

12 Step Resume Guide

Before you can begin to design your resume on paper, you need to have the words. Use the following twelve-step writing process to help you clarify your experience, accomplishments, skills, education, and other background information, which will make the job of condensing your life onto a sheet of paper a little easier.

Step One: Focus

Decide what type of job you will be applying for and then write it at the top of a piece of paper. This can become your objective statement, should you decide to use one, or be used in the first line of the profile section of your resume to give your reader a general idea of your area of expertise.

Objectives are not required on a resume, and often the cover letter is the best place to personalize your objective for each job opening. There is nothing wrong with using an objective statement on a resume, however, provided it doesn't limit your job choices. As an alternative, you can alter individual resumes with personalized objectives that reflect the actual job title for which you are applying. Just make sure that the rest of your information is still relevant to the new objective, though.

Never write an objective statement that is not precise. You should name the position you want so specifically that, if a janitor came by and knocked over all the stacks of sorted resumes on a hiring manager's desk, he could put yours back in its right stack without even thinking about it. That means saying, "A marketing management position with an aggressive international consumer goods manufacturer" instead of "A position which utilizes my education and experience to mutual benefit."

Step Two: Education

Under the objective on the first piece of paper, list any education or training that might relate. If you are a recent college graduate and have little relevant experience, then your education section will be placed at the top of your resume. As you gain more experience, your education almost always gravitates to the bottom.

If you participated in college activities or received any honors or completed any notable projects that relate directly to your target job, this is the place to list them.

Showing high school education and activities on a resume is only appropriate when you are under 20 and have no education or training beyond high school. Once you have completed either college courses or specialized technical training, drop your high school information altogether.

Continuing education shows that you care about life-long learning and self-development, so think about any relevant training since your formal education was completed. Relevant is the key word here. Always look at your resume from the perspective of a potential employer. Don't waste space by listing training that is not directly or indirectly related to your target job.

Step Three: Job Descriptions

Get your hands on a written description of the job you wish to obtain and for any jobs you have held in the past. If you are presently employed, your human resource department is the first place to look. If not, then go to your local library and ask for a copy of The Dictionary of Occupational Titles or the Occupational Outlook Handbook available online at <http://stats.bls.gov/oco/oco1002.htm>. These industry standard reference guides offer volumes of occupational titles and job descriptions for everything from Abalone Divers to Zoo Veterinarians (and thousands in between).

Another resource available at your local library or college career center is Job Scribe, a computer software program with more than 3,000 job descriptions. Other places to look for job descriptions include your local government job service agencies, professional and technical organizations, headhunters (i.e., recruiters), associates who work in the same field, newspaper advertisements for similar jobs, or online job postings (which tend to have longer job descriptions than print ads).

Now, make a copy of the applicable descriptions and then highlight the sentences that describe anything you have done in your past or present jobs. These job descriptions are important sources of keywords, so pay particular attention to nouns and phrases that you can incorporate into your own resume.

Step Four: Keywords

In today's world of e-mailed and scannable resumes, make sure you know the buzzwords of your industry and incorporate them into the sentences you are about to write. Keywords are the nouns or short phrases that describe your experience and education that might be used to find your resume in a keyword search of a resume database. They are the essential knowledge, abilities, and skills required to do your job. They are concrete descriptions like: C++, UNIX, fiber optic cable, network, project management, etc. Even well-known company names (AT&T, IBM, Hewlett-Packard, MCI) and universities (Harvard, Yale, SMU, SUNY, USC, Stanford, Tulane, Thunderbird) are sometimes used as keywords, especially when it is necessary to narrow down an initial search that calls up hundreds of resumes from a resume database.

Acronyms and abbreviations here can either hurt you or help you, depending on how you use them. One example given to me by an engineer at Resumix was the abbreviation "IN." Think about it. "IN" could stand for intelligent networks, Indiana, or the word in. It is better to spell out the abbreviation if there could be any possible confusion. However, if a series of initials is so well known that it would be recognized by nearly everyone in your industry and would not likely be confused with a real word, then the keyword search will probably use those initials (i.e., IBM, CPA, UNIX). When in doubt, always spell it out at least one time on your resume. A computer only needs to see the combination one time for it to be considered a "hit" in a keyword search.

