



Your resume speaks for you— so what is it saying?

Capturing one's talents and personality on a sheet or two of paper is the first challenge for many job seekers. There are many books and websites devoted to crafting an effective resume, and all agree that there is no "perfect" resume. How yours will be interpreted depends on the quality of your presentation, the job for which you're applying, and even who is reading it.

Rather than think of your resume as a completed document, consider it a continual work in progress. Every job and every company is different, so craft your career objectives in response to the job description, and emphasize strengths that best match the posted position. Hiring managers often receive hundreds of resumes for each open position, so the closer you match their criteria, the better chance you'll have.

Your resume is often your one chance to get your foot in the door for an interview. With so much riding on this document, take time to make sure you're putting your best foot forward

Job Seekers Toolkit: **Resume tips**

While there is no perfect resume, there are several guidelines that can help get your resume noticed:

Be enthusiastic

A resume is a marketing piece, and the product you're marketing is YOU. It should not be an obligatory listing of your job history, but an enthusiastic presentation of the value you brought to past positions, and how you will benefit your new employer.

Be concise

Hiring managers are busy. They should be able to quickly assess your accomplishments. Keep the length to one succinctly written page, two at most.

Be direct

If you don't know what you want to do with your life, no one wants to pay you to figure it out. Your resume should include a short, concise "career objective" that corresponds to the requirements listed in the job post.

Be relevant

How much of your job history should you include? The answer depends on the relevance of your experience. You want to demonstrate that you are a steady worker who has committed to past employers, but fast food experience from 15 years ago doesn't indicate that you'll make a great database administrator.

Show your success

Use "PAR" statements—Problem-Action-Result—to demonstrate your successes. State the problem that existed in your workplace, describe what YOU did to address the issue, and name the beneficial results. For instance, "Transformed warehouse inefficiency by overhauling the stocking and storing process, saving the company \$75,000 in recovered inventory." If you can support your claims with accurate figures, do so—in the example above, saving \$75,000 shows a valuable return on investment in that employee.

Be professional

Avoid parchment paper, script or cute typefaces, fancy folding, oversize sheets, and any other presentations that may appear gimmicky. If you're applying for a creative job, a creative resume is great, but for most positions, you want the hiring manager to focus on the content of your resume, not the presentation.

Check your work

Don't rely on spellchecker software, which does not know that you meant "pare expenses" instead of "pear expenses". Proofread carefully, and ask friends to read it and provide feedback. Clerical errors point to a lack of attention and/or preparedness—not the impression that you want to make.

Use common sense

Avoid religious and ethnic references, unless they are directly relevant to the new job; do not include "hobbies" unless the activity is relevant to the position; make sure the font size is easy to read; most importantly, make sure your contact information is included and current.

There are several effective ways to format a resume. The most common is chronological, listing job history from most recent to oldest, presenting your career path in logical steps. If you've had long stints with only one or two companies, list the different positions individually to demonstrate your progress. If your work history has gaps, consider a functional resume that emphasizes your skills, capabilities and accomplishments while downplaying chronology.

Uncover the value of cover letters

While your resume documents your accomplishments, the cover letter offers potential employers a quick insight into your personality, communication skills, and enthusiasm. A cover letter is often your first contact with a potential employer, and a well-crafted letter may make the difference between getting an interview and having your resume ignored. Devote the time and effort to make sure yours communicates effectively.

Do not create a form letter. Every job and every employer is different, and as with resumes, your cover letter should be a tailored response to the particular position for which you're applying. Explain the reasons for your interest in the position, identify the most relevant skills that make you a prime candidate, and express a high level of interest and knowledge about the position.

An effective cover letter should complement, not duplicate your resume. Because you have a limited opportunity to make an impression, use it wisely:

- Be concise—imagine you have one minute to establish your value. The goal is to generate interest; you can fill in the details at the interview.
- Be professional—the cover letter is an opportunity to shine, so proofread for typos and grammatical errors.

Consider these content guidelines for crafting a brief, winning communication:

First paragraph

Explain why you are writing; identify the position that interests you and indicate how you heard about the position. Be sure to mention any individuals who referred you.

Middle paragraph

Demonstrate your value to the organization by describing the strengths you offer, emphasizing specific positions or achievements that link to the open position. Use language that appears in the job posting – that's what they're looking for, so that's what you want to offer.

Last paragraph

Be assertive—ask for an interview! Include your contact information. Sign each cover letter, and type your name beneath your signature.

A strong cover letter may not overcome a lack of experience or industry expertise, but it can put you ahead of candidates with similar qualifications, and even those more qualified. Take advantage of this chance to make a positive impression on the hiring manager—write it well, and it may be the last one you ever have to write.