

Tips to Evaluate and Improve Your Resume

by Stephanie Legatos

The sole purpose of your resume is to secure an interview. Every choice about what to include, exclude, highlight or minimize – and what words to use to convey your skills, experience and accomplishments – is a strategic decision. Here are four tips that will make a difference:

1. INCLUDE AN OVERVIEW:

This snapshot of what you can offer to an employer creates a theme and sets a context at the very beginning of your resume. It facilitates the reader's ability to make a connection to the details that follow.

Include 4-5 sentences or bullet points that provides an overview of your expertise. You can choose from a variety of titles: Professional Profile, Career Profile, Executive Profile, Profile, Skills Summary, Career Highlights, or Summary of Qualifications.

2. REMEMBER THE "TOP 1/3" RULE AND THE "30-SECOND" RULE:

Play two brief games: Using your watch or a clock, take a look at your resume. STOP in 30-seconds. Make a mark to indicate how far you've read. Identify two key things that you remember. Next, fold your resume into thirds. Given the position you are seeking, what do you see in the top 1/3 that is compelling and sparks your interest enough to keep reading?

When resumes are being read by a person (vs. scanned using software), you get 20-30 second of the person's attention. If you've established relevance and captured the reader's attention, your resume will either go into the "yes" pile to be fully reviewed or will be reviewed at that moment. Inspire your reader's to read on! Include the title of the position for which you are applying at the top of your resume. Use the job listing, what you know about these types of functions/position, your industry knowledge, and/or information gained from networking, to position the most relevant information first. Use bullets or other graphic enhancements to highlight information.

3. USE KEY WORDS TO MAINTAIN AN EMPLOYER-ORIENTED FOCUS

Use the skills of the position for which you are applying to guide you in clearly communicating and prioritizing your skills and experience. Although you do not want your resume (or cover letter) to read like the employer's job listing, you do want to use selected words and phrases – this creates a visual and cognitive "match." With the ongoing and expanding use of scanning software and online applications, using key words is critical.

4. INCLUDE ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Accomplishments showcase the results of your work and are used to communicate more concrete information to an employer. This simple formula can be used to help you identify and quantify/qualify your accomplishments:

P = Problem A = Action R = Result

For example:

P = low participation of seniors in campus blood drive

A = approached the Career Services office recommending inclusion of Red Cross booths at campus career fairs

R = increased participation in blood drive by 20%

Use this information to create a succinct one or two sentence accomplishment statement: *Expanded visibility of campus blood drive by working collaboratively with other university departments, resulting in 20% increase in participation.*