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RESUME WRITING GUIDE

Importance of a Strong Resume

Your resume is your first opportunity to show an employer who you are and what you can do for them, typically before ever having a chance to speak on the phone or walk through their doors. In sum, a resume is a brief marketing tool that is well-organized and carefully targeted to a specific job. It should be well-thought out and designed to help you stand out from the competition, with the goal of landing an interview!

Note: TheLadders.com recently released research showing that, on average, recruiters only spend about six seconds looking at a candidate's resume before deciding whether he or she is a good fit for the position. Therefore, it's important to create a concise, powerful resume tailored to each employer and job to which you apply. Those just starting out in their professional career should keep their resume to one page. As your career unfolds, your resume may expand, but should never exceed two pages.

Resume Organization

A resume can be organized in one of four ways:

- Chronological. This resume lists work experiences first and should be used when you have a strong work history related to the job for which you are applying with only a few, or no, gaps in employment. Your most recent employer is listed first followed by your previous employers (this is called reverse chronological order).
- Functional. Functional resumes are used to highlight skills and experiences rather than your work experience. Those who have vastly different work history than the jobs they are applying for, as well as those with larger gaps in their employment, frequently use this resume style.
- Combination. This resume format combines both the chronological and functional resume. List your skills and experiences first, followed by your reverse chronological work history. This format highlights your skills and abilities while also giving the employer the work history they prefer.
- Targeted. A targeted resume is created to highlight your skills and abilities related to a specific job for which you are applying. While this approach may be more time consuming, it is to your benefit if the job for which you are applying matches your skills and experience perfectly.

Essential Parts

- Contact information. Ensure that employers can contact you easily by including your full name, current and/or permanent address, phone number, and email address. Mobile phone voicemail greetings and ringback tones must be professional.
- Summary of Qualifications. A summary is a few short, targeted, well-written sentences that highlight your skills, experience, and your value to the employer. Bullets may be used as well as phrases, but never use pronouns (such as I) within any part of your resume.
- Education. Begin with your most recent institution first (reverse chronological order). Include: name of institution; location (City, State); degree or certificate program (with exact wording from the college catalog); dates attended (from-to month and year), and anticipated graduation date if not already a graduate. Showcase things such as academic achievements, special projects, leadership roles, and extracurricular campus activities in your bulleted statements.

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RESUME WRITING GUIDE

- Experience. Also list in reverse chronological order. Include: Who you worked for (name of organization); Where (City, State); Role (position or title); Length of Position (from-to date range).

Note: This section lists paid full-time and part-time work. Internships may also be included if not listed under a separate heading. If the position is unpaid, list under a separate section such as “Related Experience.” This section also includes a brief bulleted list of job responsibilities and special highlights such as Employee of the Month.

Action Verbs

- These are leading words of each bullet used to describe your accomplishments. Action verbs help maximize the effectiveness of your achievements and increase chances of potential employers taking notice. For example: “Collaborated” could be used instead of “Worked with colleagues to plan events.” Optimal Resume, the free online resume program available through our Career Services Office, offers many action verb suggestions. There are also several online lists you may search for free. Ask someone in Career Services to help you master the art of using action words in your resume.
- Remember to use the present tense when you are describing your current positions, and past tense for roles you have exited.

Other Sections to Consider

- Awards or Achievements
- Internships
- Study Abroad
- Computer Skills
- Projects
- Publications/Presentations

Professional Presence

A word of caution for both your phone number and email address: Be certain they are professional!

- Phone. Cell phone greetings can be detrimental to your job search if you leave an inappropriate greeting for a potential employer. Be certain to remove all potentially harmful or offensive messages and ringback songs from your greeting while you are interviewing. Keep it simple and clear. For example: “Hello you have reached Nicholas Smith. I am sorry I unable to take your call, but if you leave a message, I will get back to you soon. Thank you.” Also be certain to identify yourself by name in a polite and courteous manner in your greeting. Automated greetings are not acceptable to some employers as they want to be certain they are reaching the correct person before leaving a message.
- Email. Your personal email should be kept simple by using your first and last name, and, if necessary, a combination of numbers. You should not hand out a personal email address that does not identify who you are to an employer. Examples of unacceptable email addresses: iluvdogs28@yahoo.com or beergoggles420@gmail.com. Acceptable email addresses include all or part of your name and, if necessary, a combination of numbers. For example: james.smith@gmail.com or james_smith1@gmail.com.

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Social Media Warnings

- Employers do not only look at LinkedIn accounts, but may use social media or internet searches to screen potential employees.
- Employers may perform online searches to evaluate character and determine if the job seeker presents him or herself professionally.
- If you are sharing content on social media, or anywhere online, be sure it has NO potential to permanently harm your reputation or professional career. Remove all things that may be perceived as unprofessional, inappropriate, or negative. Always err on the side of caution whenever you post anything online and don't assume private posts are safe and will never be able to be viewed by anyone else. Ask yourself important questions prior to posting such as: Am I truly okay with and proud of what I'm about to post? Am I nervous about what I'm about to post? Does this post match who I really am? How might parents, teachers, coaches, or potential employers perceive this post? Am I ready to deal with the negative, and potentially permanent, consequences that may arise as a result of posting this?

Help Get Your Resume Considered

- Look. Remember, your resume is an extension of yourself. Though most applications are submitted online, you should always use resume quality paper when printing (for example, when attending interviews or career fairs). You also must always follow technical resume layout and formatting rules (refer to resume checklist). If your resume is too busy looking, or not properly formatted, chances are, no matter what your qualifications,

your resume will be dismissed. When sending electronically, save your resume as a PDF instead of a doc extension so the format is locked and does not become altered upon opening.

- Layout. Ensure that your resume is easy to read. Section headings should be emphasized by a different font size, formatting, and/or by bold, horizontal lines. Your typeface should be readable by most individuals without strain (usually a 12 pt. font). Don't make your text too small in order to fit all your information on one page. Make it easy on the eyes and be sure to have proper spacing. If necessary, adjust your margins or cut some non-essential material. If neither of these options work, then it's acceptable to go on to more than one page ONLY if you have relevant content and experience that warrants it, but never exceed two pages.

Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS)

Many employers use application tracking systems (ATS) which pre-filter resumes electronically before humans see them. These systems will scan resumes for important keywords that employers seek, and typically cannot accept any fancy resume formatting. Be sure your resume includes keywords and phrases relevant to the job posting. It is advisable to have the job posting in front of you while you write your resume in order to help you accomplish this.

To use our free online resume development tool Optimal Resume, please visit:

mvcc.optimalresume.com