The Compelling Resume

Great resumes are like effective TV advertisements. They're short, engaging, and tailored to sell. Of course, the product they promote is *you,* and their target demographic comprises search engines and HR professionals. Every element of a great resume courts this audience.

The overall 'feel' of the document:

With a quick glance or scan, resumes will be judged even before they're read. They should thus make good use of headings and whitespace to look visually appealing and nicely structured. This unspoken "**body language**" of the document invites viewers to engage. Conversely, a solid monolith of letters and words puts people on guard, making them hesitant to continue. A great resume should look equally professional and approachable.

- Towards that end use only one typestyle, limited bold and italic type, clean borders (not a lot of levels of indentation) with blocks of information that are easily identified, large enough type to be easily read.
- Also, Keep it brief. Three pages is generally the outside limit.

Setting the tone:

People looking through resumes often have very little time to decide whether a particular resume likely represents the kind of candidate they need. An effective resume thus promotes its owner for a specific job within the first two-thirds of the first page. It does so by beginning with a short summary of who a person is, how they'll benefit a company, and why they'll excel at a specific role. This **Personal Summary** replaces the Personal Goal which introduces some resumes, and describes how you'll help a company rather than simply what you want.

Effective resumes highlight relevant skills and knowledge immediately after the Personal Summary. They then proceed to introduce the jobs and training though which this ability was obtained.

- Resume writers often try to demonstrate advancement, yet leave the casual resume reader with the impression that the writer moved from one job to another too frequently. If you've had several positions at the same company, or worked with companies that merged, it can appear at first glance as though you've hopped around a bit. List the dates employed as one time frame, and then break out individual positions as separate line items or paragraphs with the dates following the titles of each position you held:

Continue reading for an example of preferred resume formatting:

RESUME
Name, Title
Note that the title is optional. If used, it should be similar to the title of the job for which you're applying and accurately reflect your background

Address / Email / Phone
Include as much contact information as is comfortable. The more, the better.

Overview / Personal Summary:
A few sentences reflecting what you do, how you'll benefit a company & why you'll excel at a specific role.

Education & Certificates

- School / Degree

  If you did not degree in a relevant field, but took courses that were relevant, you may decide to list relevant courses here, i.e. 'Intro to Java Development'.

  Tip: If your degree is NOT relevant to the work you do, we recommend you move this section to the END of your resume.

Expertise:
Depending on how many technologies/methodologies you have used, you might use one of the following formats.

Option #1 is more informative and verbose:

Skill	Year Last Used	# of Years Experience
Java	2014	5
PHP	2008	3
C#	2014	10

Option #2 is more succinct (and lists skills in order of strongest to lightest)

Languages: Java, PHP, C#
Frameworks: Struts, JSF, Yii, Zend, Spring, Asp.net
Databases: SQL Server, PostgreSQL, MongoDB
Tools: Maven, Eclipse, Visual Studio, VSS, TFS

Work Experience

Title / Company / Dates (month+year)
A concise overview of your basic responsibilities in this job - what you did on a day to day basis. If your title vastly differs from your actual job, explain the discrepancy here. This is also the place to describe job growth, ex: if you were hired as a help desk analyst but quickly proved yourself and were promoted to the lead position. (Note: if this is a smaller, or lesser known company, one sentence on what the company does can be useful as well.)

- Bullet point highlighting a specific accomplishment. List a budget or timeline you met, kudos you received, money you saved the company, or a successful project to which you contributed. Ideally, these accomplishments should be stated in measurable terms, and focus on specifics such as tools used to execute the tasks.

- Another bullet

- Another bullet

- Note: don't overdo it on the bullets (Try to keep this to five or fewer). Focus on **key** accomplishments that really showcase your accomplishment and skill.

An optional, short, description of the technical environment (especially useful for developers)

Title / Company / Dates (month+year)
Overview

- Another bullet

- Another bullet

- Another bullet

An optional, short, description of the technical environment (especially useful for developers)

(This list should cover your career as far back as 10 years. For roles that were less relevant to the role for which you are applying, feel free to keep the description to a bare minimum (title/company/dates + one-two sentence overview of the position.)

Hobbies

This section is optional. Activities can speak well for a person's character ("Volunteer at the local animal shelter") or potentially lead to a personal connection with the interviewer. Focus on less common hobbies (but still business-appropriate) to distinguish yourself from the pack.

Keywords

This section is optional. If included, it provides a place to list search-oriented keywords relevant to your background and the job you seek.

Style & Writing
Conventional resumes avoid the use of first-person words like "I" and "me." You're implicitly the resume's subject, so such words are redundant. Stripping your resume of unnecessary words keeps it concise, which makes you seem efficient. Liberally using verbs to describe your accomplishments will similarly help make you seem accomplished.

The following six rules for effective writing are from George Orwell's 1945 essay, *Politics and the English Language*. His advice applies beautifully to resumes.

1. Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
2. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
3. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
4. Never use the passive where you can use the active.
5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
6. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

The following are additional tips for a great resume.

- Even professional writers rely on editors - you should too! Ask at least two people to proof-read your resume. In addition to the spelling and grammar, verify that all dates make sense.

- Tailor your resume for the job you wish it to get you. This may mean reorganizing your listed accomplishments to highlight those that more closely align with the job you are applying for, or rewriting your personal statement. It is fine to have vastly different resumes for different audiences as long as they're each honest.

- If your job title doesn't describe your duties, consider listing your *role* instead. Or, give both your title and role, and then proceed to explain the discrepancy. For instance: "Hired as ABC and grew the position to include the responsibilities of XYZ after just three months of being on the job."

- Think carefully about how and when to use technical acronyms. One the one hand, they're often well-known and expected. On the other hand, they may obscure your resume from HR personnel and search engines. Consider using acronyms only in the Keywords section.

- Do your research: a simple Google search of your job title + resume (i.e. "software developer resume") will provide many examples of resume formats and styles. While reading them keep in mind the tips from this document, and determine which style is best for you and your job history.

- Of course, be honest and accurate.