



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 major. If your GPA is good, include it. If you have taken advanced coursework directly related to the position, name those courses (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 brought to doing them. 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:

for technical skills	built, designed, fabricated, programmed	for research skills	analyzed, compared, determined, solved
for teaching skills	coached, enabled, motivated, trained	for organization skills	distributed, organized, maintained, verified
for leadership skills	coordinated, delegated, generated, prioritized	for helping skills	assisted, encouraged, supported
for financial skills	allocated, assessed, managed, projected	for creative skills	designed, initiated, planned, shaped
for communication skills	collaborated, directed, moderated, promoted		

Better yet, 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 benefit did I bring to my employer, and how can I provide evidence of it?*

Instead of just telling...

...show evidence of it.

I'm a hard worker.

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

I'm creative.

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

I'm energetic.

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

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

Instead of a me-centered job objective...

A satisfying, well-paid, entry-level job in accounting.

...write an employer-center job objective.

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.

Contributed by Rosemary McKeever



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