

Résumés that get results

The 10-second impression

Thousands of résumés cross employers' desks every working day. Each has about 10 seconds to make an impression. How can you make sure your résumé catches the employer's attention?

If your résumé has been sent in response to a newspaper advertisement, the employer is probably overwhelmed with applications. Since the firm hasn't filled the position from its own staff or through professional networks, the manager probably needs someone right away.

Understand how the manager feels. For countless reasons, most dread the hiring business: making so many appointments, knowing most applicants will be totally wrong for the job; using precious time on interviews that they should be spending on their own work; and explaining over and over what they need and what they offer.

Ideally, an employer would like to open the mail, find the perfect résumé from someone who is absolutely right for the job, call that person and hire him or her on the spot.

Well, it rarely happens quite that way but résumés are a powerful door-opener, offering the employer a snapshot of your abilities and interests. A good résumé is the difference between the waste basket and an interview.

Résumés can be tailored to a particular job advertisement or more general, for a broader job search. One is targeted, the other is more of a sweep approach. The following steps can be used in building either kind of résumé. The refinements, or specific adjustments in response to a specific job, can be made after you have the basics in place. Preparing an effective

résumé includes the following steps.

- ▲ Gather your information.
- ▲ Choose what is most important to your job objective.
- ▲ Select an easy-to-read layout.
- ▲ Put together a draft.
- ▲ Edit and change it until it is as impressive as you can make it.

STEP ONE

Gather facts about your employment and education history, and identify your skills and accomplishments.

Create a fact sheet of your employment and education, including:

- ▲ names, addresses and telephone numbers of former employers, dates of employment and names of supervisors;
- ▲ job titles, job descriptions, a list of your skills and situations in which you have demonstrated those skills;
- ▲ names and addresses of education/training institutions you have attended, the program(s) completed, major areas of study or training and any awards or recognition received;
- ▲ volunteer experience, hobbies, other activities and memberships that illustrate knowledge or experience related to the type of job you are applying for, or that show personal initiative. (Don't list activities that do not reflect initiative or knowledge of the work.)
- ▲ names, addresses and telephone numbers of references. Whenever possible, your references should be people who have supervised your work. (These should not be included in the résumé but available if a prospective employer asks for them.)

Phone number(s).

History of skills and work experience.

References
Don't write them in your résumé but make them available upon request.

Robin Hood
1236 Doak St.,
Millville, NB
EOH 1M0
Tel.: 463-1212

Experience

- **Secretarial Skills**
- 1987-1990: Secretary for 12 officers at the Department of Education involving up to six hours a day of dictaphone, together with receptionist duties.
- 1985-1987: Receptionist for up to 150 people (switchboard of 42 telephone lines), typist for the Administrative Officer and Director of the Branch.

Quality of work

- Excellent proofreader. For a period of three years, I proofread all technical manuscripts in English and French before their publication.
- Typing speed in both English and French is 100 wpm on a typewriter and faster on a word-processor.

Office Equipment Knowledge

- Operation and maintenance of:
 - electric and electronic typewriters;
 - IBM PC and compatible computers;
 - photocopiers (XEROX and Kodak with or without sorter).
- I am mechanically oriented and have learned, on my own, to operate all new office equipment quickly and efficiently.

Education and Training

- High school diploma, Wilmot High School, Wilmot, Ontario
- Commercial Studies, Nordic Business College, Timmins
- Specific work-related courses: Communications Skills, Introduction to Computers, Problem Solving: Solutions and Introduction to WordPerfect

Work History

- 1987 - 1990 Secretary to the Director, NB Department of Education
- 1985 - 1987 Receptionist, secretary for 5 editors, clerk-typist, dictatypist, Ontario Department of Education
- 1982 - 1985 Secretary, clerk-typist, dictatypist, Timmins City Hydro

References

Upon request.

The combination résumé

Advantages

- ▼ Highlights most relevant skills and accomplishments.
- ▼ Minimizes drawbacks such as gaps in employment and lack of related experience.

Disadvantages

- ▼ Can be confusing if not well written.
- ▼ Downplays experience with specific employers.
- ▼ Harder to prepare.

Comfortable margins.

The chronological résumé

Advantages

- ▲ Most widely used.
- ▲ Logical flow makes it easy to read.
- ▲ Highlights a steady employment record.
- ▲ Emphasizes growth and development in employment history.
- ▲ Easier to prepare.

Disadvantages

- ▲ Exposes drawbacks, such as gaps in employment, frequent job changes, lack of related experience or lack of career progress.
- ▲ Highlights most recent employment, not skills.

Lisa Simpson
461, Main St., Box 987
Springfield, New Brunswick
E1Y 9L9
Tel.: 443-1234

Work experience

Mecanic (diesel)
May 1986 - Sept. 1989

Training

Truck Driver
May 1983 - August 1985

References

Upon request.

True North Forest Products Limited,
Maple Leaf, NB
Under the supervision of the Director of Material, responsible for 37 pieces of heavy equipment (skidders, track tractors, generator engines, trucks and mobile cranes); in charge of parts purchasing; in charge of repairing engines.

XYZ Hygo Company, NB
Under the direction of the foreman and three experienced mechanics, responsible for normal maintenance of heavy equipment, rolling stock, engines and other company equipment; in charge of workshop maintenance, parts ordering and delivery; back-up driver of a diesel fuel supply truck on construction sites; assistant to chief mechanic (changing and tuning up of reconditioned transmission and tuning up of reconditioned diesel generators.).

