

Build the Resume Employers Want

The resume—an essential tool for any job search. Although a lot of time, effort, and thought has gone into trying to crack the secret, there is no “perfect” resume.

Your resume’s job is to move you to the next step in the job-search process—the interview. Since each job and organization is different, with different requirements and expectations, the resume that opens the door to an interview in one company might not get you an interview with a different organization. You need to tailor your resume to the job to give the potential employer what it wants.

That doesn’t mean the effort that has gone into how to develop the “perfect” resume has been wasted. In fact, it has produced a lot of good information that you can use to help you build an effective resume that you can tailor for each job.

Develop Your Own Resume

Ask for help, yes, but don’t turn over the responsibility for developing your resume to someone else.

Your resume has to showcase what *you* have to offer. *You* have to think through *your* experiences. A third party can’t know what *you* did or how *you* did it as well as you. That said, *do use* expert help available to you appropriately: The staff in your career center can help you identify your skills and figure out the best way to present them. Your career center may also offer resume critique services, which can help you identify what is and isn’t working on your resume.

Connect What You Have to What the Employer Needs

It’s critical to understand up front that, in your resume, interviews, and all interactions with employers, the responsibility rests with you to make the match between what you have to offer and what the employer needs.

With your resume, it’s up to you to convince the employer that you are worth an interview. Through your resume, you want to demonstrate how your academic, extracurricular, and work experiences connect to the job and offer the employer some evidence that you have the potential to be a good fit for the job and organization. You want to provide the employer with evidence that you are worth taking a closer look at through an interview.

To achieve this, you must research the organization and position so that you’ll have a clear idea of what to showcase as you tailor your resume to the specific job. Read the job description carefully: Use it to identify keywords, skills, and requirements. Find the similarities between the job and your experience and qualifications.

Examine the organization’s website and literature for information about its priorities, initiatives, and company culture. Attend company-hosted information sessions to get firsthand tips from recruiters, and be sure to ask the recruiter how you can position yourself.

In tailoring your resume, highlight the skills specific to the job at hand, and use the keywords and verbiage you’ve gleaned from the job description and your research. Make matches between your knowledge, skills, and experience apparent.

Showcase Relevant Work Experience

Relevant work experience—often gained through an internship or co-op experience—gives you a big advantage over candidates who lack such experience.

In fact, almost all employers taking part in a recent survey said they prefer to hire a candidate with relevant work experience—experience that relates to the job at hand—over other candidates.

Highlight your relevant work experience on your resume. Draw connections between what you did as an intern, for example, and what the job requires.

Showcase Key Skills

In the same survey, employers said they look at a resume for evidence that the job seeker has worked in a team, and has leadership abilities, written communication skills, problem-solving skills, and more.

Look at your classroom and relevant work experiences for examples that show you have these key attributes, but also look at your extracurricular and community activities and interests; you may find great examples there as well.

Format for Easy Reading

In general, what matters most to employers are your experience, skills, and education, so make it easy to find and understand these by offering a clean, well-organized, easy-to-read resume.

Don't make the employer hunt for critical information. Don't clutter your resume with irrelevant, unrelated detail. Although some job seekers can (and should) develop off-the-chart resumes, remember that "form follows function."

Yes, those applying for a graphic design or similar position, for example, should think about how their resume can pull double-duty—serving as a "show and tell" of their skills and abilities. And some job seekers have created clever, web-based resumes filled with interactive visuals in their quest to secure a web development job. But many jobs don't lend themselves to that level of creativity. In fact, you can hurt your candidacy by providing a resume that doesn't match the job. A potential employer will look at your resume for a matter of seconds: Make those seconds count.

First Impressions Matter

What does your resume say about you? Ideally, it says you warrant a closer look and an interview.

But your resume can also say negative, unintended things about you that may lose you the interview. Your resume can say you don't pay attention, don't care about details, and/or aren't interested in the company or job.

Instead of showcasing your skills, your resume might be a showcase of typos, spelling errors, misplaced punctuation, and poor grammar—any of which may lead the employer to put you in the "no" pile. Details count: Spellcheck and proofread your resume, and have someone else proofread it, too.

Truth Is Better Than Fiction

- Misrepresenting your qualifications is a recipe for disaster. In fact, employees have been fired when falsehoods on their resume came to light.
- Be honest. Represent your qualifications truthfully. That doesn't mean you have to downplay or understate your qualifications: By all means, you want to bring those *real* achievements, skills, and qualities to the employer's attention.
- Mark Twain said, "If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything." That's good advice to remember when it comes to your resume.

What Matters?

When examining resumes, employers say they look for evidence of:

- Ability to work in a team
- Leadership skills/experience
- Written communication skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Strong work ethic
- Analytical/quantitative skills
- Verbal communication skills
- Initiative
- Technical skills
- Detail-orientation
- Flexibility/adaptability
- Computer skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Organizational abilities

Applying Online

In many cases—even if a recruiter has accepted your hand-delivered, hard-copy resume—you’ll need to complete an online application. Follow these rules:

- Read and follow directions carefully.
- Ask for advice on completing the application from a company recruiter or alumnus who works for the company.
- Complete all fields—even those that aren’t required.
- When possible, use keywords related to the position.
- Use the “comments” field to demonstrate your knowledge of the organization (and to show you have taken the initiative to research the company) and to provide additional information about specific skills you have that are relevant to the job.
- If the company offers an optional assessment test online, take it.
- Check your application: Be sure you have entered the correct data in the correct field, and
- Proofread it carefully for spelling and grammatical errors, missing words, and such.

Courtesy of the [National Association of Colleges and Employers](#).