

Six Steps to a Blockbuster Resume

by ResumeEdge.com - The Net's Premier Resume Writing and Editing Service

A resume has one purpose – to market your skills, achievements, professional background, academic history, and future potential to a prospective employer. Much like a 30-second commercial, today's resume must provide maximum data as quickly as possible, differentiate you from all other candidates, and be attractively packaged.

Impossible, you think? Not at all. Writing a winning resume simply takes thought and planning. After all, you wouldn't drive from Los Angeles to Manhattan without mapping the surest route. The same goes for your resume. By using the ResumeEdge® six-step process, you'll gain perspective on your career target and the audience you need to reach, learn how to showcase your strengths, minimize your weaknesses, and produce a document with maximum punch.

Of course, if you do need professional assistance, our certified resume writers are on hand 24/7 to provide expert, *personalized* guidance.

The ResumeEdge® Process

- Step One: Targeting Your Career and Audience
- Step Two: Formatting for Maximum Impact
- Step Three: Skill Set and Qualifications Summary
- Step Four: Accomplishments and Special Skills
- Step Five: Professional Experience
- Step Six: Education and Training

STEP ONE: Targeting Your Career and Audience

You must have a clear idea of what you want to accomplish in your professional life in order to maximize the impact of your resume for your targeted audience -- the hiring manager or graduate school admissions director.

Before you begin, ask yourself these questions. Are you:

1. Making a lateral move?
2. Seeking a promotion?
3. Career transitioning?
4. Pursuing admission into a graduate program?*

For numbers 1-3 above, the most effective way to begin targeting your resume is to search openings that appeal to you on job boards (i.e. Monster, Hot Jobs, CareerJournal), internal company postings, or newspaper classifieds.

With these in hand, you can highlight the qualifications you will need to be considered and the duties you would be expected to assume. *Every match in terms of qualifications and experience will serve as key words** in your resume, as well as provide focus so that the resume can be tailored for your targeted audience.* The more closely the content of your resume matches the content of these postings, the more likely you will be asked to interview.

* Resumes provided for graduate school admission showcase your skills, professional experience, accomplishments, and academic history in much the same way as "job" resumes. The difference is that an admissions resume will focus on what transitions well to the classroom, not to the workplace.

** Key words include industry-specific jargon or acronyms (i.e. "generally accepted accounting principles" (GAAP) for accountants; "Certified Professional Resume Writer" (CPRW) for resume writers; "Series 7 licensing" for brokers; "initial public offering" (IPO) for investment bankers; "at-risk child" for social workers; "[Level 2 Training](#)" for physicians; "[intellectual property law](#)" for attorneys; "triage" for nurses; and nouns or noun phrases indicating qualifications or required tasks (i.e. general ledger, word processing, contract negotiations, benefits, payroll, closing (for sales people); catering services, new menu items, [capacity planning \(for chefs\)](#); logistics, quality assurance, advertising campaigns, product launches, staffing, training, orientations. Companies that employ scanners require a set number of *hits* on key words before the hiring manager will personally review the applicant's resume. It is always wise to incorporate as many key words as possible into your resume.

STEP TWO: Formatting for Maximum Impact

The moment your resume is opened by a hiring manager or admissions director, it must appeal to him or her on an aesthetic level, while accurately reflecting your industry or career goal. To do anything else is to relegate your resume -- no matter how brilliantly it is written -- to the *rejection* stack.

In order to ensure that your resume receives the initial attention it deserves, it's important to adhere to certain formatting guidelines, which include:

- Template and Font Choice
- Effective Use of White Space
- Prioritization of Data

Template and Font Choice

In *all* cases, templates and font choice should:

1. **Be easy to follow.** There is no greater irritation to a busy hiring manager or admissions director than to receive a resume where data is presented in a haphazard or inconsistent manner. That's why templates are used. An effective template will present company names, dates, job titles, academic information, and all other pertinent data in a clear manner, so that a quick glance will tell the contact person what they need to know.

But consistency in format isn't the only point to consider. Templates should be chosen because they [accurately reflect a candidate's career or goal](#). In other words, a banker, accountant, or [administrative assistant](#) would choose a more conservative format than a graphic artist or interior designer. Nothing is more jarring -- or disastrous -- than to receive a financial professional's resume written in italics or script with accompanying graphics.

