



Get Results: The Interview-Winning Resume

During your search for employment, employers will be looking for evidence that you have the skills and qualifications to succeed in the position for which they're hiring. Your first opportunity to make this connection is through your resume.

"The purpose of your resume is to get [you] an interview, not a job," explains Carrie Maltese, staffing manager at NBC.

Employers review resumes to identify candidates to interview, the next step in the job-search process. Your resume should summarize your skills and experience, and creating your resume presents an opportunity for you to sell yourself as a good fit for an organization. It's a way for you to connect your academic and employment—or work-related—experience to a position, and to prove why you deserve an interview.

The ideal resume

Before you start on your resume, it's a good idea to reflect on and list your accomplishments both in and out of the classroom. What have you done in your life, academic or otherwise, that would make you valuable in this industry, organization, and position?

Now reverse the situation, as if you were an employer looking at you, the job candidate. What qualifications does this candidate have that would be of value to the organization? What has the candidate accomplished in and outside of the classroom that stands out from the other candidates vying for this position? Why is this candidate special?

"One of the things we stress is that before a student begins writing a resume, he or she has clarity about the intention of its use," says Kerin Borland, senior associate director of the University of Michigan Career Center. "Students need to know their audience, and from that understanding, they can create a resume that will be of interest to their audience."

Your resume is an employer's introduction to you; therefore, it should be clean, well organized, and professional looking. It should be free of typos, spelling errors, and poor grammar; in the eyes of an employer, a candidate who makes such mistakes on a resume demonstrates very little attention to detail. Be sure to spell-check your resume, and then have several people proofread it to make sure it is clear and

error-free. Also, have a career counselor critique your resume for effectiveness and, if needed, provide tips for strengthening it.

Maltese says that the ideal resume for a new graduate is one page in length; therefore students must be judicious in the information and details they include.

“Listing irrelevant or required courses is not important,” Maltese advises. “Employers are more interested in higher-level courses or electives that pertain to the job. Some students [leave] out certain things that are important, such as key honors or activities. But that’s what a company values. If the company values leadership, make sure to show that on your resume.”

While the appearance of a resume is very important, having relevant content is critical. Employers can receive hundreds of resumes for an opening. Often, human resources professionals skim resumes looking for words or phrases that indicate a fit for the position. Or, they scan the resume into the organization’s data base, which will search for and identify key words.

“There has to be good ‘scannability’ to a resume,” says Terri LaMarco, associate director of employer relations at the University of Michigan Career Center. “Not in a technological sense, but in such a way that a person could look over the resume in a very short period of time and quickly find the information that he or she is looking for. This can be accomplished by having a clear format and by using words that draw [the reader’s] attention,” she says.

To do this, examine the job description, and research not only the hiring organization, but the industry in which it operates. Examine the organization’s web site and take note of the words and “lingo” used. Read its recent press releases to get up to speed on recent news generated by the organization for public consumption. Finally, do an Internet search on the organization to get insight from an outsider’s vantage point. Employers are looking for candidates who have the skills and experience that match the needs of job openings. Use what you have learned during your research to help make this connection. One way to make a connection is to “speak the same language.”

“Students can convey the fact that they have researched the employer by adapting their resume to the company culture, using key words identified in an annual report, company mission and philosophy, and any appropriate position description,” says Sharron Zavattaro, director of the career services center at the

One rule that is universal among employers and career counselors: Never lie on a resume.

“All resumes should be truthful,” Borland says. “It’s a bad idea in any circumstance to falsify information, whether that means an outright untruth or an exaggeration.”

Getting caught in a lie would send a strong signal to an employer that the candidate would not be a trustworthy employee.

At the same time, your resume should not highlight your shortcomings or areas where your skills and/or experience may be lacking. Highlight the positive aspects of your skills and experience.

Your task is to build the resume that employers want to see: one that showcases the qualifications and abilities you possess and connects them to the needs of an employer. Your resume should make it easy for the employer to see there is a potential match between you and the job, and spur the employer to invite you to go further in the job-search process—the interview.

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. “The trick is to be honest and to convey your research in a realistic way.”

Of course, make sure that you understand the meaning of buzzwords and industry language and use them appropriately. The last thing you want is to get an interview and be unable to discuss everything that’s on your resume.

“Students should be careful and understand that everything they put on a resume is fair game,” Maltese warns. “For example, if they list ‘Six Sigma’ on their resume, they should be able to discuss the methodology, because it most likely will come up during the interview.”

Unless you are searching for employment in a single field, where your primary resume might just need a little tweaking in order to be relevant for each organization, you most likely will be applying for several types of jobs with different organizations. If this is the case, you might need to conduct research on each employer and industry to create several tailored resumes.

“When it comes to resumes, one size doesn’t fit all,” says Judy Fisher, director of the career development center at Occidental College in Los Angeles. “You need to tailor your resume using the key words you found during your research.”

Zavattaro agrees that attention to detail is a critical component of an ideal resume.

“Tailoring a resume to the position and company is extremely important,” Zavattaro says. “Doing so may mean having to create more than one resume, but prioritizing one’s qualifications to those required for a position simply ‘cuts to the chase’ of what the employer is looking for. Resumes are not read; they are initially scanned by the eye for those necessary skills, which may take 30 seconds. Why not make those seconds count to your advantage?”

Heading

The heading of your resume should include your contact information—name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address.

When listing contact information, use common sense. List both your campus and home addresses if it makes sense to do so. For example, if you go to school in one state, but live and plan to look for employment in another, include both addresses, but indicate how long your campus address will be valid.

