

# **Résumé Workshop**

**Lee's Summit Christian Church**

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- **6 Tricks For A Recession-Proof Résumé**
- **Résumé Objectives**
- **Breaking the Résumé Rules**
- **10 Résumé Killers**
- **5 Attention-Getting Ways to Start Your Cover Letter**
- **5 Ways to Turn Off Employers**

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# 6 Tricks for a Recession-Proof Résumé

By Robert Half International

It's no secret that today's job market is extremely challenging. With more and more job candidates applying to fewer and fewer open positions, it may seem nearly impossible for you to get a potential employer's attention.

How can you move your document to the top of the stack? Consider the following suggestions for writing a recession-proof résumé:

## 1. Don't just update your old résumé

If you haven't been on the job hunt for many years, it can be tempting to simply pull out the last résumé you used, add your most recent accomplishments and send it out. But the document could be many years old, which means the content is likely outdated.

At the very least, give your résumé a thorough review and weed out any information that is not applicable to your current career goals. You may, for example, remove positions you held in college or delete the mention of an old computer application. You might even find the best course of action is to prepare your résumé from scratch.

## 2. Consider your form

A chronological résumé, in which you list your work experience in reverse chronological order, has long been the standard format that job seekers use. But in a downturn it may not be the best style for showcasing your skills and experience.

If you have frequent or large gaps in your employment history, you may want to use a combination résumé instead. A combination résumé places the most emphasis on your skills and accomplishments, downplaying your previous positions and dates of employment. Rather than having a section called "Work Experience" serve as the bulk of your résumé, for instance, you might have sections titled "Administrative Experience," "Computer Skills" and "Management and Training Skills." A combination résumé still details your work history, but this information is abbreviated and placed near the end of the document.

A combination résumé also could be a good choice if you are hoping to switch careers. If you don't have experience that relates directly to your new path, this format allows you to highlight transferable skills that are applicable to the position you seek.

## 3. Focus on the bottom line

Companies today are looking for ways to reduce expenses and increase efficiencies. When detailing the positions you've held in the past, be sure to mention how you've helped boost a former employer's bottom line. If you worked as an administrative assistant, rather than saying "filed documents" or "answered phones," try something like this: "Identified new office-supplies vendor, resulting in cost savings of 25 percent." Be as specific as possible when describing your achievements, and don't be afraid to brag a little.

## 4. Customize your content

One of the most important steps when crafting your résumé is to target your content to each company and position. Rather than creating a standard document for use with every opportunity, customize your résumé so it speaks directly to a potential employer's unique needs.

This may mean highlighting different accomplishments or going into greater detail about certain contributions, for instance. Doing so might take a little extra time and effort, but submitting a targeted résumé demonstrates your knowledge of and interest in each position and will help you stand apart from other job candidates.

### **5. Use your cover letter**

Like many job seekers today, you may have extended gaps in your work history due to current economic conditions. The cover letter allows you to address any concerns an employer may have about these gaps. In it, explain how you've kept your skills up-to-date since your last full-time position, whether through temporary assignments, volunteer work or professional development courses.

### **6. Check for mistakes**

In a Robert Half survey, 84 percent of executives polled said it takes just one or two typographical errors on a résumé to remove a candidate from contention for an open position. Employers see typos, misspellings and grammatical mistakes as a sign you lack professionalism and attention to detail. And in today's environment, hiring managers are less willing to take a chance on applicants who seem unqualified. Use the spell-check function and ask friends and family to proofread your résumé before you send it out.

One last piece of advice: Use your network to your advantage. Even if your résumé is solid, having a professional contact who can refer you for an open position or personally hand your document to a hiring manager could be key to landing the role you seek.

# Resume Objectives

## What Should Your Resume Objective Include?

- Entry level job applicants can use the resume objective to elaborate on the coursework they've completed and on the work ethic they possess, since they give a focus to a resume that doesn't yet include much work experience.
- People changing careers use resume objectives to show the employer what they can add to the organization, despite lack of directly relevant experience.
- People with very extensive work experience can use an objective statement to clearly specify which position they are interested in and why.
- Those who've been out of the workforce for a while due to military duty or family matters can explain how the experiences they've earned will translate into productive skills on the job.