2. **Be easy to read.** Resumes written in bold text or italics are extremely difficult to read and project a lack of professionalism. The same goes for *artistic* fonts that resemble handwriting. It's a common misconception that *jazzing up* a resume with these stylistic tricks will get the document read. On the contrary, the resume will get noticed -- and discarded -- *within seconds*. It's not the font you use that attracts attention, but rather the resume's initial appearance and the words crafted within it.

When in doubt about font choice, *always* err on the conservative side. Two good choices are Times New Roman or Arial in 11 points -- no smaller, or the text will be difficult to read.

Effective Use of White Space

There is no quicker way to get your resume ignored than to create a document with (narrow or nonexistent) margins, and block after block of uninterrupted text. No one wants to read a text-heavy document with sentences that run on for four or five lines. In today's fast-paced world, you must get your point across quickly, with a minimum of words presented as bulleted sentences within special sections (i.e. Professional Experience, Education, Qualifications Summary), separated by well-placed white space.

Think of white spaces as necessary pauses -- a chance for the hiring manager or admissions director to catch her breath, collect her thoughts, and digest (and appreciate) the data you've presented.

Prioritization of Data

Imagine you're a hiring manager. It's 7:30 on a Monday morning, and an important position needs to be filled in your company's legal department. Over the weekend, 200 resumes came in from eager applicants all wanting to fill this one job. Most of the resumes are attractively formatted and use the appropriate font type. So far so good. But on closer inspection, most of the candidates have relegated their willingness to relocate for the position -- a core qualification -- to the very end of their two-page resumes. More than a few have buried accomplishments within the text, figuring this will force the hiring manager to search for that data, which means the entire resume will have to be read. Some have placed bar admission, another important qualification, dead last on the resume, believing that where they can practice law certainly isn't as important as the fact that they are attorneys. And a few misguided souls simply list company names and dates of employment, assuming that the hiring manager should *know without asking* what legal duties they performed at these firms.

It's enough to drive a hiring manager to distraction -- or another career.

But then, at last, there are those few resumes that list the [important data at the top of the first page](#). In less than *five seconds* the hiring manager knows that the first candidate is willing to relocate and assume the cost of those expenses, if required. This candidate also provides a special section beneath the Qualifications Summary that

indicates where she is licensed to practice law. The second candidate does the same, while also pulling out Career Accomplishments and placing them at the top of the first page. After all, why keep a 100% win rate at trial a secret, or the fact that one can practice before the state's Supreme Court?

Given the above scenario, it's clear which applicants will be called in for an interview. No hiring manager will read every single resume that comes across his desk. Nor will a hiring manager search for data. In today's tight job market it's up to the candidate to prioritize data so that a hiring manager knows *at a glance* what the job seeker has to offer the company in terms of achievement, work experience, education, licensing, certifications, and special concessions, such as relocation.

STEP THREE: Qualification Summary & Skill Set

Picture yourself at the market after a long day at the office. You're in a rush, of course, and want only to purchase those items on your list, *if they're on sale*. Hurrying into the store, you glance around for the weekly advertising piece that indicates which items will be offered at a discount. Trouble is, there's no advertising piece this week, and no one to answer your questions. If you want to purchase the items you most need at a discount, you're forced to walk up and down *each and every* aisle until you find what's available.

Doesn't sound like much fun or an effective use of time, does it? And yet this is the same type of frustration hiring managers are exposed to every time an applicant sends in a resume that fails to open with a well-written Qualifications Summary and/or Skill Set.

What is a Qualifications Summary?

It's a brief paragraph that showcases your most effective skills and experience as they pertain to your job search. More importantly, it's your chance to convince a hiring manager of the skills you can bring to the position. This is essential, given that hiring managers generally afford no more than *10 seconds* to an applicant's resume, unless they're compelled to read further.

So, how do you compel them to keep reading?

Let's use this example: You're an accountant who has worked at XYZ Company for nine years and been promoted every time you've come up for review. Because of your organizational efforts, the company is saving \$2500 monthly. You've passed the CPA exam. You're skilled in Profit & Loss (P&L), audits, taxation matters, and internal controls. Now, you want a Controller position.

