

Resume Writing Tips

Purpose of a Resume:

1. To get FOUND (by recruiters, HR personnel, gatekeepers)
2. To be SELECTED for an interview (by gatekeepers and/or hiring managers)

The STANDARD resume format is Chronological.

Functional resumes that highlight functional skills and experience and do not give detail of previous experience are RARELY successful at serving the Purpose of a Resume (to get FOUND and SELECTED)

General Resume Guidelines:

- Keep it simple and leave white space (resumes are reviewed in seconds and notes are written in the margins)
- Don't force the resume to 2 pages – let it run as long as it needs without going overboard.
- Use bullet points, not paragraphs and make your point quickly with few words, no filler or fluff
- Scour your resume for grammar and spelling, have multiple people check it for you.
- Your resume should be clear, direct, professional and easy to read.

Summary of Resume sections:

- **Identification:** Name, address, phone number(s) and email address at top of resume and NOT in the header.
- **Introductory Statement and Summary:** Create a short description that succinctly describes you using just a few adjectives, then quickly summarizes your skills/background in a few sentences.
- **Skills Summary:** List your technical skills, broken out by category (Languages, Networking, Operating Systems, etc.) This should be relatively short and only include those things that are relevant and/or that are unique. If you are a developer, you probably don't want to list MS Word, MS Excel, MS PowerPoint, etc.
- **Employment History:** Start from the most recent and go backwards. List your job title, the company name, location, dates of employment. If this was a contract job, note that. Write a short description of the company, industry and your department/division. Describe your responsibilities and job function. List achievements as bullet points in the ACTION – RESULT format. List technologies used at each job. Every one of the technical skills listed at the top must be accounted for in your employment history.
- **Education and Training:** Include colleges, degrees with majors and dates. Also, list any relevant certifications, professional training, etc.

Things to avoid:

- Don't get cute and make your resume look like a web page, or format it in newspaper columns or in a table format.
- Don't send your resume as a PDF, send it as a Word 2003 document. Most companies and recruiters use software to read your resume, parse out your name and address, create a record in their candidate tracking system and attach the document. PDF's prevent this.
- Don't put your name and address in a header for the same reason as above. Instead, put your name and address at the top of the document body area.
- Avoid putting in an Objective – your resume is an advertisement, describing your skills, education and experience. Your objective is to get the job you applied for – period. Anything else you can put in your cover letter.
- Don't list your hobbies. Nobody cares that you collect string and watch the History Channel.
- Don't force your resume to two pages if it won't fit. Don't let your resume reach 15 pages either – you can summarize the 25 contract jobs you did in the '80's
- Don't list your references in your resume, they should be sent separately only after you have let them know they will be getting a call.
- Do not include your picture, your date of birth or any personal information other than your address, phone and email. In the US, this is not required nor recommended. You can include a professional picture on your LinkedIn profile, however, if you like.

Things to Remember:

- You want to be found! You want to be found on LinkedIn searches, job board searches and by recruiters. Think of how web pages are indexed and liberally use keywords in your resume. This means technologies, software, OS's, environments, compilers, methodologies, hardware, etc. List them under the job position/project where you actually utilized them, then repeat them in the skills section. You want unskilled recruiters, and gatekeepers to see the keywords they have been trained to look for, or you may never get your resume to the hiring manager.
- You WANT your resume to look similar to others. When a gatekeeper (HR person) or hiring manager has hundreds of resumes to look through, you want them to be able to quickly find what they are looking for, and it helps if the resumes have similar, simple structure. If the resume is too cutesy or formatted in some completely different way, it may get passed over.
- Resumes can get rejected because of the "objective" or the cover letter. It is RARE that a resume gets consideration because of the "objective" or cover letter.

Introductory Statement:

The most effective resume will quickly grab the reader's attention. It is essential that you introduce yourself to the reader with a compelling statement that encapsulates your experience.

This statement should be an overall breakdown of your career experience. It should be a simple, yet compelling statement that clearly explains what you bring to the table without over doing the adjectives.

Example Statement:

"A results-driven Software Developer with demonstrated success in the design, development and deployment of large-scale enterprise applications for the financial industry."

Summary:

The summary follows the introductory statement and consists of anywhere from 3 to 10 supporting statements that provide more details about your experience and/or training. These statements should reflect key areas that you feel are strong requirements for the job position. The statements should be compelling, detailed, yet easy to follow.