## What to Say in Your Resume Objective

Be sure to be specific when writing a resume objective; there's no point in including one if you're not. Consider the following guidelines:

- Name the specific job opening.
- Mention how your skills relate to the opening.
- Construct a small paragraph which encapsulates this information.
- Often times "my objective is..." or "my goal is..." is included, but not always.
- Do not use personal pronouns (I, my, mine, etc.).
- Remember to focus on how you will benefit the employer, not on you.

## Additional Resume Objective Pointers

You must be able to communicate that you are the best person for the job. The first sentence of the resume objective must indicate that you have something constructive to offer the company. This is important because every company wants to hire people with a strong, positive, attitude and certainty about their skills and how to utilize them.

It's best to avoid personal pronouns because they denote a self-centered instead of a company-centered point of view. Remember that the company wants to hire you because of how you can help them. Keep this in mind as you write (and also when you interview) and you'll do better than 90% of other applicants right off the bat.

Avoid a bland, canned resume objective. These indicate a lack of interest in the position, the company, and your career in general.

Here are three example objectives from actual resumes. (Comments are in parentheses.)

### OBJECTIVE

To obtain a responsible (as opposed to irresponsible?) and challenging (what, you don't like dull work?) position where my education and work experience will have valuable application (like finding a cure for cancer?)

## **OBJECTIVE**

Seeking a position in the sales department with an opportunity for advancement (in effect, you're saying to the employer, "Give me a job where the pay is good ... and keeps getting better.")

## **OBJECTIVE**

Seeking a challenging career with a progressive organization which will utilize my skills, abilities and education in management, product management, operations, purchasing and buying. (Zzzzz. You won't bore anyone into hiring you.)

You can stand out from the crowd if you'll just write your objective from the employer's point of view, instead of your own. Sounds simple, doesn't it?

It is.

All you have to do when writing your objective is to make sure it answers this question: "What's in it for me?" That's the question on every employer's mind as he or she reads your resume.

Here's an example objective, to get you started:

## **OBJECTIVE**

Management position in procurement where over 10 years of experience will add value to operations.

Avoid such trite phrases as: "seeking a chance for advancement," or "where my skills will be utilized," or "where I can further my career." I've seen each of these on resumes that were badly hampered as a result.

So, to keep your objective from being objectionable (and torpedoing your job search), put the focus where it belongs -- on the employer and their needs.

# Breaking the Résumé Rules

By Joe Turner, the "Job Search Guy"

If you've read books on résumé writing, you might be confused by all the rules. In fact, during my weekly résumé-writing teleseminar, I correct a lot of misinformation.

With the economy in the toilet these days, the last worry you need is whether you have the correct indent template or that you aren't using this year's approved action verbs. It's imperative that you deliver the right content to push a hiring manager's buttons now.

Forget the "rules." Here are the critical points you must address in your résumé:

## **Answer the employer's most important question**

Most rules fail to address the critical question: "What's in it for me?" This is the employer's primary question in a tough economy. If your initial paragraph doesn't immediately answer this question, your résumé won't last 20 seconds with the person who's reading it.

A résumé is a selling document. Unfortunately, judging from the advice I've heard and the "professionally written" résumés I've read, it's obvious that many résumé "experts" have never sold a product or service in their careers. If they had, they would realize that now, more than ever, it is about money, not mission statements.

For this reason, the opening statement on your résumé must develop readers' immediate interest and entice them to learn more about you. Drop the long-winded paragraphs filled with "results oriented" and "proven track record" clichés. Instead, address the specific benefits you bring to them. In today's recession, that means a short personal brand statement that clearly summarizes who you are, your biggest strength and the primary benefit you bring to an employer.

## **Prove it**

In the past, you could sell yourself by promoting your skills and length of service in a profession or job. Those days are gone. Today, you must sell results. It's likely hundreds (if not thousands) of other job seekers have the same skills or better. Here's the problem: When you sell skills, you've reduced yourself to a commodity, and commodities always sell for the lowest price.

