

## **Six Tips for Resume Writing**

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Managing your career is ultimately your responsibility no matter where you are currently employed or what you aspire to. A good resume and your closely related on-line profile are important tools in that effort.

As executive recruiters, we see lots of resumes. Many are excellent – others not so much. Here are six tips we offer on the topic:

1. Resumes are “scanned” -- not read
2. Use generic titles and terms
3. Stick to two pages or three at the most
4. Don't leave anything out
5. Structure your credentials for the job you want, not the one you have
6. Always have your resume up to date

### **RULE ONE – resumes are “scanned” – not read**

Like it or not, the reader of your resume is going to do a quick evaluation (a scan) of your background, and mentally extract a list of companies you have worked for and the titles you have held. The process will be brutally swift and simple; your skills and abilities will be inferred from that basic information – and not from your carefully crafted prose explanations of career highlights and accomplishments. If your resume doesn't get through this initial filter, you are not going to be considered for the role no matter how elegant the accompanying text might be. It's arbitrary, capricious and unfair; but that's the way it is.

Even worse, in the modern era your resume will likely be one of many in a “pile” of resumes which, increasingly, was pulled from an electronic resume database or “Googled”, using a key word search. Key word searching means the first screening of your credentials will be done via the lowest common denominator.

For a “functional” resume to be effective, it requires that the reader (or a computer) is interested in your prose and intends to take the time to read and digest it. Good luck. The conclusion you should reach once this reality is accepted is that presentation format including a major emphasis on presentation

graphics and key words will drive the process; and simple reverse-chronological-order resumes are the way to go.

### **RULE TWO - use generic titles and terms**

Since you're going to be "put in a box", at least make sure you are put in the correct box. Title structures can vary widely from company-to-company, and almost all organizations have institutional jargon which should be avoided. Instead, make sure to use common, well-understood title descriptors which everyone will grasp. Using generic titles and terms is particularly important for those who have worked in "matrixed" organizations.

Leave the company jargon behind, and don't assume that the reader will be familiar with industry or professional acronyms. The sad fact is that there is little creativity in the hiring process. This means that it is important to use the terms that will allow an uninformed screener (or the screener's computer) to rule you in rather than rule you out. This is increasingly important since the use of key word searching of electronic databases now dominates the initial screening process. This is true at all levels in the career hierarchy from the mail room to the Board Room.

As an example, a resume screener unfamiliar with marketing jargon might ignore the resume of someone who is or was a "S.W.O.T. Planning Coordinator" thinking that police weapons expertise is not relevant to their needs; however they would probably have interest in an individual who is a "Manager, Competitive Intelligence and Analysis".

Some might challenge this idea on the basis that it is "dishonest" to use a title other than the one your company assigned. We disagree. The generic title will do the most effective job of communicating your responsibilities and experience, and therefore will be most representative. As long as it isn't used as a vehicle to overstate your role, using generic titles and plain language is the way to go.

### **RULE THREE - stick to two pages**

If the scan of the first page of your resume has enough of the important company and title triggers, page two may get a similar scan. After that, don't press your luck. Remember, the objective of the resume is to get you an interview, and the scan is brutally swift and simple. You can always elaborate later on after you win the chance to interview.

Making a resume (or any communication) short, crisp and effective is hard work. Initial drafts can be longer, but they need to be whittled down to a useful size. "I

didn't have time to write you a short letter, so I wrote you a long one instead" is a quote variously attributed to either Samuel Johnson or Mark Twain.

Making your resume fit into a small space and still project what you want to communicate will be a challenge. Remember, your objective is to communicate successfully with someone who is going to scan the document; and requiring your reader to scan a lengthy document will be an annoyance.

### **RULE FOUR – don't leave anything out**

Wait a minute... didn't I just say to stick to two pages? You have it right: stick to two pages and don't leave anything out. Lesser items can be presented in a condensed format, but you should be able to find a way to work them into two pages – it's actually a lot of space. If you have questions about why this is important, see Rule 1.

Most hiring managers will have either an explicit or an implicit check list of qualifications against which they will compare your resume. Although the major qualifications for any job may be well understood, there are likely to be subtle additional dimensions that aren't always obvious – maybe not even fully formed in the mind of the hiring manager. The thing that will differentiate your background from the dozens or even hundreds of other resumes that will be reviewed for the role is the match between your credentials and that check list; and you can't predict *a priori* what the "hot buttons" will be.

The obvious things to include are your work history, titles, product names, key project assignments, educational credentials, etc. As mentioned, it's alright to bundle early career assignments into one heading, but they should be included. When you mention product names, be sure to also mention the use. Keep in mind that at some point your credentials will be the object of a key word search, and that search may be oriented toward a particular product or category. Accordingly, you need to make sure to include the key words that a database researcher is likely to use.

If your company was acquired during your tenure, make sure the spatial arrangement of the text clearly signals continuous employment. Make sure that tenure with various divisions is appropriately grouped under the umbrella of a parent company. Don't require the reader to have to work to get the picture.

### **RULE FIVE - structure your resume for the job you want, not the one you have!**

While you need to be reporting the facts about your education and work history, it needs to be done in a fashion that emphasizes the skills and experience that are required in your next role – which hopefully will involve a promotion.

There is a simple way to test for success in achieving this goal. After bringing your LinkedIn profile in line with your updated resume, do a key word search on LinkedIn. As key words, use the terms that an on-line researcher might use when attempting to find someone who is qualified for the position you want. If your profile emerges in the first several pages of returns, you've hit the mark. If not, go to school on your competition.

### **RULE SIX - always have your resume up to date**

Finally, you say, we can move beyond Rule 1....well, sort of...but not really. Remember, the active operating principle in Rule 1 is that the process is brutally swift and simple. Snooze and you might lose. When an opportunity presents itself, you need to be ready to respond. Others who will be candidates for the role will be ready.

Recruiters who seek you out will do so because of the nature of your credentials and accomplishments. Don't make them wait while you update your credentials. You need to do your part by being prepared to share with them the particulars of your background. If your resume is a straightforward two page document as we suggest, keeping it current should be a relatively simple task. Updating should include the simultaneous revision of both your resume document and your LinkedIn profile.

Working to maintain consistency in your public profile is important. If you wind up being a serious candidate for a new position, you must assume that the prospective employer will be doing some checking which, increasingly, involves the use of internet search. Biographic details need to be consistent at all of the sites on the web where such information can be found. That includes resumes posted to job boards, your profile on LinkedIn or any of the social networking sites, and references to your background from speaking engagements or Board appointments, and your current resume. Allowing a prospective employer to discover an undisclosed omission can raise questions about integrity and motive that are detrimental to your prospects and easily avoidable.

In summary, it should be clear that most resume screeners – whether hiring managers or support staff – will simply and quickly scan your resume and – fair or not – draw conclusions about your skills based the companies you have worked for and the titles you have held. You will be ruled in or ruled out of consideration based on the match-up of the implied skill set with the requirements of the role. Increasingly, the process is driven by computer-based

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key work searches, and the internet provides multiple ways for an employer to examine your background.

Since you can't control the process, you need to optimize the content and presentation of your credentials with the process in mind.