

## Choosing the Best Resume Format for You

by Stephanie Legatos

In the past 12 years of working with people in career transition, I've seen a myriad of books about resume writing and the job search process. Almost all of the books include examples, from the traditional to the innovative. Some showcase design layouts and formatting enhancements, or a step-by-step process for resume development, while others focus on industry-specific resumes.

Where should you start? Where once the chronological resume was the only known format, there are now four different formats that you can use. Choosing the one that will most effectively showcase your skills and expertise can be tricky. Do you choose the chronological format – the one still most widely recognized and accepted? A functional format – the format that focuses on transferable skills and most often effectively positions career changers? What about the combination format, with a chronological structure but a functional content? And, have you heard of the skills resume?

Here are a few guidelines to support you in your selection of the right format(s) for you – the first step in creating an effective resume!

**The Chronological Resume:** This format emphasizes your employment history by listing your work history in reverse chronological order. It provides a triple focus on positions, employers, and dates. Continuity of employment is emphasized with this type of resume – as are gaps in employment. This format is best used if you have a progressive career track, or have made lateral moves in the same industry or profession. It is the format I least recommend to career changers.

**The Functional Resume:** While the chronological resume uses dates as a framework, this format uses skill clusters or competencies. The most effective functional resumes I've seen are those that identify three-to-four competencies. For example: market research, counseling, advocacy, training and development, fundraising, program management. Each cluster includes specific information and details about your experience and accomplishments. Your skills are not visibly connected to any specific employer, nor are they correlated to dates of employment.

If you are a career changer, this most likely is the best format for you. It is also effective if you have minimal work experience; or, (along with the Skills Resume) if you are re-entering the workforce, have had many jobs or have several employment gaps in your work history.

**The Combination Resume:** This format uses the same framework as the chronological resume, but the details of your experience and accomplishments are written using a functional format. This type of resume has two advantages: it provides the traditional chronology of employment that people are used to seeing *and* it allows you to target specific skill clusters *within* each employment experience. If you choose this format, you would list your current or most recent title, employer, location and dates. Then, you would identify two or three competencies and detail your experience in each category.

This format works best for people with a solid work history who have worked in the same or similar industries and occupations and who are marketing themselves for similar positions.

**The Skills Resume:** Like the functional resume, this format also focuses on skills and does not correlate them to any specific employment or non-paid work experience. Unlike the functional format, the skills resume lists six-to-ten specific skills without imbedding them in skill cluster headings.

I recommend this format for people with virtually the same experience job to job to avoid repetition those re-entering the workforce, ex-offenders, and those with limited work experience (paid or unpaid). It is often a good choice for recent high school or college graduates.

***Tips:** When you're writing or editing your resume, you face many challenges and questions. Deciding on the most appropriate format is only one question. Remember:*

- *Always ask yourself, "How is this skill or responsibility **relevant** to the position(s) I'm pursuing?"*
- *Sequence and highlight your skills, experience and accomplishments as they relate to the position for which you are applying – your future.*
- *Give yourself credit for volunteer, internship or other non-paid experiences. You gained or enhanced skills – use them to your advantage.*
- *Use the 10-12 year rule: exclude any experience prior to this time unless it's highly relevant to the position you are seeking.*
- *Use verbs (action words) to convey your skills and accomplishments.*
- *Include accomplishment-focused statements vs. a description of job duties. Ask yourself, What was the impact, value, result or contribution of my work? How well did I do it? For example:*
  - **From:** Processed vendor invoices and maintained accuracy.
  - **To:** Reviewed, approved and processed invoices for 500 vendors on a monthly basis with 99% accuracy, reducing outstanding receivables from 45% to 15% within three months.