Business CareerLines

Business Resumes by Bob Cohen

The main purpose of a professional resume is to "pre-sell" you to prospective employers. Although it will not get you the job, a good resume can be an important element towards obtaining an interview. The first critical step in your job search, therefore, is to develop an objective that accurately describes the kind of position you seek based on your skills as well as your work and academic experience. That objective needs to be clearly reflected in the content of your resume. Being unclear about your immediate career goals makes it difficult to convince employers that they should interview you, much less hire you. Most studies show that goal-directed behavior is much more likely to produce positive results in getting the interview.

A resume should be a brief, informative summary of your abilities, education, and experience as they apply to your career goals. View it as a profile that highlights your strongest assets. Most importantly, it should differentiate you from other candidates seeking similar positions. Choose the resume style that best communicates to prospective employers your *relevant* experience, skills, and potential contribution.

Types of Resumes

There is no universally accepted format for preparing a resume that suits every circumstance. In fact, there are a quite number of different formats. Some will serve your needs better than others. We generally suggest, however, the following three layouts for most students and "entry level" candidates. The choice of graphics, font size or type is entirely personal. Since the main purpose of a resume is to "pre-sell" yourself, always keep the employer's preferences in mind. Your resume should be brief and businesslike and reflect the type of job you are seeking.

Chronological

The first and most commonly used format is the chronological resume that describes each job in reverse chronological sequence. The chronological resume is best suited for candidates with directly related work experience or who target positions in industries, such as banking and consulting, where a more traditional resume may be more acceptable.

Functional

The second main format is the functional resume that highlights key marketable skills by citing accomplishments that support these abilities. This format is very useful for candidates with limited practical or related work experience.

Achievement

The third most commonly used format is the accomplishment or achievement resume. This is used to highlight prior work or academic accomplishments in your background. It can be used as an alternative to a strict functional or chronological resume when your accomplishments are centered on a particular skill or experience category.

Contents of a Resume

While styles and actual content will differ, it is helpful to consider what you say on your resume according to these guidelines. Firstly, if the information contained in your resume does not add value to your candidacy, *do not include it*. Consider every word on your resume as an "advertising cost," *then* decide whether its selling value is worth including that information. Secondly, remember that your resume serves as a "script" for the interviewer. If asked about something on your resume, will you have something interesting to say?

Below are suggested ways to structure individual categories within your resume. Pay attention to the information that is included in each section and refer to the guidelines on what employers look for on a resume.

Identification and Contact Information

- Full name
- Address (local/permanent)
- Phone number (local/permanent)
- e-mail address/personal web page (*optional*)

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Contents of a Resume (con't)

Education

Emphasize the positive aspects of your academic career and extracurricular activities. Describe any academic honors or scholarships you have received as well as any positions of leadership you have assumed. Items that may be included under this section of your resume are:

- Institution/degree/concentration
- *Relevant* courses/class projects
- Academic performance (i.e., GPA)
- Publications
- Honors/special certificates
- Extracurricular activities (see *Activities/Affiliations* below)
- Professional organizations
- Scholastic test scores (list Math and Verbal SAT scores in your high school section)

Work Experience

"Hands-on" experience is important to employers. Even if your background is not directly related, you can sell your "transferable skills." Remember that it is okay if they seem relatively minor as compared to the "real world." What is important is that they are *your* results and you are proud of them. If you were a leader or a problem-solver in the past, no matter what the context, chances are you will bring those skills to your next job. Employers, therefore, consider "the past as the best predictor of the future."

Choose *action words* that apply to the job you are seeking (see *Action Word* list). Avoid "assisted," "responsible for," or "helped." They are vague and do not tell the employer *how* you helped or assisted. Emphasize your accomplishments and *quantify* or *qualify* them wherever possible.

Indicate progressive increases in responsibility. Include volunteer work, leadership positions, and so on. *Be specific* and avoid generalities. Remember to include *all* periods of employment, summer or otherwise, as well as self-employment *if relevant*. When describing present work experience, make sure to use the present tense. The category heading "Experience" can include both paid *and* unpaid positions.

- Name of employer
- Location
- Dates
- Title
- Brief job description
- Level of responsibility

Skills

This portion can include computer and/or language skills in which you are fluent. Specify what hardware (i.e., Macintosh) and software (i.e., Excel, PowerPoint) you have experience with in the past (at work or school). If you have extensive technical experience and the position you are seeking typically requires such skills you may want to move this section up before "Experience."

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Activities/Affiliations

This section can be used to list any memberships or affiliations you have. Do not forget to include whether you held a leadership position or contributed to making the organization better.

Interests

It is a good idea to include some of your interests, especially if your resume has limited information. This adds some color to your personality on paper and is often used as an icebreaker at interviews. Be specific. List your interests as Gothic novels, bluegrass, and lacrosse rather than reading, music, and sports. The key is to differentiate yourself from every other candidate.

"There are as many opinions about resumes as there are people to ask." The following are the basic rules:

Resume language should be:

- Specific rather than general
- Action-oriented rather than passive
- Written to express not impress
- Articulate not "flowery"
- Fact-based (quantify and qualify)
- Written for scanners not readers

Do:

- Be consistent in format and content
- Make it easy to read and follow
- Use spacing, underlining, italics, bold, and capitalization for emphasis
- List categories in order of importance
- Avoid information gaps
- Use 8 1⁄2" x 11" bond paper.

Don't:

- Use personal pronouns
- Abbreviate
- Use a narrative style
- Number or letter categories
- Use slang or colloquialisms
- Use a picture
- Include age or sex
- List references on resume.

"Scanable" Resumes

Companies often rely on databases to help them manage the flow of resumes. These databases are searched, using **keywords**, to find candidates to fill a position. Keywords are words or phrases that describe the qualifications (education, experience, skills, knowledge, and abilities) that are required or desired for a particular position. In a scanner-

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friendly resume, it is important to include as many keywords that are relevant to the positions you are seeking to ensure that your resume will be "hit" when the database is searched. How do you know what keywords to use? You can find clues about what keywords to use by looking at job postings and reading industry publications. Be familiar with buzzwords that are used in your industry and include them in your resume (make sure to use them appropriately!).

Content Guidelines

- Use nouns instead of verbs to describe your accomplishments. The keywords used to search the database are likely to be nouns. For example, instead of saying, "Managed a project…", say "Project manager…"

- Include as many keywords as possible, including words or phrases that are specific to your industry.

- Minimize use of abbreviations, except the more common ones like BS (Bachelor of Science).

- Use common language. Not all systems have a full-fledged synonym table so try to maximize the "hits" between a position search and your resume by using words everyone knows.

Format Guidelines

- Stick with commonly used fonts; sans serif fonts, like Helvetica, work best.

- Avoid italics and underlining. Although most systems accept boldface, if you are instructed not to use boldface, use capital letters instead. Do not use open bullets, shading, or horizontal or vertical lines.

- Use font sizes between 10 and 14 points.

- Do not use tabs or columns.

- While the regular version of your resume should be one page, your scannable resume may be longer than one page.

- Put your name first at the top of the page and then your address, phone number, and e-mail address, each on a separate line. If you have a second page, put your name on the top of page two.

- Use a laser printer to print your resume.

- Use 8 ½ x 11" paper (white or ivory), printed on one side only.

- Do not fold your resume or use staples. If mailing your resume, use a large flat envelope. If faxing your resume, make sure the fax machine is set at high resolution.