

Resume writing tips

The purpose of this two-page document is to share some ideas on effective resume writing. The following five topics are addressed:

- Audience
- Purpose
- Specifics & mental pictures
- The basics
- Final test

Tip Write your content *first*. Get that rock solid. *Then* do your formatting (one page or two, what content belongs where on the page, and so on). If you start with formatting you'll spend time trying to write content that fits into a particular area on the page—never the best strategy to make you shine. Write stellar content first; format last.

Audience

Your audience is a hiring manager. Hiring managers are busy. They scan. They don't read in great detail. They get a stack of 10 or 25 resumes, select 2 or 3, set up interviews, and get on with their day. Do your hiring managers the favor of making your resume the solution to their problem. Their problem is an open position.

- I once heard a manager say this to a direct report: "Look at this resume and give me a quick thumbs up or thumbs down with three bullets why. You don't need to read it—just scan it." He wanted the feedback e-mailed to him within 5 minutes.
- Another hiring manager told me that of 25-30 resumes, she would choose 5 or 6, call 3 or 4, and interview 1. Roughly 100 resume scans equate to 1 hire.

A well-written introductory paragraph or objective that says why you are applying for a position can be very powerful for busy hiring managers.

Purpose

A resume's purpose is to get its owner an *interview*—not a job, just an interview. When you get face time you can further impress the hiring manager with your polish and skills. And while you're there, ask some hard questions to ensure that the work fits with your skills, expectations, ethics, and any other needs that you have of a workplace. After all, why should you be the only one answering difficult questions?

Specifics & mental pictures

These two are related. When writing your resume, use specifics to describe your experience. Specifics give greater meaning to a resume by helping to create a mental picture for your reader. When the hiring manager can get a mental picture of your experience, it acts as the first step in helping them imagine what you could do for their problem—an open position. Without a clear mental picture, and particularly with too many buzzwords and jargon, your resume won't make the cut.

Compare the following two examples:

- Proactively facilitated the hygienic treatment of multiple canine clients in a positive and productive manner. Aided in materials re-supply and utilized teamwork dynamics to enhance a positive work environment.
- Bathed 8-12 medium to large sized dogs in eight-hour time periods for a period of six months. After six month orientation, led the washing station team of three other employees by listening to co-worker concerns, mediating team conflicts, and assigning work schedules. Stocked and re-ordered \$600 monthly budget for dog shampoos, conditioners, combs, brushes, and miscellaneous supplies.

The first is full of buzzwords, and does little to help the reader form a mental picture. The second uses specifics to enable the reader to imagine what specific work was actually accomplished. For more wisdom on fresh imagery, read George Orwell's essay, "[Politics and the English Language](#)."

The basics

Many resume basics fall into the "necessary but not sufficient" category—meaning that getting the basics handled won't land you an interview, but it will keep you from being tossed out of the potential interview pile.

Your resume should be readable, free of typographical errors, parallel in structure (for example, starting each sentence fragment with an [action verb](#)), parallel in punctuation, scanable, and should contain some descriptive categories that help to frame your experience in a way that a hiring manager can readily understand. Many people use *objective*, *skills*, *employment history*, and *education*. Sub-categories and sub-headings should be consistent and enhance readability.

Tip [Sans serif](#) fonts are more readable online, so consider using them for body text if your resume is likely to be read on a computer screen.

Final test

Your resume's final test: print two copies. Hand one to a friend and ask him or her to read it to you aloud. Your job is to listen to the entire resume as it is read to you. Make notes on your copy, but say nothing. (This is harder than it sounds.) Do not interrupt or stop your reader. (This is actually quite difficult.) When your reader is finished, ask him or her for any feedback. You'll know the places they stumbled, and you'll "hear" the writing in a different way than you do when working silently at your word processor. If you cannot find another person to do this, a distant second choice is to read the document aloud yourself, without stopping, all the way through. (It's really more difficult than it sounds—did I mention that?) Don't stop to edit; just put a mark by anything you want to re-visit later.

[Contact me](#) if you would like to discuss additional writing coaching.

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