the Résumé Rules

A step-by-step **GUIDE** to writing a professional and effective **RÉSUMÉ** that will *dramatically* **improve** your response rate

Table of Contents

About the Author

With over 20 years as an senior commercial manager, executive headhunter and career development professional, Jerrell Niu brings a level of insight, commercial awareness and a down-to-earth manner which is refreshing in its simplicity. He is a regular blogger and contributor to 99 Resumes.

What Is A Resume?

A resume is a document used by individuals to present their background and skill-sets and may be used for a variety of purposes but most often to secure new employment.

As a professional resume writer I see thousands of resumes from a wide range of occupations and industries and no matter what the individual differences might be, writing an effective and successful resume comes down to 3 rules.

Target the Reader

Who is your audience? It is critical that you know and understand the audience to whom you are writing. While a graphic designer might have a creative design style, an accountant's resume is likely to have a far more corporate feel.

Present a Professional Image

First impressions are everything when it comes to hiring. Your resume is your opportunity to present yourself in the best possible light and in the world of job seeking there's simply no excuse for not getting this perfect.

Your resume must be free of spelling and grammatical errors, it should be clear, well structured and uncluttered and it should demonstrate why an employer would want to hire you.

Highlight your Achievements

There is a huge difference between an average resume, a good resume and a great resume. Typically, what makes a great resume is being able to identify your key achievements and the value added skills you bring to your next job.

Where most people fail with their resume, is that they focus too much on their daily duties and responsibilities rather than creating achievement statements which focus on how you added value to your organisation. Providing examples to back up your statements will give you an significant edge over your competitors.

Getting Started

So how do I get started?

First you need to collect the information that should be included in your resume. You're going to need details of your work history, your education and qualifications, any relevant training, licences and certification you've completed. You might also want details of any community activities or volunteer work you do, projects you're involved with and relevant hobbies and interests.

Second you need to decide the objective of this document. What will it be used for? Are you seeking a new position similar to your current one? Or are you seeking to take on a more senior role, perhaps a leadership one? Are you changing career paths or are you seeking your first job after completing your studies?

Your objective is important because it dictates the direction of your research. Your research may include job advertisements, company research, speaking to colleagues and contemporaries. What you will have gained is an understanding of the desired skills, experience and qualifications and whether or not, you meet the requirements.

Next you will want to organise all this into a structured marketing document that showcases your strengths and accomplishments.

the **Resume Rules**

The Content

Career Profile - a snap-shot of your skills and experience relevant to the role you're seeking

Employment History - your work history in reverse chronological order. Include Employer, dates of employment, summary of responsibilities and achievements.

Header - Include your name, address and contact details

Education + Skills - a list of your qualifications and key skills

Footer - Include name or document title, revision no etc

Key Sections

Header

You should always include your name, title of the document and your contact details in the header or footer. This ensures that your details are on every page so if a hardcopy is printed and pages get misplaced, each page is still identified with your information.

Career Objective

This is the leading section of your resume and should summarise your career and clearly state the role you're pursuing with your best selling points. Also titled Professional Profile, Career Snapshot.

Education

Your education and qualifications is typically a key selection criteria used by an employer to shortlist ideal candidates. You should include your completed qualifications in reverse chronological order, year attained and the institution you attended. Also titled Qualifications, Learning & Development.

Key Skills

In order to identify your key skills is vital that you understand the role you're pursuing and the selection criteria that the employer is using to shortlist candidates.

What do you do better than others? Do you have a speciality? Have you completed training or certification?

Also titled Key Competencies.

the Resume Rules

Work Experience

Your work experiences are the core of your resume and will constitute the largest section. You may want to use subsections to identify achievements, skills or training gained, hardware or software used.

1.   Your work experience should be listed in reverse chronological order, with your job title, your employer and the period of employment clearly identified. This tells prospective employers the quality of your experience, whether it was with a global enterprise or a SME, the industry and much more.

2.   For each job, provide a summary of your responsibilities, the skills you used or gained and the achievements you had. Try to use a consistent metric so your successful performance is clear.

3.   Keep your history to the last decade. Employers aren't interested in the job you did 25 years ago. If you feel the need to detail a longer history, use a Employment Summary at the start of your section, position, employer, period of employment only.

Also titled Work History, Employment History.

Did you know:

"a recruiter spends as little as 6 seconds on your resume"

References

Your referee's are typically up to three people who have agreed to provide you a favourable reference. Usually two will be work references and one personal. It's not critical that you include them on your resume due to the privacy concerns that it raises. You must be prepared to provide them should you progress through the interview process.

If you don't feel comfortable providing referee's details on your resume then just put "References provided upon request." But whenever you do here's some rules to help you do it right.

1.   Your work references should be your direct manager or supervisor from your most recent positions.

2.   Let them know before you use them. They may be contacted by the prospective employer or agency to confirm your employment details, the quality of your work, your responsibilities and scope of work, how you were managed and how you managed others, and perhaps your social or cultural fit. There's nothing worse than contacting a referee to find they don't remember the candidate.

3.   Don't use your friends. If they are not really who they say they are, they'll be caught out and you'll be branded a fraud and lose the opportunity.

Optional Sections

Computer Skills

You may need to consider a separate section to list your computer and IT skills and accepted form is to give the version and your level of proficiency. In particular you should list industry applications that you've used or had training in.

