the headline of a printed ad, it should grab the reader's attention, draw him/her to your resume and prompt a call for an interview.

Do not waste prime space with a self serving objective, such as "opportunities to advance," a fast track environment," or other factors to make you happy. Most employers will knock you out of the running immediately if you don't prove you care first about their needs.

Do not use full sentences with personal pronouns

"Directed project" says exactly the same thing as "I directed the project." Similarly, avoid statements that do not reflect what you actually did. Phrases such as "participated in," "involved with" and "member of" do not paint a vivid picture for the reader; they merely suggest you were present. So, as Sgt. Joe Friday of the old Dragnet series used to say, "The facts, ma'am, nothing but the facts." When writing or rewriting your resume, imagine that Sgt. Friday will be reading it; just provide the facts.

Your "summary statement" is the most important part of your resume (after your name and address section at the top).

If it positions you incorrectly, your resume can be a handicap. If done correctly, it will soften the reader by predisposing him/her into thinking of you in a certain way. When you meet the reader, he/she will have a preconceived notion about you. Tailor your resume to make your desired impression. Most people never consider using their resume to create a certain impression of themselves. Remember, your credentials and experiences are only one half of what you are selling. Your style and personality make up the other half.

Do not write out figures, especially when you are talking about money

One hundred fifty thousand dollars does not jump off the page like \$150,000 does. Also, if you are unsure about a specific number or figure but would still like to use it in your resume, be sure to preface it with a "disclaimer statement," such as: approximately, in the range of, roughly, etc.

Keep in mind that you will be the only person to read a resume longer than two pages.

Unless you are a senior executive, a resume longer than two pages will seem self indulgent or undisciplined.

Provide a third page to accommodate a long list of memberships, technical expertise, publications or community involvement.

Use the heading, "Addendum," which suggests the crucial information is on the first two pages. Stating, "References available upon request" is unnecessary. It is a given that if you are asked for references, you will furnish them. Additionally, the heading "Resume" is worthless; we all know what it is.

Just as a strategic business plan helps a business run more effectively, a strategic resume plan makes for a more successful resume. A winning resume requires a game plan. It will be competing with hundreds of resumes for the chance at a choice interview. You can't afford to throw something together in haste and expect it to work effectively. Although most job seekers are often impatient to complete their resume, it must be stressed that they require hard work.

If done correctly, a final draft takes time. Many men and women think they can wing it through the job search with a hastily thrown together resume. This is a major job search blunder, since readers draw inferences about you from your resume. If it looks sharp, they may conclude, "If this person is organized with their resume content, they will probably bring the same kind of systematic approach to their job."