

Your resume should stand out from the crowd.

Agencies and employers, especially those who have posted openings on large Web sites, receive several hundred resumes for a single position. You must express your qualifications for the desired job in a concise, clear, and aesthetically appealing manner. Here are a few ways to get your resume to the top of the stack.

***Resumes are a TEST.***

Resume readers draw conclusions from your resume about your ability to focus on key ideas, eliminate the trivial, organize your thoughts in a logical fashion, and express yourself clearly in writing. That's even before evaluating the resume's content.

The decision of whether you get an interview is often based solely on your resume. It can not be "Something I threw together" and should be a true reflection of your good and best qualities.

Resumes are read BEFORE the cover letter.

The first issue for a person reading a resume is whether you are qualified so they will skip over the cover letter and read your resume first, often looking to see if you meet at the very least, the minimum requirements, including degree, certifications, software, years of experience, industry knowledge, etc..

If the person reading the resume is satisfied they may go back and read the cover letter looking for your motivations:

- Why are you looking?
- What are you looking for in terms of job title (rank) and content?
- Willingness to relocate or commute if applicable?
- Whether you are affordable based upon your salary expectations or current salary?

Keywords.

Many agencies and companies use sophisticated computer programs to download, store and retrieve your resume. These systems search their resume database looking for keywords so you want to be sure to include the right ones.



Replace the objective or first party statements that used to go on resumes with a section called Skill Summary. List, in column and bullet format, your target job titles, industry or product segments, certifications, advanced skills and computer software skills.

Sometimes, these programs can be thrown off by italics, underlining, abbreviations, jargons, and terms that are company specific and not industry standard.

This is what employers want to know about you.

The hardest part of writing your resume is figuring out what to say in your job paragraphs. Follow this formula and you will be surprised how easy it is. If you have a copy of the job description for your position, use that as a starting point.

Give the reader a mental image of the environment you worked in and your individual role and situation. Describe the goals, tasks, and/or challenges that needed to be overcome. List the actions you took, changes you made, programs you implemented to accomplish that task. Tell the result. As long as the situation is listed first, the task, actions and results can be in any logical order. Your objective is to tell a compelling story about your experience.



If it is not clear what your company does, or your company is not well a known Fortune 500, you may want to start with a brief description of your company, including what industry it is in, the total annual revenue, total number of employees, and ticker symbol and/or website.

The traditional resume style is to use bulleted sentences on individual lines beginning with an action verb and omitting the pronoun "I". Keep in mind, HR representatives and employers (a.k.a. impatient executives who could care less about your passionate interest in yodeling) take less than a minute to scan your resume, so showcase and organize items into several concise and relevant segments. Most often resumes are not read left to right but scanned top to bottom in about 20 seconds.

Categories.

When organizing a chronological resume, you should outline sections of your experience, education, and skills to communicate what you have accomplished.

If you just graduated from college and have not yet been employed, place your "Education" section first, directly below the letterhead. In addition to the basics--school name, degree, major, and graduation date--you can include relevant coursework that applies to a desired position, academic honors or awards, and your GPA. If you skated through college with anything over a 3.0, feel free to put it on your resume.



Other categories might include "Relevant Work Experience," "Volunteer Experience," "Computer Skills," "Publications," "Activities and Honors," "Certifications," "Language Skills," and so on.

The Importance of Content.

Now that you know how to organize your resume and what it should look like, you need to know what to put in it.

- **Action words.** When describing your prior job experience and duties, use active language. Instead of starting your sentence with a noun, start with an active, descriptive, impressive verb. For example: "Customer Service Representative. *Assisted* customers with product selection, *trained* and *supervised* 15 new employees, *organized* special promotional events." Don't think of this as a term paper--action verbs and flowery language required.
- **Numbers.** That's right, we said numbers. Every job has metrics, measurements of productivity, efficiency and profit. That is how you are judged, your department or unit is judged and your superiors are judged and reviewed. Always include numbers, percentages, and dollar amounts in your job descriptions to back up your achievements. How many people did you supervise? How much money did you raise? How many wild bears did you feed during your stint at the zoo? How much did party favor sales increase under your direction? This approach immediately highlights the kind of impact you've made. By including as many numbers as you can you are demonstrating you are a) Aware of the importance of your metrics and b) successful in performing your job.
- **Length.** It is best to keep it to one or two pages. No one wants to scan through numerous pages of your long-winded accomplishments and experience. If it doesn't all fit, cut it down to the most relevant and impressive items.



