

CREATING RESUMES THAT GET YOU INTERVIEWS

Getting Started

The key thing to keep in mind is that a winning resume is not one that gets you the job: it is one that gets you the interview. It is rare that anyone gets hired just from the resume. You want to create a resume that gets a potential employer interested enough to want to meet you in person. A hiring manager receives an average of over 120 resumes for every job opening. You want your resume to stand out among the pack. And remember, you only have 10 seconds to capture his or her attention. Here are some things to think about as you prepare your resume:

- Are you doing a targeted or a general career search?
- What is your career objective?
- Do you know what your potential employer is looking for?
- Which makes you more marketable, your experience or your education?
- What kind of a visual image do you want your resume to portray?

FAQs

How important is it to have a defined career objective?

If you don't have a clear, defined, and specific career objective, you might as well not even send in your resume. It's not enough to say, "Seeking a middle management position in a dynamic organization." Be more specific, and describe your ideal job. More details on this below.

What is the key purpose of a resume?

Many people are under the mistaken impression that employers make hiring decisions based on the résumé. They do not. Instead, they go through the pile and narrow it down to a manageable number that meet the basic job criteria. They decide how many people they want to bring in for an interview. Let's say they want to interview five people, so they pick the top five résumés that most closely match the job criteria. These people get invited in for the interview and then have a chance to sell themselves face-to-face.

Is it true that my résumé should be limited to one page?

This is the "One Page Myth," and it is not true. It depends on the organization, on the industry, and on the complexity of your qualifications. You must grab the reader's attention very quickly, but that can be done in a two- or three-page résumé just as easily as in a one-page résumé. The key is to have an objective or a summary statement at the beginning that really attracts the hiring manager's interest.

Making It Happen

Even if you are not looking for a job, you should update your résumé at least annually, if not more often. It is usually a good idea to add any new achievements or accomplishments as they occur. Otherwise they are easy to forget. The steps that are described here are aimed at people who are creating a résumé for the first time, but they can also be useful in considering how you might want to update and improve your current résumé.

Decide on Whether You Are Doing a Targeted or a General Career Search

Let's say that you are currently working and that someone contacts you about a specific job opening at another company. Or you learn about a promotional opportunity within your current company. If that's the case, you are doing a targeted career search, and you will custom design your résumé to fit that particular job.

On the other hand, if you are just out of college, or you are unhappy in your current position, or you were recently laid off, then you are probably planning to contact a large number of potential employers in many different organizations and diverse industries. In this case, you are conducting a general career search, and you will probably want to have between one and three résumé formats. For instance, if you have a background in both electronics and photography, you might have one résumé that highlights your photographic skills for one set of employers, and another résumé that highlights your electronics skills for another set of employers.

Select a résumé type and length

Decide on the best type of résumé for your particular background and career goals. Also, decide on the length of your résumé. Fast-moving industries such as advertising and Internet companies tend to respond more favorably to a short and concise résumé. More conservative and status-valuing organizations such as financial companies and stable manufacturing industries tend to want to know more details about your qualifications and won't be as put off by a two- or even three-page résumé. If you are uncertain, you can check with one of the résumé books focusing on particular résumés, or utilize the resources provided in For More Information.

Create Your "Career Objective" Statement

Before you sit down to write your résumé, you should have a very clear idea of the kind of job you are looking for, and the kind of company you would like to work for. Your name and contact information will go at the very top of your résumé, and your Career Objective is the next major section. It is the statement that may make the difference between whether your résumé goes into the "Consider Further" pile or the "Send a Rejection Letter" pile. Here are some examples of Career Objective statements that start out too broad and are then made more specific. The amount of detail you provide in your Career Objective will also be based on whether you are doing a one-, two-, or three-page résumé. Look at these example texts to see how to turn statements that are too general into more focused descriptions.

Too general: Position in the broadcast industry.

More specific: A dynamic, multi-talented and experienced broadcast professional is seeking a position that will make full use of an in-depth background as a television producer, production manager, scriptwriter, and networker. Seeking a challenging production manager position that will provide an avenue for contributing creative talents and international experience in the broadcast industry.

Too general: Managerial position in a finance organization.

More specific: Highly motivated professional is seeking a position that will fully exploit advanced education in managerial accounting and experience in all areas of finance and cost control. Proven ability to define issues, propose solutions, and implement changes.

Create headings and prepare the order of the information that will be highlighted in your résumé.

First of all, your résumé is not a life history. Only include the kind of information that is most relevant to your reader, the hiring manager. Even if you are seeking a sales position, the hiring manager is not going to care that you ran a lemonade stand when you were ten years old.

The two major categories of information in the typical résumé are (1) professional experience and (2) education. Decide whether your work experience or your education is the thing that makes you most marketable. If you are just graduating from college and have not had a lot of professional experience, then you want to highlight your educational achievements first. If you have had a reasonable amount of work experience, then that is what you want to highlight first.

Other categories that might go in your résumé can include a few of the following. Only include a category if you feel it provides information that will give you the competitive edge in the particular position you are seeking.

- Academic honors
- Areas of study
- Professional honors
- Continuing education
- Internship
- Advanced training
- Professional affiliations
- Military experience
- Summary of skills and qualifications
- Computer expertise

Create Specific Action-oriented Statements for Each Heading

Educational accomplishments are very straightforward and usually consist of the degree you received, the university and city where you received it, and the date of graduation. Reporting on your professional experience is a much greater challenge. Whole books are written on this subject, and resources are offered at the end of this Action List. All the experts agree that résumé statements should begin with an action verb and, as much as possible, include measurable results. For example:

- Designed and developed ISO-9000 program that led to a 19% increase in international sales.
- Managed a 300-bed healthcare facility and improved patient satisfaction ratings by 24% over two years.
- Created a new process engineering method that saved manufacturing \$64,000 per year.

Put It All Together

Use high quality paper and design the résumé so that it is easy to read and professional looking. Résumé books provide lots of examples, and you will notice that they make liberal use of white space. You may wish to ask other people's opinions about your résumé, but realize that if you ask 20 people you will get 20 opinions, and in the end you are the one who needs to feel comfortable with it.

Follow Up, and Always Say "Thank You"

When you send your résumé out, you will follow up with a call to set up an interview. Regardless of whether or not you get the job, always send a thank-you letter.

Common Mistakes

You Send an Old Résumé Because It's All You've Got

An opportunity comes up and you need to respond quickly, so you pull an old résumé out of file and send it off. But it doesn't really represent who you are now. Update your résumé on a regular basis so that you are never caught by surprise.

The Résumé Is Too "Busy" and Hard to Read

You think that the hiring manager wants as many details as possible, but they are really looking to see if you have at least the basic qualifications, and they want to find that information quickly. It's hard to do that if the résumé has long sentences, paragraphs, and a lack of white space. It's better to have a two-page résumé that feels more open than a one-page résumé that is solid text. Make your résumé visually appealing with lots of indentations, and with lines inserted between sections.

You Oversell

In an effort to get their attention, you make what might be interpreted as boastful or arrogant claims of success in your résumé. It is much better to let the results that you have achieved speak for themselves.

For More Information

Books:

Cochran, Chuck, and Donna Peerce. "Heart & Soul Résumés." Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black Publishing, 1998.

Jackson, Tom, and Ellen Jackson. "The New Perfect Résumé." New York: Doubleday, 1996.

