



## 10 Points to Make Your Résumé Count

Employers want to know four things about you:

1. Who are you?
2. What have you accomplished or achieved?
3. What skills do you have?
4. How can they be assured that the skills you have will match the tasks they need performed?

Sounds simple doesn't it? You already know the answer to the first three questions. It's the fourth one that's going to take some thought. Just remember that everything you put in a résumé will help answer that last question.

### 1. Make it stand out.

Employers receive dozens, even hundreds, of résumés for a particular job opening and may take only a few seconds to determine if a candidate is worth pursuing. The employer will get their first impression from the basic layout of the résumé. Is it easy to see who you are? Are key points arranged for easy reading? Does it appear clean, concise and orderly? Tape your résumé to the wall and step back 10 feet. Does it still look good? Will someone want to step forward and examine it further?

### 2. Identify your job objective.

What is your objective – for your career as well as this particular job? Develop a concise statement that shows how this position matches your career goals. This is sometimes referred to as an objective or summary. It doesn't matter which term you use. But understand that everything that follows reflects back on that statement.

#### Sample job objective:

Seeking a position as a laboratory technician in health care research where I can use my extensive lab experience. Skilled in using electronic and analog equipment for high-quality specimen processing.

### 3. Target your résumé to the position.

You are selling yourself to an employer who is most interested in finding out if YOU have what it takes to fill THIS EMPLOYER'S needs. Here are some questions that may guide your research about a job:

- What does this company do?
- What is the purpose and function of this particular department?
- What types of skills and experience are they looking for in a candidate?
- What would you actually do in this particular job?
- Who will make the final decision regarding who gets hired?
- To whom will you report?

Finding the answers to all those question will require some creativity, but here are some suggestions:

- Talk to someone who works for this company.
- Better yet, talk to someone in this particular department or who has previously held this job.
- Read up on the company, its history and accomplishments.
- The Internet and local public library may provide a wealth of information.

#### **4. Recognize that the answer is YOU!**

You've done your research and you have a good idea what this particular employer wants. If you're lucky, you'll know exactly what position is open and what the employer wants. Use that knowledge to construct a résumé that shows how you can contribute to the employer's bottom line. The employer should be able to see YOU as the answer to the questions we described earlier.

#### **5. Highlight your accomplishments.**

Provide examples of challenges you faced and problems you solved. Use action verbs to describe your achievements. Instead of "I did this. . ." say, "organized. . .," "developed. . .," "was responsible for. . .," "collaborated with. . .," "expedited. . ." These words show strength and accomplishment.

Use "results" statements to describe your accomplishments. Describe the situation you faced, how you handled it and the results of your actions. "Developed a new system for recording and validating the backlog of specimens, which increased accuracy and reduced turnaround time by 25 percent."

If you don't have a lot of work experience, you can point up accomplishments from high school, college and service/community work that are transferable to work situations. For example: "As vice president of the parent-teacher organization, wrote a grant that was awarded to fund the development of a greenhouse lab for the school." Or "wrote a proposal to enter chemistry club in a nationwide competition." Or "was the lead programmer/designer for school's award-winning Web site."

#### **6. List education and training.**

List educational levels attained, starting with your most recent. If you have a college degree, it isn't necessary to list your high school or elementary school.

List classes you are currently taking that are pertinent to the position. Attending workshops and professional training indicate that you are eager to learn and improve your skills. Many employers will research your educational background, so make that information easy to find. Include the name of the school, location, degree attained, major field of study and the date you received the degree.

#### **7. Provide details about your work experience.**

List your work experience starting with the most recent position. Employers often contact previous employers so be accurate about dates, titles and contact information. Your work history illustrates your employment patterns and career progression and helps employers see how your experience and skills will help them.

#### **8. Tout your skills.**

In addition to your education and work experience, employers want to know that you have the skills needed to step into a job with minimal training. What skills do you have and what skills did you gain or improve during previous employment? If you don't have many "hard" skills such as running a piece of equipment, you can emphasize "soft" skills such as organizational ability or good communications.