Appearance

Do not use anything else but MS WORD, it is the "gold standard". Don't use WordPerfect, Excel or other software programs that are not commonly available.

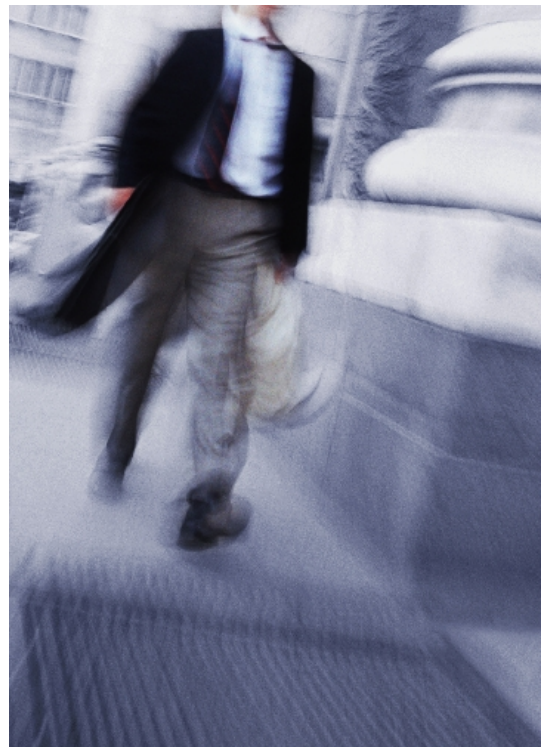
Along with effective organization, appearance can make or break your resume. When creating a super resume, keep these points in mind:

- **Fonts.** Whether you e-mail, fax, or mail your resume to prospective employers, you should try to keep your font plain and easy to read. And select a reasonable size--anywhere between 9 and 12 points should be acceptable. We suggest using a sans serif font like Arial or Verdana, not Times New Roman. These will come out much clearer in faxes.
- **Formatting.** Just because you have Microsoft Word and all of its' formatting capabilities, your resume doesn't have to look like a Caribbean vacation brochure. Myriad fonts, colors, and graphic embellishments don't really help, so use minimal and purposeful formatting. Simple bullets will best separate your duties and skills; use bolding and italics sparingly. Formatting should highlight your accomplishments, not draw attention away from them. Less, in this case, is definitely more.
- **Paper.** Even if you don't snail-mail your resume to employers, you should have hard copies on hand to bring to interviews. These copies should be on tasteful resume-quality paper. White, off-white, cream, and gray are the easiest to read. Just like your socks, your cover letters, mailing envelopes, and resumes should all match.

EMAIL is preferred.

1. E-mail your resume as a "MS WORD" attachment file.
2. Protect your transmission by keeping your virus software up to date.
3. Set up a personal email account with a suitable version of your name, not something cutesy, anonymous or inappropriate for business.
4. Test the format of your resume by emailing it to yourself. Take the time to open the attachment file and check the format of your resume. Make any needed adjustments and retest the format.

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Here are **20 Common Resume Killers** that could send your resume to the trash faster than you can say delete.

1. Exotic fonts or poor use of capitalization. Non-standard or special fonts may not correctly translate on the reader's computer, or may just look strange. This can also cause problems when a resume gets digitally scanned for inclusion onto a database. Use standard fonts to avoid this. Also, some people do not capitalize their emailed cover letters or their resumes. This is inappropriate for a business communication.
2. Functional resumes as opposed to Chronological, or resumes that look like they are cover-ups. (Note: A Functional resume lists the various functions a person has performed without regard to the order or timeframe in which they were accomplished)
3. Any lack of pertinent information. Some people leave off titles, dates or names of employers, but this will usually kill your resume in an instant. The Screener will assume that you are either trying to cover something up or there is something negative that you would rather not reveal. Your resume is considered incomplete without this necessary information.