Let us take a look at some statements that we may want to include in our example:

"Over 20 years of experience developing software for large multi-national financial organizations, credit card corporations and banking institutions. "

The above statement would further document your experience by identifying your years of experience and industry expertise.

"Sun Java 2 Certified professional with deep understanding of object-oriented design and extensive experience building software in C++ and Java."

The above statement would highlight a key certification and highlight your areas of expertise within your field.

"Proven ability to lead and motivate high performance teams. "

This would be considered a statement of personal strength. In this statement you are informing the reader that you can lead teams and you have had success doing so in the past.

"History of building software systems with improved functionality and productivity, consistently meeting critical requirements. "

This is a good example of a strong closing statement that documents that you have achieved success in your field in previous positions.

You can put your statements in as 3 or 4 bullet points or for a more formal approach, put this in paragraph form including the Introductory statement:

"A results-driven Software Developer with demonstrated success in the design, development and deployment of large-scale enterprise applications for the financial industry. Over 20 years of experience developing software for large multi-national financial organizations, credit card corporations and banking institutions. Sun Java 2 Certified professional with deep understanding of object-oriented analysis and design with extensive experience building software in C++ and Java. Proven ability to lead and

motivate high performance teams. History of building software systems with improved functionality and productivity, consistently meeting critical requirements.”

Make sure it is easy to read and no longer that the example above.

Tips for developing the summary:

1. Focus on functional strengths first, such as years of experience, areas of expertise, knowledge of key technologies, knowledge of processes or methodologies, or any other items that are DIRECTLY related to your experience or training. Then if you have the room, you can add statements that reflect personal strengths such as skills regarding communication, leadership, troubleshooting, etc. If possible, you can use these personal strengths in a combination with strong statements of functional expertise.

Example:

"Proven ability to lead, motivate and train large teams with experience managing groups of up to 20 staff members within Project Management Office."

In this case you document your leadership strengths but also mention specific experience managing a PMO office.

"Over 15 years in technical support with proven ability to rapidly troubleshoot, diagnose, and resolve complex technical issues."

In this case you are documenting your technical support experience but also mentioning your troubleshooting skills.

2. Don't be afraid to mention any major certifications, training, IT skills or education in the summary, even if you are building a formal education section and a formal technical skills section. If you are an MCSE and expert in Windows 2000, then let them know in the summary, the tech skills section and the experience section.
3. Don't go overboard with the adjectives and self descriptions. Usually 2 at the most per statement, otherwise the statements become overwhelming and you almost lose some credibility.

Don't do this:

An honest, loyal, well organized, self-motivated problems solver with experience leading people, meeting new challenges, achieving goals and producing positive results

Honestly.... what does this statement mean? Nothing to an employer, its just a bunch of fluff and overused self descriptions.

4. Usually, its good to write the experience section before you write the summary, then its easier for you to look at your experience and summarize it. Also, its a good idea to browse the job boards and pick out some jobs you would like to apply for. Then pay attention to the key requirements and make sure those requirements are addressed in the summary.
5. Often times you hear about individuals that have multiple resumes. Most of the time as busy professionals, we do not have the time necessary to completely rewrite our resume for each specific job we apply for. However, its usually not that time intensive to make modifications to the summary that can help you target the job much more

effectively. After all, targeting, is one of the key elements of marketing and that is what your resume is doing ---- Marketing or Advertising yourself to your employer.

Skills Summary:

NOTE: The following is written for Information Technology professionals, but you can easily apply the same principals to any profession.

For hands-on IT professionals this is critical. For example lets look at a software engineer. There is a major difference between the type of jobs available for a software developer OOAD engineers, database developers and firmware developers are all very different jobs using different technologies. We need to make that clear to employers that you possess a knowledge of specific technologies.

The goal is to develop a detailed outline of your technical skills and break it down into subcategories. This will make it easier for the reader to pick up the specific skills they are looking for.

A good general breakdown would include 5 categories of skills sets: Operating Systems, Hardware, Software, Networking and Programming Languages. A basic example of an IT Resume Technical Skills Section:

Operating Systems: Windows (XP, Vista), AIX Unix, Linux, UBUNTU

Application Software: Siebel, MS Office, Clarify, WinRunner, LoadRunner, ClearCase, Jboss

Protocols and Networking: TCP/IP, DNS, DHCP, FTP, SNMP,

Methodologies: UML, OOD, Agile, Waterfall, SOA, RCA, Six Sigma

Languages: Visual Basic, C, C++,C#, HTML, SML, Java J2EE, JSP, JavaScript, Perl, Python

Of course the subheadings that you choose should reflect the key areas of your field. Often times, network engineers will not have a languages section and software engineers won't have a networking section.