Soft skills are often not included in search criteria, especially for very technical positions, although I have interviewed some companies that use them extensively for the initial selection of resumes for management positions. For instance, "communicate effectively," "self-motivated," "team player," and so on, are great for describing your abilities and are fine to include in your profile, but concentrate more on your hard skills, especially if you are in a high-tech field.

At the end of the chapter, you will find more examples of keywords for specific industries, although there is no such thing as a comprehensive listing of keywords for any single job. The computerized applicant tracking programs used by most companies allow the recruiter or hiring manager to personalize his or her list for each job opening, so it is an evolving process. You will never know whether you have listed absolutely every keyword possible, so focus instead on getting on paper as many related skills as possible.

The job descriptions you found in step three are some of the most important sources for keywords. You can also be certain that nearly every noun and some adjectives in a job posting or advertisement will be keywords, so make sure you use those words somewhere in your resume, using synonyms wherever you can. Make a list of the keywords you have determined are important for your particular job search and then list synonyms for those words. As you incorporate these words into the sentences of your resume, check them off.

One caution. Always tell the truth. The minute a hiring manager speaks with you on the telephone or begins an interview, any exaggeration of the truth will become immediately apparent. It is a bad idea to say, "I don't have experience with MS Word computer software" just to get the words MS Word or computer software on paper so

your resume will pop up in a keyword search. In a cover letter, it might be appropriate to say that you "don't have five years of experience in marketing but can add two years of university training in the subject to three years of in-depth experience as a marketing assistant with Hewlett-Packard." That is legitimate reasoning, but anything more manipulative can be hazardous to your job search.

Step Five: Your Jobs

Starting with your present position, list the title of every job you have held on a separate sheet of paper, along with the name of the company, the city and state, and the years you worked there. You don't need to list addresses and zip codes, although you will need to know that information when it comes time to fill out an application.

You can list years only (1996-present) or months and years (May 1996- present), depending on your personality. People who are detail oriented are usually more comfortable with a full accounting of their time. Listing years alone covers some gaps if you have worked in a position for less than a full year while the time period spans more than one calendar year. For instance, if you worked from September 1996 through May 1997, saying 1996-1997 certainly looks better.

From the perspective of recruiters and hiring managers, most don't care whether you list the months and years or list the years only. However, regardless of which method you choose, be consistent throughout your resume, especially within sections. For instance, don't use months some of the time and years alone within the same section. Consistency of style is important on a resume, since it is that consistency that makes your resume neat, clean, and easy to read.

Step Six: Duties

Under each job, make a list of your duties, incorporating phrases from the job descriptions wherever they apply. You don't have to worry about making great sentences yet or narrowing down your list.

Step Seven: Accomplishments

When you are finished, go back to each job and think about what you might have done above and beyond the call of duty.

What did you contribute to each of your jobs?

Did you exceed sales quotas by 150 percent each month?

Did you save the company \$100,000 by developing a new procedure?

Did you generate new product publicity in trade press?

Did you control expenses or make work easier?

Did you expand business or attract/retain customers?

Did you improve the company's image or build new relationships?

Did you improve the quality of a product?

Did you solve a problem?

Did you do something that made the company more competitive?

Write down any accomplishments that show potential employers what you have done in the past, which translates into what you might be able to do for them. Quantify whenever possible. Numbers are always impressive. Remember, you are trying to motivate the potential employer to buy . . . you! Convince your reader that you will be able to generate a significant return on their investment in you.

Step Eight: Delete

Now that you have the words on paper, go back to each list and think about which items are relevant to your target job. Cross out those things that don't relate, including entire jobs (like flipping hamburgers back in high school if you are now an electrical engineer with ten years of experience). Remember, your resume is just an enticer, a way to get your foot in the door. It isn't intended to be all-inclusive. You can choose to go back only as far as your jobs relate to your present objective. Be careful not to delete sentences that contain the keywords you identified in Step Four.