Stewart's Trucking, Blackville, N.B.
Driver of heavy double-axle truck on highway construction site; occasional driver of bulldozer and tank truck.

Moncton Community College,
Moncton, NB
Sept. 1985 to May 1986
Motor vehicle repair (truck and transport)

Chronological order (starting with the most recent)

Must be typed.

One page only, two maximum.

Keep it short

A successful covering letter only has to contain three paragraphs:

- ▼ **First paragraph:** State your interest in the company and why you've written.
- ▼ **Second paragraph:** Refer to your résumé and summarize how your skills could benefit the company.
- ▼ **Third paragraph:** Request an interview.

Keep your language simple and to the point. Your readers will appreciate how well you can communicate and that you value their time by not making them read more than necessary.

When you have drafted the letter, set it aside for several hours. When you pick it up again, try to read it as if you were reading a letter from a stranger. That's how your reader will see it.

how your work benefited your former employers. Avoid using "I" and unnecessary phrases such as "I was responsible for..." or "My duties involved..." Use action words to describe your work: "researched and developed a work plan for" or "supervised a team of four."

- ▲ Be honest. Don't exaggerate or misrepresent yourself—most employers check information. Even if they don't and you get the job, you'll be found out soon enough. On the other hand, don't sell yourself short by being humble.
- ▲ Make sure there are no errors in spelling, grammar or typing.
- ▲ List a telephone number where you can be reached during the day. Or, list two telephone numbers, one where messages can be left during the day and an evening number.
- ▲ Don't sign or date your résumé, or put the title *Résumé* at the top. Before you prepare the final copy, show your draft to several people for feedback. You need to find out if your résumé gives a clear and appealing picture of your best qualifications.

pany is doing and its objectives.

- ▲ Personalize your letter. It should reflect your personality. However, be careful to avoid appearing pushy, overbearing or too familiar. This is a business letter so humor is generally out of place.
- ▲ Tailor your letter to the requirements of the job. It must show how your skills relate to this particular employer's needs. Photocopies and form letters are not acceptable.
- ▲ Stress how the employer will benefit from hiring you, and how you think you will benefit by becoming a part of the company. It's important to anticipate the reader's questions and give the answers.
- ▲ Mention you are available at the employer's convenience for a job interview or to discuss opportunities; give telephone numbers where you can be reached, either in person or by leaving a message.
- ▲ Check the letter carefully for any spelling, punctuation, grammar or typing errors. Ask a friend to check it.

Résumé roulette

Résumés, while an essential part of any job search rarely will replace personal contact, says Tom Prins of the Manitoba Department of Education.

"The best résumé and the finest credentials do not guarantee a job interview if you use them to avoid personal contact," Prins says. "In fact, statistically, a person must distribute about 1,470 résumés to land one job. Taking this approach to your job hunt is called Las Vegas roulette

because it gives you about the same odds as winning big at the roulette tables."

Prins says this passive approach may have worked 15 years ago, but it doesn't work today when most employers get hundreds of résumés each month without advertising a position.

"The individuals getting the jobs are getting them through building a network of contacts; friends, relatives, acquaintances and anyone else who has a job," he says. "Sixty-five to 90 per

cent jobs are found through networking."

Résumés are not a tool designed to help the job-hunter. Prins maintains they were invented by employers, not to determine who they will see, but who they will not see. They fall into the same category as personnel officers and application forms. "They are screening devices designed to screen you out," he says. "Résumés assist the employer to reduce a list of 300 applicants to five or 10 who will be interviewed."

A résumé does, however, have a purpose. It can be used as a self-inventory to prepare for your job search. It becomes a way to organize a personal summary of yourself for your eyes only.

"Going through this process will enable you to interpret yourself and your history to an employer," Prins says. "Any job hunt that begins with a self-inventory is a search that has automatically increased its chances for success. A résumé works best when you personally put it

in the hands of the employer. It becomes an effective reminder."

He says the best résumé is written after an information interview with a prospective employer and is tailored exactly to the skills needed in the job.

"Remember, paper is a non-conductor," Prins says. "Try to avoid inserting it between you and the person who has the power to do the hiring."

STEP TWO

Decide on the qualifications you want to emphasize when applying for a job. Your strongest qualifications should be listed first. For example, most experienced workers list work history first, then education and training. However, if you don't have much experience relating to your job objective, you may choose to list education and training first.

STEP THREE

Choose a format. There are three types of résumé formats.

The chronological résumé lists work experience in order, beginning with the most recent. The functional lists skills without saying where or when you used them. The combination résumé lists both skills and employment history. Each format has advantages and disadvantages. Purely functional résumés may be appropriate in some circumstances, but studies show most employers like chronological and combination formats best.

STEP FOUR

Write a first draft.

STEP FIVE

Edit, edit, edit. Then edit some more until you are represented on paper in the best way possible. Use as few words as possible but make certain the information is clear. Do not use abbreviations whenever possible.

CHECKLIST

Résumé Preparation

- ▲ Keep it simple and clear, one page, two pages at most.
- ▲ Emphasize your accomplishments and achievements. Wherever possible, describe

CHECKLIST

Writing a covering letter

- ▲ Link yourself to the employer by naming your referral if possible (i.e.: "Joe Smith, manager of customer service, suggested I write you"). If you are responding to an advertisement, refer to the ad. Show your awareness of the types of things the com-

What doesn't go into a résumé

- Age and sex
- Height and weight
- Hobbies (unless directly related to career objective)
- Race or religion
- Military service (unless it was your career)
- References
- Salary requirements or previous salaries
- Reasons for leaving any job
- Personal statements