

Resume Basics

Knowing what you want your resume to convey and writing it so that it conveys what you want can sometimes feel like an insurmountable hurdle. "I know what I want to say, I just don't know *how* to say it!" laments the struggling resume writer. Lament no longer, good friend, this is easier (and more difficult) than you think.

Structure is the easy part, and this article will give you some direction you can really use. The hard part, however, comes before you set even the first word to paper (or screen). You need to know what you want. You need to *really* know what you want. Then, you need to know what *they* want, the hiring managers holding the keys to the positions you're targeting.

Deciding what you want may be more difficult than you first imagine. Not only do you need to decide what you'd like to do, today, but it's in your best interest to decide what you'd like to do five years from now. Why? Because knowing where you'd like your career to take you helps you to make better decisions regarding the jobs you accept today. Being offered a job isn't always the end of the job search, and an immediate "Yes!" isn't always the best response to every offer. Select the positions you accept as carefully as you select any of the commitments in your life.

Knowing what the hiring manager of the minute wants doesn't mean you have to be a mind reader, but it does mean accepting that in that brilliant mind of yours you already have at least half the answers. You already know what it takes to do a job (almost any job) well. Don't believe me? Well, try this; think of any job in the world for which you have little or no experience. Let's say, "Brain Surgeon." I bet you can give me a dozen pieces of key criteria that will determine whether a brain surgeon is successful in his or her career, or not. What personal and professional characteristics would you want a brain surgeon to possess if it was your head they'd be working on? The hiring manager is no different. They have a position to fill, and with that position they have some established criteria they believe a candidate needs to possess in order to do the job well. You already know at least half the criteria. If you're responding to an ad, you'll know a few more.

Your second opportunity to learn the criteria of the position is at the interview. You're not there to simply answer questions. You are not the only one being interviewed. If you fail to interview the hiring manager, take the opportunity to fully learn the position's criteria and accountability, the company's missions and goals, the working environment's structure, etc., you can't make the kind of informed decision that will allow you to give a "Yes!" response with real confidence. Why do so many people end up in jobs they hate? Because they fail to see beyond the smiles and good intentions and ask the questions. While you're asking yourself, "What characteristics, both personally and professionally, do I possess that will allow me to do this job well?" ask yourself, also, "What criteria do I need in my employment situation for me to succeed to my full potential?"

But interviewing comes after the resume, and the resume is what we're heading for here, so . . . let's get to it.

CONTACT INFORMATION

What's the most important information on your resume? Is it the great contribution you made to the production efforts of ABC Company last year? Is it the shiny new MBA you recently achieved, with honors? Is it your exceptional communication skills and winning presentational presence? Nope. It's your



contact information. Who you are and how your reader can reach you is, when all is said and done, the most important information in your entire document.

See, this is getting easier. You know who you are, you know where you live, you know your phone number and e-mail address. You already know the most important information in your entire document!

OBJECTIVE STATEMENT

That done, the next piece of information to include (or not include) is your "objective statement." Do you need one? Well, let's take a look at your career history, first. Is your background consistently (and clearly) in line with the position you're currently targeting? Without an objective, will the reader know your career direction and recognize the position for which you're applying? If your background is in operational management, and the three most recent positions you've listed on your resume are "Operational Manager," and the position for which you're submitting a resume is Operational Manager, is there any real need to say you want to be an operational manager?

Objective statements are most useful when:

- The resume is being submitted for a specific position (To obtain the position of Operations Manager for ABC Company),
- The candidate is changing career paths (To use my extensive background in sales, marketing, and personnel management for the benefit of ABC Company's operational efforts),
- The candidate is a recent graduate with little hands-on experience,
- Any time when the career history alone does not present an easily identifiable "fit" for the position being targeted.

At all times in writing your resume you have to remember your audience. You want to make this easy on your reader. Don't write an objective that is vague, or tells the reader what *you* want, but rather what you're offering *them.*

PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY, PROFILE, or SYNOPSIS

A summary is not simply a brief listing of what you've done, but what you can do. It's a package of personal and professional characteristics that you offer a company ~ that which allows you to provide exemplary work. Example:

"Senior Operations Manager offering an impressive background in _____."