#### **9. Follow up.**

Sending out hundreds of cookie-cutter résumés and hoping for a strike is like fishing for salmon in an ocean of tuna. Once you've made contacts based on a targeted strategy, it's important that you follow up with a letter, phone call or e-mail.

- A follow-up phone call adds a voice and personality to the résumé and letter.
- A follow-up letter allows you to reinforce your interest in the job and add important details about your qualifications that you weren't able to include in the résumé.

Both of these methods will keep you and your qualifications fresh in the mind of the employer. While other candidates are waiting for an answer, you are showing initiative and interest.

Follow-up also is important after you've had an interview. This is the time to send a note or e-mail thanking the employer for taking time to meet with you.

- Be brief.
- Restate your qualifications.
- Reiterate your interest in the position.
- Tell the employer you will follow up to learn about a decision (if possible, specify the date and time you will call).

## 10. Remember that size counts!

It is generally accepted that a résumé be no longer than two pages. One page is even better. This is not your life story nor even your entire work history. A good résumé won't get you a job. You have to do that. The purpose of a résumé and cover letter is to get the employer's attention and get invited to an interview.

Your résumé should:

- Focus attention on your special abilities.
- Create a favorable impression of you.
- Create a desire to meet with you personally, either in person or on the phone, to find out more about you.

When an employer is sorting through a stack of resumes, let's say, one every 10 seconds, yours should be the one they put into the "keeper" stack.

You can communicate additional information in your cover letter.

There are a number of Internet sites that provide sample résumés and cover letters. Some word-processing programs include some basic résumé and letter templates to make the job easier.

## Cover letter

Every resume you send out needs a cover letter. While a resume presents your accomplishments in a rather rigid format, your cover letter provides an opportunity to be more personal and emphasize what you have to contribute to the company.

There are three basic parts to writing the cover letter:

- Opening
- Body
- Closing

## The Opening

The cover letter should be addressed to a specific person who can hire you. If you have been referred to this individual, this is the place to say so. "My friend Don Jones suggested I contact you regarding a job opening in your home health care division." A word of warning: don't just name drop. A referral should be someone who knows you and is familiar with your abilities. Assume employers will contact a referral.

Whether a person is an engineer, lab tech, nurse or phlebotomist, **everyone is in sales**. Some sell products, others sell ideas. In this case, you are **selling yourself**. The employer is looking to **buy** your skills and abilities. So, just like an advertisement, the first part of the cover letter should grab the reader's attention. If an employer has a position to fill, they are ready to **buy now!**

Here are some examples of opening sentences:

- “Could your construction firm benefit from a carpenter with a proven track record?”
- “I am a certified dental hygienist who can offer your practice excellence in patient education.”
- “Your recent advertisement in the *Times* is of particular interest to me. The following highlights some of my experience in advanced manufacturing.”

The opening paragraph identifies your reason for writing and helps transition to the body of the letter.

## The Body

It’s best to keep the body of your cover letter to one or two paragraphs that summarize the skills and experiences you have to offer that are relevant to the type of job you are seeking. Some examples:

- “I am offering over 10 years of experience in clinical nursing with emphasis on pediatric care.”
- “As a medical records manager with over 15 years of comprehensive background in the field, I am seeking a Director’s role.”

If you are attempting to cover several areas of experience, consider using a bulleted format. For example:

- Proven management capabilities.
- Supervise a staff of 14 clinical nurses.
- Delegating department work flow, scheduling and quality oversight.
- Effective communicator, managing multiple projects concurrently.
- Principal trainer in patient care for high-risk patients.

## The Closing

Your cover letter should close in a professional and respectful manner that indicates your interest in the position and a follow-up phrase:

- “I look forward to meeting with you at your earliest convenience.”
- “I will call you in the next few days to answer any further questions you may have.”

Unless you know the recipient very well, your signoff should be conservative and professional:

- Sincerely,
- Sincerely yours,
- Yours sincerely,
- Respectfully submitted,
- Cordially,