Rather than including all of the aforementioned data in the body of the resume, where the hiring manager would be forced to look for it, but won't (remember, you'll be given *10 seconds* before the hiring manager moves on), the wise candidate would write something like this:

Results-oriented, detailed professional with comprehensive accounting experience. Background includes consistent promotions to positions of increased responsibility. Skilled in P&L, audits, taxation, internal controls, and streamlining procedures, effecting a monthly savings of \$2500 at XYZ Company. Recently passed the CPA exam; currently seeking a Controller position.

In five lines and a mere 45 words, you've *given specific examples* of what you can do (P&L, audits, taxation, internal controls), *quantified* an accomplishment (streamlining procedures, effecting a monthly savings of \$2500 at XYZ Company), *indicated past performance* (consistent promotions to positions of increased responsibility), *provided data on certification* (recently passed the CPA exam), and *provided your career path* (currently seeking a Controller position). And you've done all of that in a well-written paragraph that's interesting and easy to read. (Note that personal pronouns are not used here. In business writing, which includes resumes, personal pronouns such as *I, me, or my* are *never* used).

Three examples of outstanding Opening Summaries:

- IT Professional, Webmaster
- Government Consultant
- Foreman

Fine, you say, but what about an Objective? Where does that go?

In the modern resume, an objective statement is no longer used. The reason for this follows.

Qualifications Summary vs. the Objective

In the outmoded Objective, the candidate told the hiring manager what he wanted, whether that was a job at the company, room for advancement, a chance to use a new college degree, or any other reason an applicant could think of and the hiring manager could dismiss as self-serving. On the other hand, the Qualifications Summary proactively declares *what the candidate can do for the targeted company*, which places the hiring manager's needs first. A wise applicant always uses a Qualifications Summary, either by itself or combined with a Skill Set.

What is a Skill Set?

Generally speaking, it's a list of your core competencies as they relate to your targeted career goal. Again, let's take the example of the accountant who has just passed the CPA exam and now wants to be a controller. Rather than presenting all of that data in the qualifications summary, a portion of it would be showcased as a tag line (professional title or title of job you're targeting) and skill set, and might look something like this (followed by a reworked qualifications summary paragraph):

CONTROLLER CANDIDATE

P&L ~ Audits ~ Taxation ~ Internal Controls ~ Successfully Passed CPA Exam

Results-oriented, detailed professional with comprehensive accounting experience. Background includes consistent promotions to positions of increased responsibility for notable achievements, including \$2500 in monthly savings at XYZ Company by streamlining procedures.

This time, the first *two lines*, which contain just *15 words*, present core strengths quickly and effortlessly.

STEP FOUR: Accomplishments and Special Skills

Accomplishments

There is no data on your resume more important than your accomplishments. Why?

Think of it this way: you're a hiring manager with one position to fill and 10 qualified candidates clamoring for the position. Each candidate has the same basic educational and professional background. So, who gets the job?

The candidate who contributed the most at past positions. Accomplishments are all that separate you from other equally qualified candidates, with one caveat. Your accomplishments must be quantified.

What is an Accomplishment?

1. Increasing the company's bottom line (i.e. facilitating its growth)
2. Streamlining procedures
3. Promotions
4. Special projects successfully completed
5. Decreasing costs
6. Company- or industry-sponsored awards
7. Certifications and licensure

What is *not* an Accomplishment?

1. Daily responsibilities that are included in your job description
2. Regular attendance at work
3. Getting along with co-workers
4. Working full-time while going to college at night
5. Volunteer or community service *unless* it has a direct bearing on your job search

In other words, an accomplishment is service that goes beyond your usual job description. But for an accomplishment to have the most effect, it must be quantified.

What is a Quantified Accomplishment?

One that includes dollar figures, percentages, and time periods.

For example: Our accountant has streamlined procedures, realizing a \$2500 monthly savings for his company. The dollar figure *quantifies* the accomplishment, while the "streamlined procedures" explains how he did it. Now, if he

achieved those savings within three months of hire, that would further strengthen his accomplishments, and it might be written thusly:

- Achieved a \$2500 monthly savings for XYZ Company within three months of hire by streamlining procedures.

Imagine the hiring manager's reaction to the above as opposed to this entry:

- Streamlined procedures for XYZ Company.

Doesn't say much, does it?

Special Skills

Special Skills should *always* be presented up-front so that a hiring manager knows what you can do. In some instances, a special section (i.e. Computer Skills, Languages, Office Procedures, etc.) should be created to showcase these special skills.

