



Getting your resume noticed

Regardless of the amount of education, experience or creative vision you think you can bring to that new job you're going to apply for, none of it will get you in the door if your resume has all the earmarks of an amateur.

Adherence to the following six tips will ensure that you are putting your best foot forward and projecting a winning image that will get your bio and credits favorably noticed by those who are in a position to say "yes" to your career advancement.

BREVITY

A well done resume should be factual and to the point. If it runs on too long, you are either rambling or engaging in overkill to sell your talents. A rambling resume suggests to the reader that you don't know how to pull your thoughts together and that you require a lot of words and time to get your point across. One that reiterates material which has already been set forth and/or includes copious attachments which were not requested has the effect of making a reader think that you are blowing smoke to pad out a spotty employment record, mask your deficiencies, or that you are just really desperate.

A hiring authority should be able to see at a quick glance what positions you have held and what types of skills you can bring to the table. It should also be remembered that today's competitive job market means that an HR department will be inundated with dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of resumes that need to be read, sorted, and whittled down to a manageable number of semi-finalists who can advance to the next level. If your submission reads more like a chatty Christmas newsletter than a succinct summary of your accomplishments, it is guaranteed not to make the first cut.

RESULTS

Anyone can say that he or she has held a job as a salesperson, a machinist, or an executive assistant. What a prospective employer looks for, however, is whether the candidate did more than just take up space and draw a weekly paycheck for it. Did your salesmanship skills consistently top the quarterly expectations for your division? Did you invent a device that made an existing piece of equipment operate more efficiently? Did your powers of persuasion convince directors to follow your ideas? A results oriented resume will put you ahead of the competition because it conveys more than just a litany of tasks; it demonstrates a sense of initiative to improve upon the status quo and a commitment to giving 110% as a team player with the company's best interests at heart.

Don't forget that volunteer and community service activities are pertinent to list on your resume as well, especially if your efforts were instrumental in raising funds, passing an initiative, saving an historic landmark, teaching at-risk kids to read, etc.

RELEVANCE

Yes, it's fascinating that you took a year off after college to meditate with monks in Tibet but what, exactly, does it have to do with being a hostess at a steakhouse? While one's life experiences are certainly contributing factors to a job seeker's work ethic and sense of self, your future employer's bottom line will always get back to, "That's nice but what does all of this mean to me?"

To that end, savvy job applicants don't limit themselves to just one all-purpose resume but, rather, several which respectively emphasize those details that have the most direct bearing on the positions they are seeking. For instance, let's say that you have experience as a freelance writer, an accountant and a graphic designer. The job you are applying for is in the accounting office. Thus, the accounting background will be the one rotated into the most prominent slot. Seasoned interviewees also know to incorporate buzz words in their resume that subtly mirror the specifications of a particular job and, accordingly, create a sense of familiarity to which an employer will easily gravitate.

REFERENCES

It's a given that your references will include your current and most recent employers. Did you know, however, that you can also include individuals who have known you outside the context of employment; i.e., clergy, officers of clubs and organizations, teachers, etc. Although few employers will ever admit to it, the inclusion of people who hold the same or higher rank than the person doing the actual hiring invariably makes for a positive impression. What it suggests is that your strength of character has attracted the favorable notice of those who are successful, well established, and conceivably could be in the position of offering you a job themselves or referring you to one of their associates.

PERFECTION

Don't go for cheesy gimmicks when you're doing your resume. Flashy neon paper, unusual fonts or an envelope full of sparkle confetti will not score any points. In fact, they will have the opposite effect of what you thought you were going to accomplish by being "different". Nor should you enclose a photograph unless you're applying for a job as an actor or model and a photograph has specifically been requested as part of the submission package. Invest in some good quality paper with matching envelopes. Stick to white, ivory, cream or light gray.

The most readable fonts are Courier, Times New Roman, Bookman and Palatino. Your font size should be no less than 12 pt, keeping in mind that you want the text to be as easy on the eyes as possible.

Don't rely on the spell-check function of your computer to catch everything. Solicit instead a couple of live readers to give your resume (and accompanying cover letter) a once-over before you submit it. Be aware as well that the most frequent typing mistakes ironically occur in the two portions of these materials that are rarely reviewed; specifically, the recipient's address block and the sender's own name.



DELIVERY

If you were applying for a job at SABC, would you address your letter "To Whom It May Concern"? Of course not. While your correspondence could eventually find its way to the right desk, it will not only have been handled and mangled by everyone along the supply chain but also take a lot longer to reach its destination than if you had addressed it properly to begin with. If you are responding to a classified ad in the newspaper or job posting on the Internet, instructions will be given on how to address your submission and where to send it. If, however, you are making the equivalent of a cold call, it will behoove you to find out the name and correct title of the person who manages your targeted department or who makes the hiring decisions for the agency. Look at it this way: if you receive two envelopes at your home address and one is addressed "Occupant" and the other is addressed to your actual name, which one will you open first? Even if you're doing a mass mailing in your employment search, it should never look as if you are. It's the personal touch that people remember and that will get you in the door to shine in person!

Final tip: If it's feasible to hand-deliver your resume, do it! In the first place, it gives you a psychological advantage of already being familiar with the office environment prior to the interview. Secondly, you don't have to worry about the postal service losing it. The third reason is that the odds are high of encountering the actual people with whom you will later be interviewing. This could be in an elevator, in a corridor, or in the reception area. If you're someone who strikes their interest or curiosity, they may casually ask who you are or ask the receptionist about you. Even if they don't, your second appearance in the office as a candidate will tweak a faint chord of remembrance. And being remembered out of a big herd of hopefuls could make all the difference in getting the job.