Is Your Resume Working for You?

10 Steps to a Killer Resume

An overwhelming majority of job seekers make basic mistakes with their résumés - mistakes that ensure that they will not get the interviews they deserve. If you feel as though you're sending your résumé into a black hole, try this 'Ten Step Program' to diagnose problems and get your résumé working for you.

1. Is your résumé the right length?

You may have heard that your résumé should fit on one page. This is nonsense. Recruiter or hiring managers don't care if your résumé is one or two pages long. But they do care whether it is easy to read and gives key information upfront. Your résumé can be one, two, or (occasionally) even three pages. The only rule is that the length should be appropriate for you. If in doubt follow the (very general) rule of thumb that less than 5 years experience probably only requires one page and more than that may need two.

2. Does your résumé clearly position you as someone who can meet the needs of the employer?

Think of a résumé as an advertisement for a product, only this time the product is you. Just like any other advertisement, positioning is everything. The person who receives your résumé will scan it quickly perhaps for no more than 20 seconds to determine whether you can help her company. Your job is to say quickly, clearly and loudly that you can!

Don't just launch into a chronology of your career history. Instead, determine your own positioning by spelling out your message at the start of the résumé and giving the reader your version of events upfront. For this reason, you should use the first 1/3 of your résumé to create a compelling personal profile which highlights your key strengths in an attractive, easy-to-read format.

3. Does your résumé begin with an objective?

Don't start with an objective. Recruiters and hiring managers don't like them because they focus on the needs of the job seeker rather than the needs of the potential employer. Consider this objective statement: "Seeking a software engineer position with a progressive employer where I can contribute to the development of new technologies and work with bright, committed people."
This may be very honest but it is irrelevant to the reader, who does not care what you want and only cares what you have to offer. Instead of an objective, try using a positioning statement that clearly and concisely explains what you have to offer.

"Senior Software Engineer with 10 years experience developing leading-edge technologies."

Now the reader can immediately see your value to the company. (For even greater impact, tailor this statement for each position so that the reader immediately sees a match between his/her needs and your skills.)

4. Does your résumé contain specifics?

You must place your achievements in context by providing specifics. For example, don't say something vague like "contributed to product design." This tells the employer nothing about your actual contribution. Instead be specific about what you did: "Conducted market analysis for (name of product) to determine design and mechanics. Led changes to original design spec. despite initial developer objections. Received critical acclaim and sold over 4 million units." See how being specific makes a difference? This level of detail shows the reader the contributions you have made in the past (and therefore the contributions you can be expected to make in the future.)

5. Have you outlined achievements as well as responsibilities?
Don't provide a laundry list of responsibilities without showing what results you achieved. Most employers already know what the main responsibilities of your job were. They want to know what makes you different from all the other applicants. An effective résumé summarizes job responsibilities in a few sentences and then provides details of quantifiable achievements.

Focus most of your résumé on the results you accomplished, not the regular duties of your job.

6. Are there any typos?
Your résumé has to be perfect. Proofread it over and over again. When you are sure it's perfect, have other people proof it! If even one word is misspelled the reader will assume that you didn't know how to spell the word (this is bad) or that you didn't care (this is even worse!) Nothing puts the reader off more quickly than misspellings or typos.

7. Is the résumé easy to read?
At least 50% of the impact of your résumé derives from design. A strong résumé design will pull the eye through the document, making it easy to keep reading and will highlight your key strengths clearly. But if your résumé is badly laid out, disorganized or hard to read, it will be discarded before the reader knows how qualified you are.

To see examples of how to lay out your résumé, go to the library or bookstore and look in the career section. You will find collections of sample résumés. Take time to understand how the page has been laid out and then apply what you've learned to your résumé.

8. Have you listed irrelevant information?
Don't list your hobbies unless they directly support your qualifications for the position. Don't detail your marital status or the number of children you have. Don't mention non-professional affiliations such as political or religious volunteer work unless it directly relates to the position you are applying for. Any personal information runs the risk of turning the reader off. However proud you are of personal achievements, you should not run the risk of alienating someone before you even have your foot in the door.

9. Are you too modest?
Don't be uncomfortable about blowing your own trumpet. Too many people play down their achievements. While you should never exaggerate on a résumé, you should definitely take credit for the things you've accomplished. Some people feel uncomfortable boasting on paper preferring to explain in an interview. But if your résumé doesn't spark interest, you may never get that opportunity, so don't be modest!

10. Have you created an internet-ready version of résumé?
If you have to post your résumé online, or apply to a job via an online system, you will need to convert your résumé to a text-only format. If you don't do this, your résumé will be almost impossible to read because most online systems cannot support the type of formatting used in a résumé (bold, italics, bullet points, lines etc.)

SUMMARY
When you send your résumé out, it must speak articulately for you. You can't explain inconsistencies, clear up confusion or fill in things that are missing. Your résumé has to make your sales pitch in a clear and compelling manner within 20 seconds. Invest the time to make it exceptional and you will see an immediate increase in the response rate.