4. Overly cute or inappropriate business language. This may be viewed as being unprofessional. Sometimes an inappropriate email address will also do this. Keep it formal.
5. Misspellings or poor language. This is an instant killer. Always have your resume proofread. Spellcheckers are great, but the human touch is also needed.
6. Lengthy resumes over 3 pages or resumes sent via snail mail (These days, snail mailed resumes may not get scanned or screened at all.) Many Screeners view them as too much trouble and too low tech.
7. Overuse of acronyms or inside language that is internal to a prior employer organization. Do not assume that the Screener will know what you are referring to. Rather than try to figure it out, they may assume that you are not a good communicator or are specific to a different industry or range of technology.]
8. Inconsistencies such as when the past title and responsibilities do not match up, or the date ranges are broken. If you were in sales but talk about finance, confusion and questions will ensue. Title cover-ups when applying for a position that does not exactly match your past title. If your responsibilities do not match your title, this needs to be explained. For instance, if you were a Director applying for a Manager position, the explanation may be that you were working for a much smaller company.
9. Use of a nickname like Buck or Missy is inappropriate. If you prefer to have yourself called that, mention that once you get hired. Also, first name as initials only, like J.R., or an attempt to hide identity or gender is viewed as suspect and this should be avoided. The full formal name is required.
10. Use of Dr. (if non medical) or MBA with name. Certifications like CPA are great, but be careful not to overdo it by using that in the name header.
11. Written in the first person, or constantly refers to the candidate as "I", or "Mr. Anyname" is inappropriate and seems self-centered. A resume needs to convey the facts as though an independent and objective party were writing it. Referring to yourself in the body by your formal name (Mr., Ms., etc.) is awkward.
12. Unemployed for an extremely long period without explanation. If you are in a tight job market and looking for the right opportunity rather than jumping on something, this needs to be communicated.



13. Job hopping - more than one job per year, or generally bad tenure can be a big killer unless dealt with on the resume. The reasoning for the moves or explanations should be communicated to lessen the negative impact of this. The reader will ask, "Is this a problem, or a trend, or is this person sincerely looking for something long term?" Employers seek loyalty and stability.
14. Downward trend of responsibilities often may indicate a problem if someone is on the downside of their career unless clearly explained. Often what may look like a lesser title or job was in fact a



greater one, and this needs to be communicated. The story needs to be told and reasons given for lessening responsibilities.

15. Lack formal training despite having reached a high level of job proficiency can be a killer. Ways to overcome this are plentiful: Include statements from references, actual job performance demonstrations, and indications of future intentions to complete a degree or training.
 16. Inappropriate degrees, e.g. B.S. Animal Husbandry when applying for a Systems Analyst job should probably not be listed since it would detract from the job at hand and may give the impression that this person is off-track.
 17. Average or below GPA can be a killer with some companies. A GPA of 2.5 at one school may be the equivalent of a 3.5 at another. Do not expect the Screener to know this. Avoid listing a GPA unless it is 3.0 or above and identify what the scale is. Also, Future graduation date of 2+ years from now is often viewed as too speculative and overcompensating.
 18. Irrelevant information or filler should be avoided. Personal activity that doesn't contribute to your business image should NOT be included. For example:
 - Enjoys listening to music
 - Extreme sports enthusiast
 - Plays in a rock band on the weekends
- The fact that you belong to a certain church, volunteer for a given charity, belonged to a fraternity or referee for a soccer team could be viewed negatively.
19. Any overly personal statement or reference anywhere on the resume is best left unsaid. Examples may include "Left company because of death in family", or "Deacon of church and attends every Sunday." or "Became divorced because job required too much travel" is inappropriate.
 20. Non-business references are inappropriate and a waste of print.



Now your resume will be dancing it's way across the employer's desk, leaving the rest behind like a stack of graceless wallflowers. And if your skills match what an employer is looking for, you'll be snatched up for an interview. From there, it's up to you: Show them you're as good as that pretty piece of paper says you are.

