

# HOW TO WRITE A GOOD RESUME

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*The resume is a primary tool in finding a good job. When writing a resume, one should pay particular attention to its overall structure. There are several different guidelines that can help in doing this.*

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## SELECT YOUR FORMAT

Selecting your resume format is a major strategic decision. Real and compelling differences characterize the two most common formats, which have impact on the receptivity employers have to your initiatives.

No universally "right" format is appropriate for all people. Your review of your own objective and background will be your most effective guide to selecting the best format for you.

## THE CHRONOLOGICAL FORMAT

Your employment record is the primary organizing principle for this format, a job-by-job historical narrative of your work effectiveness.

### **Merits:**

This format accentuates your formal qualifications for the work you are seeking. Appropriate for directly qualified candidates with linear progression paths, it showcases the track record of clearly pertinent, often increasingly responsible experiences. Seasoned judgment in grappling with job challenges is emphasized. Recruiters and some hiring managers are accustomed to, and often prefer, a traditional format. Many find it familiar, straightforward and easy to use when making preliminary decisions of inclusion and exclusion.

### **Drawbacks:**

For candidates who are starting or changing a career, this format emphasizes the lack of direct, in-depth experience in the targeted career area. It underscores past identity rather than future potential.

Gaps in employment, conspicuously brief or long affiliations, and time periods elapsed since certain qualifying experiences are spotlighted.

Rather than accenting accomplishments on the job, it lends itself to a somewhat dry, repetitive recitation of job responsibilities.

### **Criteria for Use:**

The chronological format is particularly effective for people with clear-cut qualifications, who are continuing or advancing in a particular career direction. It

is acceptable for other, less overtly qualified people. This format can be productive if you cite relevant skills and tasks that support your objective within the job-by-job description.

## **THE FUNCTIONAL FORMAT**

Your key skills, knowledge and related accomplishments are the primary organizing principles of this format, citing relevant examples of effectiveness as proof and prediction of your ability to contribute.

### **Merits:**

This format provides an opportunity to establish the transferability of skills and accomplishments for candidates who are starting or changing a career. Grouping these items in self-contained categories builds a case for your ability to function in a new situation. The conventional resume format dilutes or contradicts this talent.

Not limited to paid employment, you can give status to qualifying experience from every area of life. This format widens the scope of informal experiences supportive of your career objective, including special projects, internships, community service and relevant leisure pursuits. It eliminates distinctions that discount their importance.

### **Drawbacks:**

For directly qualified candidates with a linear progression path, this format challenges the standard presentation of personal strengths. Executive recruiters and other employment professionals prefer a job-by-job description to trace with clarity exactly what has been done, for whom, where and when.

Some employers assume that this format hides background information of importance.

In a purely functional resume, key time/space anchors that employers expect are not given. This information can be essential to credibility.

### **Criteria for Use:**

The functional format is particularly effective and highly recommended for people without direct experience in the area of their career objective. Since it accents skills and achievements, it is effective and often desired by people who are well established in a career.

## **THE COMBINATION FORMAT**

The combination format recognizes the inherent drawbacks of both the chronological and functional formats used in their pure forms.

- The pure chronological resume is too mundane, a bland work autobiography. It is descriptive, but tends not to be persuasive about personal qualifications.

- The pure functional resume is too free-floating and reads like a set of assertions about abilities, unlinked to verifiable sources of confirmation.
- Whether you prefer the chronological or functional format, the most effective resume blends the best elements of each.

## **The Chronological-Combination Resume:**

This format retains the structure of a job-by-job delineation of experience and emphasizes accomplishments, the hallmark of the functional resume.

## **The Functional-Combination Resume:**

This format retains the structure of key skills, knowledge and accomplishments, incorporating a distilled EXPERIENCE section, which denotes career-related time/space anchors, the hallmark of the chronological resume.

All References to Resumes in This Guide Assume a Combination Format:

Chronological-combination resumes and functional-combination resumes will be referred to simply as chronological and functional resumes.

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*After deciding on the appropriate format, the way to organize the information is equally as important. Below are some guidelines to assist you in creating the best resume.*

## **CREATING A DAMN GOOD RESUME**

### **I. A DAMN GOOD RESUME HAS FIVE ESSENTIAL PARTS:**

- A.** A clearly stated **JOB OBJECTIVE**.
- B.** The **HIGHLIGHTS OF QUALIFICATIONS**.
- C.** A presentation of directly **RELEVANT SKILLS** and **EXPERIENCE**.
- D.** A chronological **WORK HISTORY**.
- E.** A listing of relevant **EDUCATION** and **TRAINING**.

### **II. GETTING STARTED**

**A. Work History** - Create a "Work History Master List," keeping in mind that not everything on your "Master List" will necessarily appear on **THIS** version of your resume. For paid and volunteer jobs or positions, list the dates started and ended, your job title, and the name and city of the company or organization. Put these jobs in chronological order.

**B. Education and Training** - Create an "Education and Training Master List," this time including:

1. Schools you attended, with dates, degrees honors.
2. Personal study in your field (classes, workshops, and other informal ways you have learned).
3. Any other credentials or certificates.