Similarly, if you’re still on campus, include both your campus and home phone numbers, and indicate when your campus phone will no longer be active. As a general rule, don’t include your cell phone number because it is a more informal means of communication; you might receive the call while driving or shopping—not the best places to receive a phone call with implications for your career. If you only

have a cell phone, however, and use the listing, make sure to answer it professionally and have a professional message for your voice mail.

In addition, be careful when listing an e-mail address. Validity of the address is one issue to consider. For example, your campus address might expire shortly after you graduate. If you know the date the account will expire, include it, as in “E-mail: JJones@statecollege.edu (until June 30, 2006).”

The nature of the address itself can also be an issue. “The e-mail address included on your resume should be professional,” Fisher notes. “Don’t include anything silly, and make sure it doesn’t contain too many numbers and letters, as these addresses can be easily mistyped.” Thus, a basic address, such as MarySmith@aol.com, is preferable to a clever one, such as RaidersRule@aol.com.

If you have a web site that can help you make your case as a strong candidate—perhaps it includes examples of graphic design work or articles that you have had published in the campus newspaper—include the URL on your resume. But be careful to direct employers to the site only if it includes professional images and information. (See “The Online Portfolio,” page 41.)

Objective

Much like an organization’s mission statement, the objective sets the course for the resume. Everything listed on the resume should support your objective.

However, there is debate about whether including an objective is necessary. Some career services practitioners and recruiters believe the resume’s other content can stand alone, without an objective.

Fisher does not believe the objective is a requirement, based on feedback she has received from alumnae who are human resources professionals. “The objective is optional,” she explains. “If you use one, it has to be specific to that individual position.”

Michelle Schmid, national human resources programs manager for Franklin Templeton Investments, says that she does not favor the inclusion of an objective unless a student knows exactly what position he or she wants.

“Otherwise, it’s somewhat limiting,” she explains.

Maltese advises students to choose wisely when deciding whether or not to include an objective. “If you’re going to [include an objective],” she says, “make sure it’s specific and clear. If it’s too broad, it’s a waste of space.”

Your best course of action regarding whether to include an objective would be to speak with someone in your campus career center. As with all things job-search related, the practitioners in your school’s career center know best the expectations of the employers who recruit on your campus.

Education

For the undergraduate, the education section of your resume typically follows the objective. Include the name of the college or university, the level of the degree you are working toward and an expected date of graduation, your major, and your minor, if you have one. In addition, include details of any projects relevant to the position. This demonstrates the development of the appropriate skills.

“In this section, students have a great deal of latitude,” Borland explains. “For students who haven’t had a great deal of experience through work or volunteering or co-curricular [activities], the education section is even more important. Students can include academic awards, or they can include other classes they took if they are relevant to the position they’re seeking.”

Fisher adds: “If you have little internship or work experience, you should try to build up the relevancy of your course work.”

For instance, if you are an English major who wants to go into sales, list the business courses you completed.

Your GPA could also be a selling point. Should you list your GPA—even if it’s not stellar? Again, there is no consensus.

“GPA always comes up as an issue,” Borland explains. “Again, the resume is a tool for getting further in the [job-search] process. If your GPA is impressive or you believe it would help you, I recommend including it. If, however, it is a deterrent, I don’t recommend including it. That doesn’t preclude the fact that at some time during the job search you will have to tell the employer your GPA.”

However, Anne Voller, director of college relations for May Department Stores in St. Louis, advises students to always include their GPA on a resume.

“Since most students do so, a missing GPA is conspicuous and can send the wrong message to an employer,” she says.

It’s OK to explain a less-than-stellar GPA by finding positives. For example, you could say that your GPA was 3.4 in your major or 3.0 after your freshman year. Again, if you’re not sure if you should list your GPA, speak with a counselor in your career center.

Experience

Employers will pay special attention to the experience section of your resume, as they will look for evidence that you can do the job. Your previous experience can provide this evidence. Having relevant experience will make you stand out from the pack.

Experience comes in many forms—through, for instance, experiential education assignments, volunteer work, and campus organizations. It's important to show that you've learned or acquired the skills and characteristics necessary for the job. Often, employers look for candidates to have gained experience through internships (paid or unpaid) or co-op assignments.

“In this section you should account for your time and provide detail about how the experience supports your candidacy,” LaMarco says.

Use common sense about what experience to include. Even some types of unrelated experience can prove to employers that you know how to work and can showcase your abilities. Some career services practitioners recommend that those students making a career transition or those with little or no work experience in the field list their unrelated experience to demonstrate transferable skills.

Voller recommends using bullet points that begin with an action verb to help make your resume quick to read and easy to digest.

“Keep your descriptions meaningful, specific, and concise while emphasizing your accomplishments,” Voller advises. “Make it easy for your potential employer to quickly learn key facts about you.”

Don't just list the jobs you have held, or the organizations you have been at or are a part of. Detail the results of your involvement.

“Some resumes list the name of every organization where the student has attended a meeting,” Voller says. “Instead, list fewer groups but mention those where you have made a difference by making key contributions. For instance, ‘Increased membership by 24 percent’ or ‘Raised \$1,750 for the Kidney Foundation,’ are examples of how you can signify your involvement. This will better highlight your skills, leadership, and accomplishments.”

Other categories

This is an area that may or may not be included on your resume. In fact, it might be included on one resume, but not included on others. The key, once again, is to use a category if it is relevant to the position you're seeking.

These optional sections include “Campus Activities,” “Honors and Awards,” and similar categories. It all comes down to relevance.

“You can include extracurricular activities and clubs, but only do so if you plan on talking about them in an interview,” Schmid says. “Don’t just use them as filler.”

In addition, “you might want to include language skills or computer proficiency here. Any other group of work or skill base could become a grouping in and of itself if it is substantial enough,” Borland says.