

Resumes: Ten Simple Rules

Your resume -- it is one of the most important documents you can prepare when trying to launch or further your career. It does, after all, play a key role in opening the door at a potential employer. Actually writing your resume, however, can be a daunting task. What are you supposed to say that not only showcases your talents but gets someone's attention?

By formal definition, the word *resume* is a "summary of work experience submitted when applying for a job." With this definition, it is no wonder that most job applicants would rather have a root canal than pull together a resume! Instead, think of your resume as a marketing tool. It is not a legal document or an application for employment. The number one purpose of a resume is to get the hiring manager's attention and ultimately, schedule an interview. That's it!

Okay, so you know the content has to be good but what about the format? Both are important and the combination of the two will likely determine how many interviews you generate. Following are some basic rules of thumb to keep in mind when putting together your resume:

- (1) ***Print your resume on plain, white paper.*** Don't waste your money on expensive stationary complete with matching envelopes. More than likely, your resume will be photocopied, scanned, faxed, and/or emailed numerous times, thereby defeating the purpose of investing in high dollar paper. Do consider printing it on a laser printer, however. Clarity is essential when it may go through several transformations along the way.
- (2) ***Make sure your contact information is user-friendly and relevant.*** What name do your peers call you at work? If your name is William Edward Stone, III, but your peers refer to you as Bill Stone, then list your name as William (Bill) Stone. You don't want a prospective employer to call you by the wrong name – it's embarrassing for all parties involved. So what about those little letters after your name? Are you a CPA, PE, JD or MD? If you are, include your certifications after your name i.e. William (Bill) Stone, CPA.

Now, here is more food for thought. Consider omitting your address and instead, listing your phone numbers (including either a cell phone and/or work phone number) and your email address. There are two reasons for this. First, if you live out of town or in a remote area, including your address may eliminate interest in your resume before your audience even reads it. Second, it is quite likely that the prospective employer will try to reach you during the business day. Since employers typically communicate via phone or email, there is just no need to list your address. Save it for your employment application.

- (3) ***Skip the objective or summary section.*** Hiring managers typically receive hundreds of resumes per job posting. Few applicants are extended an offer based

on their objective. The more likely scenario is that this section serves to eliminate candidates prematurely. Make sure your resume opens the door – rather than closing it.

- (4) ***Include specifics about your educational background, certifications, etc.*** Always include the name of the university you graduated from, including the exact degree you received. There is no need to list all the colleges that you attended. If you have not completed your education, include the name of your high school and state the number of academic hours you have completed towards a specific degree.

Do you hold a professional certification? If so, list the certification and the date completed. If you are in the process of obtaining a certification, include some verbiage stating that you are a candidate and include the name of the certification, the state you will be certified in, and the expected date of completion.

- (5) ***List your current or most recent employer first.*** Be sure to include the name of your employer, dates of employment and your title. If you have held several positions at the same company, list each position separately and include the dates you held each position.
- (6) ***Keep it short and simple.*** A chronological and functional resume style is best. Use bullets to highlight each responsibility and avoid using first person. In other words, never use the word “I” on your resume. Most importantly, make sure your resume is no more than two pages in length! Only documenting the past 10 years of your work history is one way to accomplish this. Never include more than 12 years.
- (7) ***Do not include personal data.*** Personal information simply does not have a place on a resume. You can share details about your marital status, religious affiliations, or political inclinations after you are hired, not before.
- (8) ***Account for employment gaps.*** Tenure problems? If so, add an italicized note under each employer that states your reason for leaving. Employment gaps longer than 90 days need to be accounted for. If you left your career for an extended period of time to care for an ill family member or to rear young children, you may want to consider including it. You can minimize negative assumptions by addressing the issue on the front end.
- (9) ***Leave references off.*** References should be provided on an employment application or after an interview. Meet with your potential employer before you share personal information such as this.
- (10) ***Proof, Proof, Proof.*** No matter what, proof your resume. It is never a bad idea to have someone else read it too. If you can’t get a document that is all about you right, then why would a company want to hire you?

To summarize, following these 10 simple rules can drastically improve your chances of being interviewed and ultimately landing the job you desire. It is only one of many steps involved in the process, however.