Step Nine: Sentences

Make sentences of the duties you have listed under each job, combining related items to avoid short, choppy phrases. Never use personal pronouns in your resume (I, my, me). Instead of saying, "I planned, organized, and directed the timely and accurate production of code products with estimated annual revenues of \$1 million," say, "Planned, organized, and directed. . . ." Writing in the third person makes your sentences more powerful and attention grabbing.

Make your sentences positive, brief, and accurate. Since your ultimate goal is to get a human being to read your resume, remember to structure the sentences so they are interesting to read. Use verbs at the beginning of each sentence (designed, supervised, managed, developed, formulated, and so on) to make them more powerful.

Make certain each word means something and contributes to the quality of the sentence. If you find it difficult to write clear, concise sentences, send your resume to ResumeEdge.com to put a team of Harvard-educated editors and professional resume writers to work for you.

Step Ten: Rearrange

You are almost done! Now, go back to the sentences you have written and think about their order of presentation. Put a number 1 by the most important description of what you did for each job. Then place a number 2 by the next most important duty or accomplishment, and so on until you have numbered each sentence. Again, think logically and from the perspective of a potential employer. Keep related items together so the reader doesn't jump from one concept to another. Make the thoughts flow smoothly.

Step Eleven: Related Qualifications

At the bottom of your resume, think about anything else that might qualify you for your job objective. This includes licenses, certifications, affiliations, and sometimes even interests if they truly relate. For instance, if you want a job in sports marketing, stating on your resume that you play tennis or are a triathlete would be an asset.

Step Twelve: Profile

Last but not least, write four or five sentences that give an overview of your qualifications. This profile, or qualifications summary, should be placed at the beginning of your resume. You can include some of your personal traits or special skills that might have been difficult to get across in your job descriptions.

Here is a sample profile section for a computer systems technician:

Experienced systems/network technician with significant communications and technical control experience. Focused and hard working; willing to go the extra mile for the customer. Skilled in troubleshooting complex problems by thinking outside the box. Possesses a high degree of professionalism and dedication to exceptional quality. Effective team player with outstanding communication and interpersonal skills. Current Top Secret/Sensitive Compartmentalized Information security clearance.

It is also acceptable to use a keyword summary like the one below to give a "quick and dirty" look at your qualifications:

Hardware: IBM 360/370, S/390, 303X, 308X, ES-9000, Amdahl V6-II, V7, V8, 3705/3725, Honeywell 6000, PDP II, NOVA, Eclipse, Interdata 8/32, Wang OIS 115, 140, VS-80, VS-100, HP 3000, 9000, Vectra, IBM PC-AT, XT, and numerous other computers and mainframes. Languages: FORTRAN, PL/1, COBOL, BASIC, BAL (ALC), JCL, APL, DL/1, SQL, DS-2, HP-UX, and various PC-oriented software and support packages. Systems: DOS, OS, CICS, VSI/II, MVS, SVS, VM/CMS, IMS, MVT-II, MFT, POWER, TOTAL, DATANET-30, JES-2, JES-3, BTAM, QTAM, TCAM, VTAM, TSO, ACF, NCP, SNA, SAA, ESCON, SDLC, X-25, TCP/IP, UNIX, and TELNET.

This type of "laundry list" isn't very interesting for a human being to read, but a few recruiters in high-tech industries like this list of terms because it gives them a quick overview of an applicant's skills. You can use whichever style you prefer.

Busy recruiters spend as little as ten seconds deciding whether to read a resume from top to bottom. You will be lucky if the first third of your resume gets read, so make sure the information at the top entices the reader to read it all.

This profile section must be relevant to the type of job for which you are applying. It might be true that you are "compassionate," but will it help you get a job as a high-pressure salesperson? Write this profile from the perspective of a potential employer. What will convince this person to call you instead of someone else?

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