

A CRASH COURSE IN RESUME WRITING

For starters, let's run through the basic concepts of good resume writing presented in my earlier books, *Damn Good Resume Guide* and *Resume Pro: the Professional's Guide*.

First, the "quick-and-easy" summary:

DEFINITION OF A GOOD RESUME

A good resume is a "self-marketing tool" that uses your past work history as a kind of "stage" to show off your job skills and their value to a future employer.

TEN STEPS IN CREATING A GOOD RESUME

1. Choose a target job (also called a "job objective").
2. Find out what's needed in the way of skills and knowledge to do that job.
3. Choose a resume format to use, either chronological or functional.
4. Make a chronological list of the primary jobs you've held.
5. Make a list of your training and education relevant to the new job.
6. Choose the main skills you'll need to demonstrate you can do the new job well.
7. Identify the best of your past job duties and accomplishments that show you can do the new job.
8. Describe those actions and accomplishments in simple, powerful, action-oriented statements.
9. Arrange your action statements in the format you chose.
10. Summarize your key points at the top of the resume.

WHY MOST PEOPLE DON'T WRITE GREAT RESUMES

1. They skip steps #1 and #2 above—they have no clear job target and they don't know what's required in the new job. (*Already, they're off to a bad start!!*)
2. They mostly describe past job duties, instead of pointing out their experience, accomplishments, and work habits that best relate to the new job.

NOW — IN MORE DETAIL . . .

WHAT IS A RESUME?

A good resume is NOT primarily a "work history" (that's what an application blank is). A good resume is a "self-marketing tool" that shows off your job skills and points out their value to a future employer—and it uses your work history as a kind of "stage" to show off those skills.

HOW DO YOU MAKE A RESUME GREAT?

Since your goal is to illustrate and document your skills that are relevant to your NEXT job, an *excellent* resume has to be more than just a cut-and-dried description of your past job duties. (In fact, if you are making a career change, you need to be very careful NOT to describe ALL your past job duties in detail!)

Instead, follow this strategy: (You can do #3 through #10 in any order, but do #1 and #2 first.)

1. Choose a target job—also called a "job objective." Sometimes this is the most difficult, and most important, step! *You can't do a great resume without it.*
2. Find out what's needed in the way of skills and knowledge to do that job. *This step is equally crucial.* This information may be found in either a classified ad for the position, or a job description written by the company's hiring unit, or in the

big book of job descriptions ("D.O.T.") found at your local Employment Development Department or library.

3. Choose which resume format to use, either: chronological, if you're staying in the same field; or functional, if you're making a significant career change. A chronological resume arranges your contents according to *jobs* and *dates*—it is considered the traditional resume. A functional resume describes your *work experience* by emphasizing the *skills* involved—putting the *descriptive details* into skill-group paragraphs (separate from your bare-bones chronological list of jobs). This format is especially useful when your relevant skills (the skills required for your NEW job target) are not so obvious just looking at your chronological job history.

4. Make a list of the primary jobs you've held, listed in chronological order (regardless of which format you use.)

- a. List your most recent job first, then your earlier jobs.

- b. You should include jobs that were very brief ONLY if necessary to show how you acquired relevant skills or to fill in a skimpy work history.

- c. You can (and should) eliminate SMALL gaps in your work history by dropping very short, irrelevant jobs, and rounding off your employment dates to years.

- d. You can omit some jobs that aren't relevant (or jobs that detract from your desired image) as long as dropping them doesn't leave a big hole in your work history.

- e. You can include jobs that were not particularly relevant to your current job goal, but don't describe them in detail.

- f. You can include unpaid work you've done if it helps in documenting your



skills (see #7 below) and/or if it fills in a gap in your work history.

g. You can eliminate earlier jobs if you are concerned about age discrimination.

h. You can modify a title if it does not accurately and fairly reflect your actual job duties and responsibilities.

i. You could include periods of training or education, if that helps fill in a gap in your work history. (In that case your job title would be something like "Full Time Student" or "Trainee.")