Today, you need to sell results by speaking the employers' language, which is "return on investment" or ROI. If you can't do that, you can't answer their question, and you've lost their interest. They will move on to the next résumé.

List specific, measurable results of activities performed for your employer or client. Place these activities in their own section under your personal brand statement. This strengthens the statement with measurable evidence including examples of problems that you've solved.

## **Don't tell too much**

Employers are typically going to look for the top three to five candidates. They'll weed out large numbers of résumés in the initial process, looking for an easy way to eliminate you. Don't give them a reason by telling too much, confusing them or taking them off track. These are called "screenouts." Yet I still see résumés that were written heeding the advice of "experts" to include too much information.

Here's the point: Your résumé is not a dossier. It's a sales document. Your résumé's only purpose is to get the reader to pick up the phone to call you. You're applying for only one job title. If the résumé doesn't clearly explain why you're the best project manager, executive assistant or purchasing agent, get rid of the information or minimize it, because it doesn't belong there.

To ensure the best possible impression when mailing a résumé, use the following general guidelines:

- Use a standard, easy-to-read font like 11 point Times New Roman or Arial.
- Always include a cover letter.
- Print both cover letter and résumé on good quality paper. Look for paper that
  - has a watermark.
  - has a weight of between 16 lbs. and 25 lbs.
  - is at least 25 percent cotton fiber.
  - is in a traditional color such as white, off-white or ivory.
- Use a laser printer, which will produce the best printing quality.
- If you're sending résumés that will be scanned, use plain white 8.5" x 11" computer paper with black ink.
- Don't staple the pages.
- If you're sending a one-page cover letter and one-page résumé, it is usually OK to fold them and send them in a No.10 envelope, but using a larger envelope that allows them to lay flat might make a better impression.
- Don't try to fold and stuff several pages into a smaller envelope. Use a larger, flat envelope if you're sending samples, transcripts or other requested material along with your résumé and cover letter so they all arrive neat and unfolded.

# 10 Résumé Killers

By Kate Lorenz, CareerBuilder.com Editor

Writing a résumé isn't exactly a speedy process. First there's the brainstorming. Then, you have to write -- and rewrite, and rewrite -- your educational and work histories until your résumé perfectly boasts your background. Plus, there's all that proofreading.

Even though your résumé took you hours to write, hiring managers will typically spend less than one minute reviewing it. If your résumé has any glaring errors, however, employers will waste no time deleting it.

To ensure your résumé gets proper attention, avoid these 10 all-too-common blunders:

## 1. Not bothering with a cover letter.

Cover letters are so important to the application process that many hiring managers automatically reject résumés that arrive without them. Make the most of your cover letter by expanding on a few of your qualifications, explaining any gaps in employment or providing other information that will entice the employer to read your résumé.

## 2. Assuming spell-check is good enough.

In a 2007 survey, 63 percent of hiring managers told CareerBuilder.com that spelling errors are the most frequent mistakes they see in résumés. Spell-checkers can pick up many typos -- but they won't catch everything (manger vs. manager, for example). Always proofread your résumé several times, and ask a friend to give it a final once-over.

## 3. Being too generic.

In the same CareerBuilder.com survey, 30 percent of hiring managers said résumés not tailored to the position was the most frequent or annoying mistake. Always customize your résumé and cover letter for each job and employer to which you apply. This way, you can tailor your materials to show how you will be a perfect fit for the position.

## 4. Focusing on duties, not accomplishments.

Instead of writing a list of job duties on your résumé, demonstrate how each duty contributed to your company's bottom line. For example, anyone can plan the company fund-raiser, but if you note that your fund-raiser brought in 50 percent more money than the previous year's event, the hiring manager will be more impressed.

## 5. Having a selfish objective.

Employers are trying to determine whether you're a good fit for their organizations, so everything on your résumé should point to your experience. A summary of qualifications that conveniently displays your accomplishment and background is far more effective than a generic objective statement ("To gain experience in...").