Also, its a good idea to break down the IT skills section into more than just 5 subsections. I have seen this done effectively with up to 10 subsections, although I think going above 10 is overdoing it. For example, a specialized software engineer could build an IT skills section using these subcategories: Programming Languages, Operating Environments, Hardware, API's/Frameworks, Databases, Development Utilities and Applications.

Tips for building the IT Skills Section

1. Be reasonable about the subcategories and don't build so many that you have only 1 or 2 skill sets listed in the subcategory. For one, it tends to make you look weak in that category. For two, it tends to take up too much space and may be forcing you to cut quality information from other portions of the resume.
2. Be reasonable about what you are listing. I have seen resumes with an entire page full of technical skills. This is counterproductive as it makes it extremely difficult for the reader to find what they are looking for. Stick with the key technologies and eliminate skills sets that are either insignificant or so old that no one uses the technology anymore. That's not to say that you should eliminate ALL legacy technologies as sometimes they may be beneficial if the company is planning to migrate to a newer

technology. Use logic and your better judgment to decide. 25-30% of the page is an ideal length for the IT skills section.

3. There are multiple options for formatting the IT skills section. The style above is popular and takes up less room. You can also list the headings on top and the skills below. Use the style that you prefer.

Employment History:

Commonly known as the "body" of the resume, there are numerous styles and formatting options for the experience section, but we will discuss common options and you can choose the style that best suits you.

The job experience section is made up of headings with job titles, companies employed, dates employment, city of employment followed by statements of responsibility and statements of achievement.

The Heading - this should include at minimum:

- Name of the Company you worked for
- Location of the Company (City, ST) - Sometimes Country or Province
- Your Job Title
- Dates of Employment

Example:

AAA Corporation, Chicago, IL
Software Engineer, June 1999 - May 2007

Optionally, you could include multiple titles if applicable and also include a description of your company, which is highly recommended. It is acceptable to use only the year as the date and eliminate months. This is an effective way of hiding gaps in employment. If your work history is consistent then it is recommended to use months. If you have a number of jobs that lasted less than 1 year, it will be difficult to eliminate months without confusing the reader.

Statements of Responsibility - Much like the headline statement in the introduction and summary, you will want to build an opening statement that identifies the overall scope of your responsibilities. The following statements then support the opening statement and provide further details regarding your key duties. Example:

"Develop and implement financial software in support of company's flagship product. Coordinate with accounting staff to define requirements. Design software architecture. Develop software code using C, C++ and Java. Manage projects for implementation of applications. Train staff members on software utilization and provide ongoing software support."

You can also list key technologies that you worked with in the position, especially if those technologies are critical for obtaining your next job.

Achievements - After developing statements of responsibility, you should now document a few achievements. Your achievements are what set you apart from your competition. They help differentiate your resume from other applicants and they demonstrate that you have been successful in previous positions.

Ideally, statements of achievements should be written in the form of ACTION - RESULT. State the action, then state the positive result. If possible, try to quantify your results.

Example:

* Developed application for accounting and reporting system that automated posting to the General Journal, saving \$5 million in annual paper expense while increasing overall productivity.

Achievements don't always have to be in the form of action result. Other achievements can document awards, completion of training, promotions, or prominent roles (such as being selected as chair member of emerging technologies). Also, you can build statements to simply highlight key technologies or areas of technology.

Formatting duties and achievements can be done in several ways. The preferred style is to build a paragraph of duties and then bullet point the achievements below. This style really allows you to separate the 2 types of statements and helps to highlight the achievements.

Tips for developing your experience section:

1. Experience should be written in reverse-chronological format (most current job positions first). For the most part, order of items in the experience section reflect order of importance to the reader. The heading is necessary to identify critical job information. Then it is important to state your scope of work. Then highlight achievements. The order of statements within the paragraph of responsibilities should also be determined by importance. Therefore, build the opening statement and follow that statement with the next most important responsibility. Follow the same logic when listing statements of achievement.
2. Try to start statements with action verbs (design, develop, implement, deploy, create, lead, manage, coordinate). Avoid using the same action verbs within each job, but if that is not possible, at least avoid using the same action verb in consecutive statements. Develop this, develop that, develop this, develop that.... its poor writing, reflects laziness and shows a lack of creativity. Also try to avoid the two dreaded vanilla statements (Duties included..... and Responsible for.....).
3. Make statements detailed, but don't go overboard. Brief and detailed is ideal. Even if you have 1 bullet point, don't be afraid to break it down into multiple sentences.
4. Avoid using first person pronouns (I, me, my). Also avoid using too many articles (a, an, the). The resume is not a novel or publication. Statements are meant to be quick and descriptive. This strategy really helps maintain attention of readers who quickly scan the resume. Imagine the statement above filled with articles and first person pronouns.