Remember that criteria you already know? Remember what special skills you'd like your brain surgeon to have? Well, what makes a top-notch operations manager? What skills, talents, achievements, and focus would you like this individual to possess if it were your job to hire them? That information goes in the summary. It gives your reader a quick list of criteria that establishes a "fit" for the position, the benefits that can be enjoyed through hiring the individual, and impresses a level of quality of work and background.

Perhaps it's important that a good operations manager understand the particular industry for which the position in question is held. Perhaps they should possess outstanding problem solving skills, with an ability to develop effective solutions that will positively impact: production, efficiencies, and/or costs. Perhaps they should have good communication and interpersonal skills, so that they can develop a cohesive team structure between various departments. The summary is the place to list these skills, and identify them in a manner that will be appreciated *by the reader.* You want your reader to envision you providing these great services for *their* company. So, it's not just what you've *done* that's important, but what you *can* do that counts here.

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY / CAREER BACKGROUND

The biggest error many resume writers make is in telling a "story." I don't mean writing fiction, but writing their history as if it were a conversation, a tale of sorts. With lots of "I" statements and "Responsible for's." Their resume begins reading like a dialogue. If you had to bring your history down to its most basic form it would be: Problem, Solution, Results. Every job is held in order to problem solve, from the receptionist to the company president. Work is generated because there is a problem that needs addressing, the actual work is the solution, and the outcome of that work is the result (positive or negative).

Let me give you an example: The receptionist. The receptionist is hired to solve the problems of: ringing phones, client questions, schedules of meetings and appointments, paperwork management, etc. Those are otherwise known as her "responsibilities." Her solution is to: answer the phones, provide information to clients, organize a logical and workable schedule of appointments and meetings, and coordinate paperwork so that it's easily retrieved on demand. The results of her work (if positive) are: the phones are answered in a timely and efficient manner (clients are happy, bosses are happy), information provided to clients is accurate and helpful, schedules and meetings are workable and productive, paperwork is managed and maintained so that important information is easily accessed and understood.

How might this information be listed on her resume?

- Manage office operations and procedures for leading advertising firm.
- Schedule and coordinate client meetings and corporate appointments for Senior Advertising Director and Marketing Manager, assuring workable and productive daily schedules and activities are maintained.
- Manage multiple-line telephone system, providing fast and efficient service to inquiries of both established and potential clients. Position requires a detailed understanding of industry and client needs.
- Coordinate and maintain database and paperwork management, assuring records and schedules are accurate and consistently maintained. Created and implemented a logical system for quick information access and long-term records management, improving inquiry response time and accuracy of information by 70%.

Isn't this an improvement over: "I am responsible for phones, appointment scheduling, and paperwork"? or, worse yet, "I'm just a secretary"?! Each position is important, each individual who holds that position provides value. Recognizing, fully, what services you provide and appreciating their resulting value will enable your reader to appreciate them, too.

EDUCATION

If your education is the most recent accomplishment in your career, or if it holds the greatest proof of your credibility for the position, list it first. If you've held positions in your field of choice, since achieving your education, list your work, first. Your reader is most interested in that information which is most current and that information which most clearly establishes your level of fit for the position. If you feel that your education is a trump card, list it twice; once in your summary, and once again in its own section.

Only list the dates of educational achievements if they are current, within the last 10 years, or so. It matters less **when** you achieved your degree or education as it matters that you achieved it, successfully.

OTHER INFORMATION OF INTEREST

List any associations or professional organizations for which you're a member IF they hold some value to the position for which you're applying.

List hobbies and outside activities **ONLY IF** they are directly relevant to the position for which you're targeting.

List all volunteer work, that is directly **RELEVANT** to the position you're targeting, the same as you list any other work on your document. Being paid for your work is not an issue, ~ gaining skills of benefit and value to your next position that your reader can appreciate is the issue, financially compensated, or not.

DO NOT list personal information, such as: marital status, physical health, height, weight, number of dependents, pending lawsuits (never a good idea to make it known that you are suing your previous employer), religious affiliation, race, or what you had for breakfast on this document. It is illegal for an interviewer to determine your employability by these issues ~ for a reason!

DO NOT include a picture of yourself with your resume, unless you're in the entertainment industry, no matter how good Olan Mills made you look.