## 6. Giving your résumé format a little "flair."

Unusual fonts or fluorescent pink paper will certainly make your résumé stand out -- in a bad way. Keep your résumé looking professional by sticking with standard white or cream-colored paper, black type and a common font like Arial or Times New Roman.

### **7. Guesstimating your dates and titles.**

With the proliferation of background checks, any "upgrades" you give your titles or stretching of employment dates to cover gaps will likely get caught -- and you will be eliminated from consideration.

### **8. Tell everyone why you left.**

Never put anything negative on your résumé. If you left the position due to a layoff or you were fired, bring it up only if asked.

### **9. Include lots of personal information.**

It's fine if you enjoy fly fishing on Sunday afternoons, but unless your hobby relates to your career, it doesn't belong on your résumé. The same goes for your height, weight, religious affiliation, sexual orientation or any other facts that could potentially be used against you.

### **10. Going long.**

Your high school job scooping ice cream probably isn't relevant to your career anymore, so there is no reason to include it on your résumé. Your résumé should be no more than two pages -- and no more than a page for most professionals -- so only include your most recent and relevant work history. Take it from hiring managers: 21 percent think a résumé more than two pages long is the most frequent and annoying résumé mistake.

# 5 Attention-Getting Ways to Start Your Cover Letter

By Lori Cates Hand, Jist Publishing

"Enclosed please find my résumé for the advertised position." How many cover letters have you written that started like that? How many other people do you think have done the same? Now imagine that it's your job to read résumés and cover letters all day, looking for people to hire.

"Employers sift through more cover letters with attached résumés than is humanly possible every day," says Romona Camarata, Regional Director for R.L. Stevens & Associates, a national career management and outplacement firm. "My colleague, who has been a recruiter for 20 years, receives an average of 400 cover letters and résumés weekly." As a result, you have only a very short time to get the employer's attention.

"Employers may spend between two and four seconds scanning the cover letter. If it doesn't match what they need, it is overlooked," Camarata says.

So how do you break out of the pack and write an opening that really wakes up the HR person - and gets them to read your résumé? "I don't suggest that you get too gimmicky," says professional résumé writer Louise Kursmark, co-author of "15-Minute Cover Letter" (JIST Publishing). "But do avoid dry, overused introductions. Instead, write something that will make your reader want to know more about you."

Kursmark offers five ways to open your cover letters with impact:

## **1. Refer to a prior conversation with the hiring manager.**

Of course, you won't be able to do this if you've never spoken with the manager. But if you have, you're at a distinct advantage. Open by mentioning your prior contact with him or her.

**Example:** "Thanks for taking my call last Thursday and discussing your available mechanic position. I am very interested."

## **2. "Drop" the name of the person who referred you.**

People are more likely to read cover letters that mention the name of a trusted colleague or friend.

**Example:** "At the suggestion of Dana Whitman, I am contacting you to express my interest in the open position of principal pianist with the Omaha Pops."

## **3. Lead with one of your most startling and relevant successes.**

State your astounding achievement and show how you can do something similar for your potential new employer.

**Example:** "Under my leadership as sales and marketing vice president of MoneyMakers, market share grew from 10 percent to 24 percent on a shoestring budget. I'd like to speak with you about opportunities where I can deliver this level of sales results for Acme Funds."

## **4. Quote your contact directly.**

If your contact has been interviewed in the media or has posted anything business-related to the

Internet, quote it and show how your philosophy meshes with theirs -- and makes you an ideal person to hire.

**Example:** "In your recent interview in the Chicago Tribune you said, 'Companies succeed by hiring the right people -- people who want to make a difference, not just do a job.' When I read this I knew that General Widget was a great fit for my energy and passion as well as my skills as a machinist."

#### **5. Quote a recent industry statistic or relevant article.**

Doing this shows that you've done your homework and are in tune with the latest developments at your target company or the industry in general.