"I developed an application for the accounting and the reporting system that automated the posting to the General Journal, saving \$5 million in annual paper expense while I increased the overall productivity."

5. Length is a matter of judgment. It really depends on how much experience you have, the level of detail involved in your job, and volume of achievements. But.... it would be highly recommended that you limit yourself to 5-10 statements of responsibility and 2-8 statements of achievement. As you start building descriptions of previous work history, you should start cutting back the level of detail. Each job should be progressively shorter as the you work your way from current to previous positions.

6. Consider dropping experience past 20 years and you should even consider just listing the headings (without descriptions) for "old" experience, especially if it has limited value.

For example, lets look at a list of experience throughout a software engineers career:

Senior Software Engineer 2000 - Present (Should contain heavy detail)
Software Engineer, 1998 - 2000 (Should contain medium detail)
Software Developer, 1996 - 1998 (Should contain medium detail)
Programmer/Analyst, 1993 - 1996 (Should contain medium detail, but less current jobs)
Computer Technician, 1992-1993 (Consider just listing this job with no description)
Computer Technician Intern, 1990 - 1992 (Consider just listing job with no description)
Retail Store Clerk, 1988 - 1990 (Insignificant job, should be eliminated)

Lets look at the Computer Technician job from 1992-1993. This job is in technology, so it should be listed. But, why waste the space to build up a description of this job? For one, the job duration was only 1 year. For two, the job is not even within the field of Software Engineering. It's only significance is documenting career progression and overall length of IT experience. Most people do not have a career that is this straightforward, so the decision is much more difficult. Just ask yourself this --- "how much of an impact will this job have on my ability to market myself for a new position?" It just makes no sense to build up lengthy descriptions of previous somewhat insignificant jobs while cutting information from very significant current positions.

Education and Training:

Experience is almost always a better seller than education, unless you are in an Academic field. Therefore as you gain more experience, focus less on your education. With the exception of entry level professionals, the education section should fall below the experience section.

Information that is required:

- The name of the degree or certification
- The institution where you received the degree or training

Information that is ideal to include:

- The date you received the degree, certification or training (unless you received the degree over 20 years ago)
- The city, state and sometimes country of the institution.
- Graduating with honors or Cum Laude

Information that you may include:

- GPA. Make sure to also include the scale (3.5/4.0). Do not include if your GPA is B average or below. (mostly used for less experienced job seekers or students)
- Other honors affiliated with your performance
- Scholarships and academic awards
- Other sections - You will often see a number of other sections within the resume. Of course some of those sections are reserved for specific fields and professions. For example, you will always see a list of publications in the resume of an Author or

Writer. But for the IT resume here are a few sections that you may want to include IF they quality of information presented is of a high degree.

Professional Affiliations - The Project Management Institute (PMI) is a good example of a high profile organization in the field of Project Management and membership is highly regarded. I would not recommend adding this section if the extent of your professional affiliations is something like.... Member of the South Orange County Computer Users Club.

Publications - Again this is straightforward. Only provide this information if your work was published within well know publication in your field. If you are highly published, it is often a good idea to create a separate document as an addendum to your resume.

Volunteer Work - Sometimes IT professionals set up significant systems within local organizations. In this case, it may be a good idea to add this content, but it really depends on the extent of your career and the level of effort involved in your volunteer work.

In summary, your resume should accomplish these goals:

- Introduce yourself with compelling, detailed information using brief statements that summarize your career.
- Identify your key areas of technical expertise and skills sets.
- Document the scope of your work experience.
- Demonstrate your past success through statements of achievement.
- Define your training and education.
- Utilize action verbs and action oriented statements.
- Above all else --- GENERATE INTERVIEWS.

This cannot be stressed enough. If your resume generates interviews, don't change it. The resume is a tool and these guidelines can help you build a more effective tool for generating interviews. However, there is no secret system or no 100% guarantees. These guidelines are based on research and personal experience, based on what has been successful for the majority of job seekers. And remember, the resume is not the only tool you have to generate interviews. You also need a good, aggressive job search plan along with a strong initiative to succeed.