Feature

Resumes: Screening Devices for Employers

Abstract

A resume can be considered as a tool to show a person's background, skills, knowledge, and experience and what he can offer that is unique for an organisation. This article covers in brief what information can be included in a resume. It also discusses in brief how electronic resumes are prepared and sent via e-mail.

1. Introduction

A resume is the first interface a job seeker has with his prospective employer. It is one of the most important deciding factors in determining whether one gets an interview with the employer. A resume can be considered as a tool to show a person's background, skills, knowledge, and experience and what he can offer that is unique for an organisation. A good resume varies depending upon the type of job one is applying for. The point is, one is selling one's own unique combination of skills, and depending upon the job requirements, one should present one's work experience, skills, and education to reflect his qualifications for a particular job through his resume. Resumes are used as screening devices to determine a candidate whom the employers can interview and select.

Every person, regardless of the present stage of his or her career, needs a good resume as one may be seeking a job, wants a career change or may get an unexpected job opportunity. A resume serves as a guide for the interviewer as well as an information source for the candidate if he faces an interview unexpectedly. One can customise his resume if he is aiming at more than one job opening.

The resume is needed to be kept updated. It should always reflect candidate's newly acquired skills and experience.

2. Parts of a Resume

A resume must contain a certain amount of essential information about the candidate. This information may vary from person to person depending upon qualification, experience, special accomplishments, etc.

The following categories may be included:

♦ Name, address, city, state, phone number(s), and e-mail address

♦ Carrier or Job objective

♦ Summary of qualifications

♦ Employment record

♦ Education

♦ Professional training

♦ Professional affiliations

♦ Knowledge of foreign languages

♦ Publications

♦ Special accomplishments

♦ A statement to the effect that references and, if applicable, samples of previous work, will be available on request

It is not necessary to include all these categories. One can always consider what is relevant to the position for which one is applying.

Name, Address and Telephone Numbers

Along with one's full name, one should give address, city, state, phone number(s), and e-mail address where he can be communicated. Nicknames and surnames, such as 'Junior', 'Senior', and 'II', should be dropped. All words in the address should be spelled out (such as 'Street', 'Apartments', etc., and name of the state). Pin code should always be mentioned.

The Career or Job Objective

A clear and concise objective statement describing the type of position one hopes to obtain should be mentioned. This could be as simple as a one or two word description of the position one is seeking—documentation officer, computer programmer, technical assistant, library assistant, etc. This is optional as objective is included in covering letter also.

One should avoid the 'all purpose' type of objective. Be specific and emphasise what one can do for the employer, not how one hopes to benefit from the position. Be cautious about using overly ambitious statements. If one knows the exact job description, define objective to match the employer's interests and needs.

Summary of Qualifications

A candidate can summerize his qualification if his work experience has been varied and spread out over a number of years before giving further details and can present his personal traits in a positive manner.

Example:

Have the ability to carry out programmes under established policies and time frame and also command the respect of staff. Problem solving, leadership, team building, decision making, and communication skills are some of the qualities developed from my experience as chief librarian, a supervisor and a customer relations representative.

Employment Record

This section will follow education section if one believes that education is most important factor for the job. This is often true for researcher's, bachelor's, and master's degree candidates at entry level positions and also for the fields of teaching, engineering, law, and the like. The total employment record should reflect candidate's skills and make a positive impact on the employer. Employment record can be listed in several ways. In the chronological format, one should list employment in reverse chronological order (candidate's present or most recent job first). One should emphasise that his skills and experience will be valuable to the employer. Most employers want dates of employment and hence a candidate should always indicate the period of experience in years. Incorporate as many action verbs as possible (but don't go exaggerate).

Example:

¤ Participated in feasibility study and planning of computerised reference services.

¤ Performed all functions necessary for the preparation of manual and computer-processed payables.

¤ Developed improved mailing system for library bulletin.

One should tailor description of experience according to job requirement. There is no need to say why he left or wants to leave the present job. This can be answered during interview.

Education

If one has just passed out of the school this section precedes the employment history. With little or no practical experience, a candidate's academic credentials probably will be his strongest asset; in this case, place them directly after the objective statement. As one gains experience, the academic credentials become less important and are usually placed near the end of the resume. An exception to this rule is when the academic background is required for the job as in the case of law or medicine.

Begin with highest level of educational achievement. Here a doctorate will be followed by a master's degree, then a bachelor's. If one has not completed a college degree, list what one can. Drop references to high school if one has attended college or has received some specialised training.

Degree, Diploma, or Certificate

List a degree, diploma, or certificate as was awarded by the institution.

Name of the Institution

Give the name of the institution or organisation where the learning took place. One should include the entire name and not abbreviation.

Location of Institution

Do not mention the city and state where the college is located if it is obvious from the title.

Year

Mention the year in which candidate was declared 'passed' in his degree/diploma, etc. by the corresponding institution.

Professional Training

It is advisable to separate education from training. Include this section to focus on special courses, world seminars or other forms of continuing education. Training also includes courses taken to improve job performance. One should always mention those courses which can be considered an added asset. For example, one can mention that one is computer literate and can be useful for the organisation.

Professional Affiliations

A candidate should mention associations and memberships, which are directly related to his career objective. It shows that he is up to date in his profession. For persons making a career change, a listing of professional memberships in that new field demonstrates that one is serious about his intent.

Foreign Languages

State any foreign languages one knows, level of proficiency, and translating experiences (if any).

Publications

Mention titles of papers, books, etc. published, along with year of publication, and name of journals. For papers presented in conferences, along with title, the name, place and year of conference should be given.

Special Accomplishments

Career changers, recent college graduates, and women returning to work after an absence of years can benefit from including a special accomplishments section.

The section can include achievements, activities, social work, project awards, volunteer experiences, state or national level awards, or other related facts.