**Example:** "I was interested to read in Business Monthly that San Marcos Manufacturing plans to expand its Asian operations to Vietnam and China. With seven years of experience launching production (both plant start-up and supplier development) in both of these countries, I can help make this important venture successful for you."

Your first paragraph should also make it clear why you are writing. Are you confirming a scheduled meeting, applying in response to an advertisement, or being referred by a mutual acquaintance? "Don't be mysterious! Share this information up front so that your reader can place your letter in the proper context," Kursmark says. Follow these tips and your next letter might go from making the hiring manager yawn to making him or her pick up the phone and ask you to come in for an interview.

# 5 Ways to Turn Off Employers

By Tag and Catherine Goulet, FabJob.com

Are you high maintenance? Do your friends tease you about being a "diva"? Is one of your favorite phrases "enough about you, let's talk about me"?

If you answered "no," check out the following behaviors, compiled from bad moves of dozens of real-life job seekers, for ways guaranteed to make a negative impression on employers. Behave like this and you won't be getting a job offer anytime soon.

## **Turn Off No. 1: Get More Information Before Applying**

Before you apply for a job, make sure you're not wasting your time going after a position that's beneath you.

When you see an ad for a job that looks interesting, phone the employer and demand to speak with the person in charge of hiring. Once you have that person on the phone (if necessary, keep phoning until they agree to take your call), grill them about the job.

Get answers to questions such as:

- How much does it pay?
- How much vacation time will I get?
- How big will my office be?

Finish by insisting that they fax or e-mail the job description to you.

## **Turn Off No. 2: Create a Cover Letter That's All About You**

Start your cover letter with a strong statement such as, "This is the type of position I've been looking for."

Then go on to explain what you want in a job. For example, "I am searching for a financially rewarding position where I can gain experience and pursue my interests." Add that you see the job as a steppingstone to something better.

Even if they haven't asked for salary expectations, tell them the minimum amount they'll need to pay you "with benefits."

Better yet, don't waste your valuable time writing a cover letter when anyone can see from your résumé how lucky he or she would be to have you.

## **Turn Off No. 3: Show Them Who's Boss During the Interview**

Arrive late so you can avoid sitting around waiting for the interviewer.

During the interview, ask intelligent questions like "What does this company do?" When the interviewer describes what they do, respond: "Hiring me will help you people achieve some real success."

Explain how nothing they have been doing until this point has been particularly effective, which

is why you'd never heard of them before you saw the ad for the job.

If asked what you could do for them, answer with vague generalizations.

Interrupt the interviewer repeatedly. If they try to say something while you're making a point, ignore them and keep talking loudly because it really isn't important what they say; what is important is that you get your point across.

Keep your cell phone on in case someone calls you during the interview with a better offer.

#### **Turn Off No. 4: Follow-Up Repeatedly After the Interview**

After the interview, contact the hiring manager and say you want feedback about how you did so they can reassure you that you did a great job.

If the interviewer is reluctant to talk, pressure them to give you information. Contact them repeatedly if necessary. This information could be helpful to you in future job searches.

Moreover, if you don't like what the hiring manager has to say, you can argue that their assessment of you is wrong. If you argue strongly enough, maybe you can convince him or her to hire you.

If the employer offers the job to someone else, insist he or she tells you why you didn't receive an offer. Then demand to speak to the company president to try to convince him to veto the decision and give you the job.

#### **Turn Off No. 5: Keep Communicating Until They Get a Restraining Order**

Phone and e-mail repeatedly for any reason:

- to find out more about the job
- to ask for help filling out the online application form
- to ask if they received your application
- to ask what to wear to the interview
- to ask for feedback after the interview
- to find out if they received the thank you notes you sent
- to find out when they'll be making a decision
- to demand an explanation for why they didn't hire you, etc.

If you don't get the first job you apply for, apply for every other job that opens up in the company that might be remotely related to anything you have ever had an interest in.

In all your communications with the employer, talk at length about yourself and how you feel.

In short, these tactics will make an impression on an employer, but probably not the kind you want to make! Check out the other articles at this website for advice on how to make a positive impression on employers.