Special skills will include:

1. Computer proficiencies
2. Office procedures (i.e. answering multi-lined phone systems, taking dictation (include speed), transcription, typing (include speed), 10-key, etc.)
3. Linguistic capabilities (i.e. fluency in a foreign language, ability to translate, etc.)
4. Any skill that's industry-specific for the job you're seeking

Here are a few examples of resumes with outstanding accomplishments and skills showcased effectively for hiring managers:

- [IT Professionals – Project Manager](#)
- [Chief Marketing Officer](#)
- [Executives – Supply Chain Director](#)

STEP FIVE: Professional Experience

In the Professional Experience section you will list your employers, job titles, and dates of employment in a reverse-chronological order; that is, your most recent job comes first, followed by your next most recent job, and so on. This format is standard and is expected by all hiring managers and admissions directors.

With regard to employment dates:

Generally speaking, hiring managers prefer years of employment, rather than months and years (i.e. 1999 - 2003 as opposed to May 1999 - April 2003). However, some college admissions programs want specifics when it comes to dates, so it's best to use precise dates when applying to graduate school.

In the Professional Experience section you will also include daily tasks and responsibilities beneath the appropriate employer listing. If you've included a Career Accomplishments section in your resume, you should not repeat that data here. Once data is presented in a resume, it must not be repeated.

To ensure that your daily tasks are presented in an interesting and easy-to-read manner, you should do the following:

1. Use a bulleted format. This breaks up large blocks of text that could prove daunting to a hiring manager.
2. Delete unnecessary articles and adjectives. Your sentences should be short and snappy.
3. Begin each sentence with an action verb. This quickens the pace of your writing and makes the text more enjoyable to read. For a comprehensive choice of action verbs, please use this link: [Power Verb List](#).

An example of a bulleted format, pared down writing, and sentences beginning with power verbs follows: (Again, we use our accountant)

XYZ COMPANY, Anywhere, California

1999 – 2002

Senior Accountant

- Held P&L responsibility.
- Supervised a junior accountant and two bookkeepers.
- Generated monthly financial reports for senior management.

Verb tense:

- For those jobs where you are still currently employed, write your job duties in the *present* tense.
- For those jobs in the past, write the responsibilities you held in the *past* tense.

Additionally, Professional Experience can be captured and showcased in three formats:

1. [Functional](#)
2. [Chronological](#)
3. [Combination](#)

In the *functional* format, you are stressing what you know over where you gained your experience. This works for those who have strong skills, but a weak employment record.

In the *chronological* format, you are providing a work history dating back from the present. This is the most common format and is generally preferred by hiring managers.

In the *combination* format, you are stressing what you know in one section, while also providing work history dating back from the present in another. This is a highly popular modern format.

STEP SIX: Education and Training

Education:

Data provided in this section should be prioritized (and included) according to:

1. Your current career level (entry-level as opposed to professional)
2. The purpose of your resume
3. The country in which your resume will be distributed

Your current career level:

If you're an entry-level candidate with little or no professional experience, your education should be presented immediately after the Qualifications Summary and/or [skills area](#). The reasoning for this is that education is currently your most marketable asset. Here, you would include:

- GPA (if 3.5 or above)
- Awards/scholarships
- Dean's list
- Coursework *relevant* to job search

If you're a professional with five or more years of experience, Education should be [listed last on your resume](#). GPAs, awards or scholarships, and mention of dean's lists are not generally provided in a professional or executive resume, except for those used for entrance into graduate school programs.

The purpose of your resume:

Resumes sent to admissions directors for graduate school can list Education before Professional Experience or after, depending upon these factors:

- If the applicant has just recently completed his bachelor's degree, it should be listed before Professional Experience.
- If the applicant has *real-world* experience related to the graduate degree she is seeking, the Professional Experience should be listed first.

The country in which your resume will be distributed:

If you are distributing your resume within the US, high school education is *not* included. The only exception to this rule would be if you're applying for a job with the federal government. In that case, you would include high school data.

When distributing a resume outside the US, then high school education *is* included.

Training:

Include all specialized training *that is transferable to your new job target*. If you have not attended college, include *all* specialized training in your target field. Hiring managers generally prefer to see some post-secondary education.