How to create a successful resume

By Amanda McCarthy – MyCareer

A well-structured resume engages the reader and presents your work history in a logical and sequential order. A recruiter needs to gain a good understanding of where you worked, for how long, what was happening in each of your roles, and what skills, knowledge and experience you acquired along the way.

Recording your work experience

When documenting your work experience, always list your most recent job first and go back in reverse chronological order. For jobs you want to emphasise list the following:

*Job title
*Company name
*Dates of employment (months and years)
*Company description if organisation is not well known (see Chapter 18)
*Responsibilities
*Achievements

For jobs you don't want to emphasise, only list:

*Job title
*Company name and location
*Dates of employment (months and years)

Describing your job responsibilities

Be specific, succinct and clear when listing your responsibilities. Each statement should commence with an action verb, followed by a description of the task. Action verbs usually end in 'ed' and describe how you performed the task or action. Here are some examples of job responsibilities with action verbs:

*Sorted [action verb] and distributed [action verb] the mail to internal staff [description of the task]
*Served [action verb] drinks and liquor to customers [description of the task]
*Facilitated [action verb] weekly induction training and conducted [action verb] orientation tours for new staff [description of the task]
*Typed [action verb] court documentation including interrogatories, subpoenas, affidavits, offers to settle, plaints and writs [description of the task]
*Logged [action verb] help desk calls and provided hardware and software support to customers [description of the task]

Remember

When you compile your responsibilities, remember to use past tense for previous experience and present tense for current roles. See how the action verbs change using different tenses.

*Previous role: Sorted and distributed the mail [past tense]
*Current role: Sort and distribute the mail [present tense]
*Previous role: Facilitated weekly induction training [past tense]
*Current role: Facilitate weekly induction training [present tense]

Consider the following statement:

*Liaised with external clients

Notice how vague the statement is. This statement doesn't tell the reader how you liaised with the clients. Was it by phone, in person or through correspondence? What were you liaising with the clients about? Your resume needs to include specific responsibilities. Try this instead:

*Dealt with clients on the phone, listened to their legal requests, and redirected the calls to the appropriate solicitor.

When writing your responsibilities, you need to take a step back and think about what you actually do or did in your role. What were your responsibilities? What were you accountable for? Write your tasks down succinctly and try not to waffle. A recruiter wants a crystal clear understanding of your work life.

Showcasing your high achiever status

Sure, recruiters are interested in what you've done, but they're more concerned with what you've accomplished in your past roles and how you can contribute to a business's success in the future. Natalie Kobica, author of the article 'Top 10 Achievements to Include on your Resume', stresses the importance of highlighting individual achievements in your resume. In the article she lists ten achievements most employers would desire in an applicant:

*Saving money or reducing costs
*Taking on extra responsibility
*Improving a system or process
*Introducing a new system or process
*Exceeding targets or objectives
*Solving problems
*Exceeding customer expectations
*Generating income
*Improving employee morale
*Developing staff

Writing achievements can be a wee bit daunting when you first start off. Keep persevering, and you'll get there. Be sure to list the benefits to the organisation as a result of your achievement. Did you reduce costs? Save time? Increase efficiency and productivity?

Detail specifically what you did and outline what was achieved. Did you invent or design something? Did you initiate the development of something new? Did you streamline a process or procedure? Did you head a successful project? Where possible try to back up your claims with numbers, percentages and dollar amounts (without giving away company secrets) to give yourself credibility. Here are some sample achievements to modify for your own resume:

*Increased cosmetic and skin care sales by 20% [benefit] as a result of cross-selling and up-selling products to customers [achievement].
*Launched a new Web site [achievement], which educated customers on the company's products and services and generated a 20% increase in new business [benefit].
*Cut production costs by 10% over a 12-month period [benefit] through renegotiation of supplier contracts [achievement].
*Saved the organisation $100,000 [benefit] by outsourcing the recruitment function to job placement agencies [achievement].
*Designed a file-tracking system [achievement], which increased efficiency and reduced the time spent locating missing documents [benefit].
*Decreased staff turnover by 35% [benefit] through company-wide incentive programs, employee satisfaction surveys and in-house training [achievement].
*Initiated and developed a payroll procedures manual [achievement], which improved accuracy and reduced processing errors by 50% [benefit].
*Grew the customer base from zero to 500 within two years [benefit], by cold-calling customers and launching a direct mail campaign to new and existing businesses in the area [achievement].

In some circumstances, listing a benefit for every achievement isn't practical. In these cases, just specify the achievement. For example:

*Won 'Telesales Award' for excellence in customer service.

Choosing whether to emphasise a particular job

When listing your work experience, remember to emphasise and de-emphasise jobs. You need to go into large amounts of detail only for positions you want to promote and draw a recruiter's attention to. For example, if you've been a dog handler for a period of time, don't list the responsibilities and achievements for that role if you're seriously interested in hospitality. That info sounds as useful as a pool on a winter's day. Use common sense - many resumes I read indicate that their writers haven't focused on what's required.