

Strong resumes

As a rule, an employer takes only about ten seconds to scan your resume, so your most important information must come first. And while resumes can vary in appearance and even in content and organization, they still follow basic principles: they must be easy to read and present your strongest qualifications first; they must include key words and demonstrate understanding of the employer's needs and point of view.

Readability

To help the reader quickly pick out the most important information in your resume, format it for readability. (Also prepare a plain-text version with no formatting at all for some electronic submissions.) Do your best to keep your resume to one page because the screener might never read any farther—remember that ten-second rule.

- Use a larger size font for your name and contact information.
- Use bold for headings and keywords.
- Chunk your sections with white spaces between to break up the text.
- Use an easy-to-read font like Times New Roman in a point size not much smaller than 12.
- Instead of paragraphs of dense text, use bullet lists.

Strengths First

Whether you lead with your work history or with your education depends on which is stronger for you. If you have a work history with job titles or accomplishments relevant to the desired position, start with that. If your work history is sparse or unrelated to the position, start with your education. If your education is still in progress, give an estimated date of completion and your area or study or major. If your GPA is good, include it. If you have taken advanced coursework directly related to the position, name those courses (for example, Business Law, Advanced Veterinary Nursing Techniques, UNIX System Management). Don't bother naming basic or general education courses like Basic Keyboarding or English.

Skills, Achievements—and Evidence

Duties are the requirements of your job; skills are your competencies at fulfilling them. Don't just list your responsibilities. Show what skills you employed. For example, you were *responsible for staying within the allocated department budget for personnel and supplies*. But what skills did you use? It's stronger to say that you *prioritized* scheduling needs, *monitored* payroll, *verified* work hours, *projected* personnel costs, and *managed* supply purchases. Skills include hard skills (professional and technical experience) and soft skills (like people and communication skills). To describe your skills, use verbs:

- Communications skills: collaborated, directed, moderated, promoted
- Creative skills: designed, initiated, planned, shaped
- Financial skills: allocated, assessed, managed, projected
- Helping skills: assisted, encouraged, supported
- Leadership skills: coordinated, delegated, generated, prioritized
- Organizational skills: distributed, organized, maintained, verified
- Research skills: analyzed, compared, determined, solved
- Teaching skills: coached, enabled, motivated, trained, encouraged
- Technical skills: built, designed, fabricated, programmed

If you can, link your skills to evidence—a quantifiable result if possible: *managed an annual department budget of \$30,000, or decreased personnel costs by 20 percent while increasing numbers of customers served by 15 percent*. You have to start

thinking of your work history in a new way: not just did I do what I was expected to do, but what measurable benefit did I bring to my employer, and how can I provide evidence of it?

Instead of just telling...

I'm a hard worker.

I'm creative.

I'm energetic.

...show evidence of it.

Cashiered at AM/PM in the evenings and waited tables at Applebee's on weekends while maintaining a 3.8 GPA

Rewrote department procedures, adding screen shots to illustrate the more difficult tasks

Always looking for new tasks when assigned tasks are complete and always seeking to learn new aspects of my job

If you have an old performance review, see if you can find ideas and evidence there to support your claims.

Keywords

You need to use the keywords that the employer will be looking for in your resume. Some employers scan resumes electronically for these terms; others are scanned only by human eyes. Either way, you need to make an informed guess what keywords the employer is looking for. One way is to analyze the job announcement and a few more similar ads. Look for these things:

- job titles (for example, manager, accountant, AP/AR, groundskeeper, programmer).
- nouns that describe tasks and skills (such as loss prevention, hazmat certification, installation, operation, fabrication, accounts receivable, ability to meet deadlines)
- specific hardware, software, or other tools (for instance, Mac OS, Quickbooks, C++, forklift, plasma cutter)
- personal characteristics (such as resourceful, focused, prompt)

Use as many keywords as you can near the top of your resume in case a screener doesn't read to the end. Pack keywords into your job titles, your duties, and your accomplishments. At the same time, avoid clichés like *hard working*. Think of your resume as a claim, and show evidence that you are hard working.

If you can't use an important keyword in your experience (maybe you have worked at jobs not directly related to the position you are seeking) you might be able to use the keyword as part of your job objective. For example, if a job asks for someone to do *accounts receivable* and you have never done accounts receivable, you could write a job objective that includes "applying my knowledge of general accounting principles to becoming proficient at *accounts receivable*."

Understanding the employer's point of view

A me-centered job objective tells the employer what you want out of the position. It looks like this: *A satisfying, well-paid, entry-level job in accounting*. Unfortunately, everybody else who is applying also wants a satisfying, well-paid job, so this does not make you stand out from the crowd. An employer-center job objective tells the employer what you bring, such as knowledge of the field, similar experiences, and even a desire to stay busy and to excel. It looks more like this: *An opportunity to apply my broad knowledge of accounting principles and experience with computerized accounting to becoming proficient at accounts receivable in a busy office*.

Remember that the employer doesn't care primarily about *your* objectives; he cares about *his*. Demonstrate that your characteristics, skills and career goals offer a solution to his immediate staffing problem.

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