References

As most employers prefer to seek out their own sources for references, it is not necessary to list them in a resume. One can simply state: 'References will be furnished upon request'.

3. Keep in Mind

Always read and verify resume two or three times and update it regularly. Check the following points during its preparation:

Punctuation Mistakes

○ Periods should be there at the end of all full sentences.

○ Be consistent in use of punctuation.

○ Always put periods and commas within quotation marks (i.e., Won five awards including the 'JLIS Award,' in 2000.).

○ Avoid using exclamation marks.

Other Grammatical Mistakes

○ Do not switch tenses within the resume. The duties currently performing should be in present tense (i.e., write reports) and already performed in past jobs should be in past tense (i.e., wrote reports).

○ Capitalize all proper nouns.

○ When expressing numbers, write out all numbers between one and nine (i.e., one, five, seven), but use numerals for all numbers 10 and above (i.e., 10, 55, 127).

○ A sentence beginning with a numeral, should have that numeral spelled out (i.e., Eleven cash awards won while employed.).

○ Date formats should be consistent (i.e., 12/11/99 or November 12, 1999, or 12.11.99. Choose one and stick to it).

Words Count

○ Avoid large paragraphs (five or six lines). Write small sentences so that the resume will be easily read and understood.

○ Use action words, i.e., wrote reports, answered queries, conducted conferences.

O Don't use declarative sentences like 'I conducted the....'

Potential Mistakes

Always check:

O Dates of all previous employment.

O Currency and correctness of address and phone number.

Design is Important

O Don't overcrowd the resume; give plenty of white space. It should be readable. Use normal margins (1" on the top and bottom and 1.25"on the sides).

O Keep the resume to one page whenever possible.

O Use minimum number of fonts—two at the most.

O A font should be easy to read. Preferred fonts are Arial, Courier, and Times New Roman.

O Do not overuse capitalisation, italics, underlines, or other emphasising features.

O At the top of the page, name, address, and a phone number should be given.

O Print resume on white or cream standard, non-textured, fine-grained paper using a good quality printer. The photocopy must be clean and clear. The textured and dark-coloured paper may not copy well when employer makes copies to pass to the selection committee.

O Print on one side of the paper only.

Honesty is Must

O Employers feel satisfied hiring candidates whose accomplishments can be verified.

O There is a difference between making the most of one's experience and exaggerating or falsifying it. One can be caught at the time of interview or later and may face punishment.

4. Preparation of Electronic Resumes

To make the electronic resume the following steps are needed:

Word Processor

Plain text (also called ASCII text or MS-DOS text with three-letter file extension: .txt) is universally accessible.

ASCII Text

ASCII is a standard, common text language which allows different word processing applications (such as MS Word) on various computer platforms (a Macintosh or a PC) to read and display the same text information. So convert the resume to an ASCII file.

While Creating an ASCII Resume:

O Avoid using special characters such as mathematical symbols, bullets, etc., as these do not get accurately and exactly transferred.

O Use the spacebar instead of tabs as the default for ASCII will make everything left aligned. So for indenting a sentence or centring one should use the spacebar.

O Plain text format does not recognise formatting, such as bold facing or italicised text. Fonts will become whatever a computer uses as its default face and size. Bold face, italics and various sizes will not appear in the ASCII copy.

O One can use asterisks (*), plus, minus or hyphen symbols (+ or −) and capital letters to achieve similar effects. Use a 12-point font such as Courier.

Looks are Less Important

Companies take the electronic resume option more for getting the basic facts about the applicant. One should pay more attention to presenting key details and facts in a precise and direct manner rather than emphasising on aesthetics part of it.

Make Content Readable

O Even in the absence of formatting features, a resume should look legible and easily readable. If possible set margins at 0 and 65 characters (in other words, the longest line, including spaces takes 65 characters before wrapping to a new line).

5. Sending Resumes through E-Mail or the Web

These days most employers ask for an electronic resume. Here a resume is prepared on a computer in a format that can be sent over e-mail or the Internet i.e., a resume is needed to be stored in a computer or a floppy diskette, i.e., in an electronic format. But most important is its format. No faxing or mailing is necessary.

Sending resumes through e-mail or the web is quick and convenient, but it has some difficulties:

- A person or an organisation may not be willing or able to receive attachments with e-mail. They may not be having updated version of the software.

- Avoid sendind a resume as an attachment, as organisations may delete all e-mail with attachments to safeguard against viruses.

While E-Mailing a Resume:

- O Include a cover letter and mention where the advertisement was found.

- O Send the resume and cover letter in one file. One may write cover letter in the space before the resume.

- O Use the job title and/or job reference number as the subject of the e-mail message.

- O Follow up with an e-mail or phone call after a week or so.

6. Cover Letter

A cover letter gives the employers an opportunity to evaluate a candidate's ability to communicate. From a cover letter an employer may get insight about his ability to express himself on paper, knowledge of the proper form of a business letter, command on language, etc.

Here are a few points to consider when putting a cover letter together:

- ♦ It should draw employers to a candidate's resume. For example, "you can see from my resume that I have the experience you are looking for" may be a good way to do so. One should experiment with his own wording.

- ♦ Keep it brief—no employer wants to read a candidate's life history.

- ♦ Tailor it to the position and organisation to which one is applying.

- ♦ Begin by explaining the purpose of writing and where one has heard about the job. One can say something like "Your recent Times of India advertisement caught my attention."

- ♦ Always mention why one finds himself suitable for the position/job. If the advertisement gives job description, one should refer to those skills in cover letter and say how he fits in and mention his unique traits and qualifying features.

- ♦ Always remember to sign the cover letter.

- ♦ Note 'enclosure' or 'encl' several lines after signature because the resume is enclosed.

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