5. List any training and education related to the new job.

You can omit this section if you have no training, no college, and no school courses related to your new job goal.

"Training" and "Education" can be listed as separate sections on your resume, or they can be combined into one section.

Training

List just the certificate earned if you completed the training.

List every relevant course you completed, if you only completed PART of the training and didn't get a certificate or diploma.

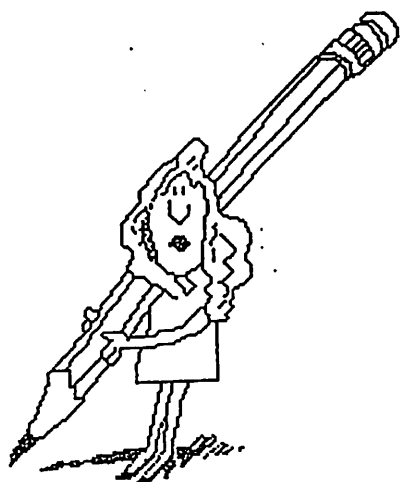
List every relevant course you completed in the training, if you are new in this field and have almost no experience—even if you completed the training.

Education

Make an "Education" section if you have gone beyond high school.

Make an "Education" section and list your high school diploma IF the new job specifically calls for a high school diploma AND you are not listing any other schooling or job-related training.

Make a section called "Relevant Education" if you didn't graduate from high school BUT you took courses in school that relate to your new job. List any courses that show your interest and commitment to this career.



6. Choose the main skills you'll need to illustrate to show you can do the new job well.

7. Decide which duties and accomplishments from your past work history best illustrate and document those skills and the knowledge needed for the new job.

"Work history" in this case means ANY WORK you've done—paid, volunteer, parenting, hobby, *whatever*—that documents the skills and knowledge you need to show for your desired new job. Just think up a reasonable job title for that work, and then be sure to label the Employment section "Work History" rather than "Employment History."

8. Describe those actions and accomplishments in simple, powerful, action-oriented statements with the action words near the beginning of the line. Be sure to mention specific, provable, successful results whenever possible.

9. Arrange your action-statements in the format you chose—either:

a) under the appropriate job title where these actions happened (if you chose a chronological format)

OR

b) under the name of a skill or special knowledge needed for the new job (if you chose a functional format). In this case, *be sure to mention where this activity or accomplishment happened*, so your statements are more clear and believable.

10. Make a brief summary (say, five

short lines) of key points that the new employer will need to know and that will make you look attractive for the job. Then put that summary at the top of the resume just below your "job objective."

A good summary *could* include:

- Number of years or months of experience in that field.
- Credentials, training, or certifications you have that are relevant.
- An accomplishment or recognition that "says it all," if possible.
- Your key skills or special knowledge related to this job.
- Something about your personal work style or attitude toward the job, that would look good to an employer.

MAYBE: a "Key Word" Section too!

Some large employers have begun to use computerized scanning programs to quickly scan hundreds of resumes at once and transform the information into a database. If you know that the company you're applying to uses a resume scanning program (you can call the personnel department and ask), then you need to add one MORE section to your resume: "Key Words."

Here's how to make a Key Word section: Review both your resume and the description of the job you're applying for and mark the significant words that describe ALL your skills, experience, and special knowledge. This may include industry jargon, job titles you've held, equipment you know how to use, processes you know, and so forth. In this case, "more is better." If in doubt about something, include it.

The main thing to remember about Key Words is that they must be NOUNS, not verbs! *Don't ask me why*, but for some reason, the computer is stubbornly looking for NOUNS! Nouns look like:

Product Design. Drafting. Fabricating. Residential Cabinetry. Construction Foreman. Marine Emergency Duties Certificate. Flux Core Arc Welding. Firefighter. Emergency Medical Technician. CPR Certificate. Fundraising. Sales. Telemarketing. Operations. Customer Service. Receptionist.

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