**C. Job Objective** - Compose a clearly stated Job Objective, using a minimum number of words. Ask yourself these questions:

1. *WHAT* do I want to do?
2. *FOR WHOM* or *WITH WHOM* do I want to do it?
3. *WHERE* do I want to do it?
4. *AT WHAT LEVEL OF RESPONSIBILITY?*

**D. Relevant Skills And Experience** - What you want to create - contrary to everything you've heard in the past about resumes - is a word picture of you in your proposed new job, created out the best of your past experience. Steps include:

1. So first, get out your Job Objective and ask yourself what are the five or six major skills required for that job.
2. Get out a sheet of paper for each of those skills or special knowledge areas, and label each page.
3. Then ask yourself, "When did I use those same skills in the past?"
4. Under each of the skills listed, begin to write action-oriented "One- Liner" statements that clearly and concisely describe how you used or developed those skills in the past.
5. Then you can assemble the Relevant Skills and Experience section of your new-job resume by putting those five or six skills paragraphs together on one page.

**E. The Highlights of Qualifications** - The essential message of the highlights is two-fold:

1. First, that you are **QUALIFIED** - you have the experience, credentials, and basic skills needed for the job.
2. Second, that you are also **ESPECIALLY TALENTED** (perhaps even gifted) in the areas that really matter - in other words, for **THIS** job you're "hot".
3. A typical group of Highlights might include :
  1. How much relevant experience you have.
  2. What your formal training and credentials are, if relevant.
  3. One significant accomplishment, very briefly stated..
  4. One or two outstanding skills or abilities.
  5. A reference to your values, commitment, or philosophy if appropriate.

### III. PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

- A. Assemble the five parts of your resume - Job Objective, Highlights, Relevant Experience, Work History, and Education - type up a draft copy.
- B. Omit anything personal and unrelated to your Job Objective (age, marital status, height/weight, hobbies).
- C. Omit the details of less important past jobs that create an image you don't want to take with you.
- D. Keep it to one page if you can.
- E. If your resume is on two pages:
  - 1. Present your "aces" on page one (job objective, skills, accomplishments).
  - 2. Use page two for the work history and education.
  - 3. Be sure to write "continued" on page one, and "page two" PLUS your full name on the second page.
  - 4. Print it on two sheets of paper, and don't staple them together (the two pages can be placed side-by-side to view the whole resume at once).

*PLEASE NOTE: For a more detailed account of constructing a resume according to the above process, consult the new edition of "The Damn Good Resume Guide", by Yana Parker, (Ten Speed Press, 1989). Used by permission of the author.*

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*There are still several important points to remember while writing your resume.*

## HOW TO WRITE A BETTER RESUME

### OFFICE TEAM

*Specialized Administrative Staffing*

A good resume cannot get you a job; but a bad resume can prevent you from getting the interview - and without the interview there's no chance of getting the job.

The new rules for better resumes start with the fact that there are fewer rules. There's an opportunity for some creativity, but not for gimmicks. What works today is conservative style and a focus on a key achievements - especially those that are of particular interest to the reader.

Remember what interests an employer, for let's say an executive assistant position, may not interest the employer hiring a desktop publishing specialist. That's why it is essential that people who qualify for several different jobs (and most do) have several different resumes. All resumes should be accurate and truthful, but each should highlight different strengths as they relate to the job opening.

Better jobs have become more competitive than they were in the 70s and 80s. And they will continue to get more competitive in the 90s, as these better jobs require increased specialized skills.

Since the resume is a primary tool in finding a better job, extra time spent on its preparation is a good investment. In fact, some astute people constantly update their resumes, even though they may never use them to get another job. A reminder of your talents and accomplishments, a current resume can provide you with clues to getting a better job in your present company or the ammunition to prove you deserve a salary increase.

We believe the best way to explain the new "rules" of resume writing is to explain what you should always do and also what you should never do.

**We wish you success!**

## **ALWAYS**

- Always print your resume on standard letter size, white or ivory rag paper.
- Always have the resume professionally typed, but not typeset, with plenty of space between paragraphs, and allow for adequate margins.
- Always use conventional English. Stay away from multi-syllable words when a one or two syllable word is clearer.
- Always use short paragraphs - preferably no longer than five lines.
- Always make sure the resume and the cover letter are error-free. Proofread, and have others proofread to.
- Always rewrite a resume for a specific company. It's extra work, but may well pay off.
- Always include your significant contributions at each one of your jobs.
- Always allow the most space to the jobs that are most relevant to the job you're applying for.
- Always list your activity with professional, trade and civic associations - but only if they're appropriate.
- Always keep a permanent file of your achievements, no matter how inconsequential they may appear to be. This is the basis for a good resume, and it is also essential information to get a raise or promotion.
- Always give each of your references a copy of your resume.
- Always send a brief, customized letter with each resume.
- Always send your resume by messenger overnight mail if you're applying for a high salary level job and you're reasonably convinced you fit the job specifications.
- Always re-read your resume before interview - chances are the interviewer did just that too.

# NEVER

- Never give reasons for termination or leaving a job on the resume. In almost all cases, the reader can find negative connotations to even the best reason. You're far better off explaining it in person.
- Never take more than two lines to list hobbies, sports and social activities. When in doubt, "leave them out".
- Never state "References Available on Request". It's assumed, and clutters up the resume. Other things to leave out include your social security number, your spouse's occupation and your personal philosophies.
- Never list references on the resume.
- Never use exact dates. Months and years are sufficient.
- Never include the date your resume was prepared. If your search takes longer than a few months, the resume will appear outdated.
- Never include your company phone number unless your immediate boss is aware of your departure.
- Never include your height, weight or remarks about your physical appearance or health.
- Never list your high school or grammar school if you're a college graduate.
- Never state your objectives on your resume unless the resume is targeted to that job or occupation.
- Never use professional jargon unless you're sure the resume will be read by someone who understands the buzz-words,
- Never use the so-called "action words" like sparked, accelerated, and streamlined. They're passé.
- Never provide salary information on the resume. Save it for the interview. If you are required to give that information, reveal it in the cover letter.
- Never lie.