Community / Hobbies

Present the personal side of yourself, show what inspires and touches you and provide yourself with something interesting and personal to talk about in your interview.

Academic Projects

Including details of your involvement in academic projects allow you to demonstrate your ability to work as part of a team and allow you to highlight the your individual contribution at a technical level. This may be an important section to consider if you are a student or recent graduate.

The Resume Rules

It is said that a recruiter (or hiring manager) looks at the average resume for no more than 6 seconds. And that 6 seconds will decide whether you are short-listed for interview or discarded to the "Thanks for your interest…" pile.

The key to getting your resume right is to remember that it is your personal marketing document and the objective is to get the prospective employer interested enough to meet you.

Be Consistent

A resume is often a 'living document', that is, its started when we first looking for a job and it just gets added to every time we leave a job or finish a course. As a result your resume can end up looking like a patchwork of different fonts, sizes, bold and underlining.

In order to present professionally your resume must be consistent throughout, fonts, size, headings, subheadings, date formats, everything.

Be Accurate

Its critical that the details in your resume are accurate. Remember its a simple process for prospective employers to check on your qualifications or previous period of employment.

Clean Open Readable Layout

Don't crowd your resume. Allow room between jobs and sections so your resume doesn't appear cluttered and amateurish. Use a simple sans-serif font for the body of your document. Arial and Verdana are popular. 10-12 point is ideal.

Use Bullets Sparingly

Using bullets throughout the body of your resume used to be 'de rigueur' but its no longer regarded in the same light and here's why.

Bullets are used to create lists and lists are typically boring data so your eye will generally skip across the list to other more interesting parts of the page. If you've used bullets to list your job responsibilities and achievements, the use of the bullets has ensured that the reader will want to skip across the very information you want them to read.

They also are a poor use of the page' real estate, meaning that you resume is likely to run longer than acceptable.

the **Resume Rules**

Emphasise Achievements

This may be the most important rule of all. Your achievements are the evidence that demonstrate your value to your current and past employers and it is reasonable to assume you will replicate similar outcomes for a new employer. Therefore, clearly defining your achievements is the key to a compelling resume and critical to a prospective employer's decision process.

Think about the way that an employer will look at your achievements. Where is the value to an employer? Is it in savings? Then provide a metric of the savings made. Is it in revenue? State the achievement using a metric of the revenue gained.

Contact Details On Every Page

I've seen this so many times. You've got a pile of resumes on your desk and you find the perfect one for the role you're working on. But clearly a page is missing because you have no contact details. Or the mobile or email has been left off.

Remember it is completely pointless to submit your great looking resume if you have failed to include your contact details. You should always include both a mobile number and email. If you make yourself hard to reach you will miss out on opportunities.

Use A Professional Email Address

Did you know that 76% of employers trashed the resume if the email was unprofessional? Simply use a professional email for job search - using your name is ideal, 'john.citizen@gmail.com'.

Use Images Meaningfully

Using images in your resume is fraught with potential danger but the appropriate use of images can really add impact to a resume, so go carefully. A lot of recruiters hate photographs on a resume and I've seen some pretty bad ones including a very experienced engineer whose hi-visibility vest made him look like a prison inmate.

Having said that, I've never seen an attractive qualified candidate with a good head-shot in their resume miss out on the interview. If you're going to use a photo, make the effort to get it done professionally, photo-shop it and size it appropriately to the rest of your document.

First Page Is The Key

You have as little as 6 seconds to grab the attention of the hiring manager, so the front page is key. The front page of your resume must have all the critical information a recruiter needs to know, to give you the best chance.

So include your career profile, your key skills, qualifications and current role on the front page giving the hiring manager everything they need in a glance. Then your value proposition and engaging content will encourage them to read more about you - and want to interview you.

No Spelling & Grammar Mistakes

There's simply no excuse for spelling and grammar mistakes and just one mistake can get your resume dumped. Use your spell-check first, then read your resume slowly and aloud to check that it flows and you haven't overlooked an error.

Remember, your spell-check won't pickup 'same word-different spelling' errors, correct use of words, punctuation errors and inconsistent use of tense. The only way is to carefully proof read your document

> **"Clearly defining your achievements is the key to a compelling resume"**

the Resume Rules

The Right Length

The ideal length for your resume is 3 pages. Those with senior experience, extensive qualifications, post-graduate study and training may struggle to keep the length to just 3 pages, but try you must. Submit a 9 page resume and the truth is that most often it will simply be discarded without ever having been reviewed. Just as you're expected to meet the word count guide in responding to selection criteria for an APS job, so it is important that you keep your resume to a reasonable length.

Remember you don't need to include every job you've ever held - the last 10 years will do.

Stand Out From The Crowd

Writing a resume that stands out from the crowd is all about using numbers and quantitative evidence to highlight your achievements and presenting value added evidence about the type of behaviour an employer can expect. Which of these two statements would make you hire this candidate?

"Business development specialist, excellent communicator and relationship manager"

-Or-

"Managed a team of 6 Account Managers dedicated to new product penetration of the market leading to an overall increase of $5 million over a 12 month period"

Using numbers and evidence to back up your statements will make your resume stand out against other candidates.

What Gets You Binned?

Like to know what will instantly get your resume binned?

Make one of these mistakes and you're resume will be instantly binned.

No Cover Letter

Failing to include a cover letter means you haven't bothered to put in 10 extra minutes of effort - You're binned!
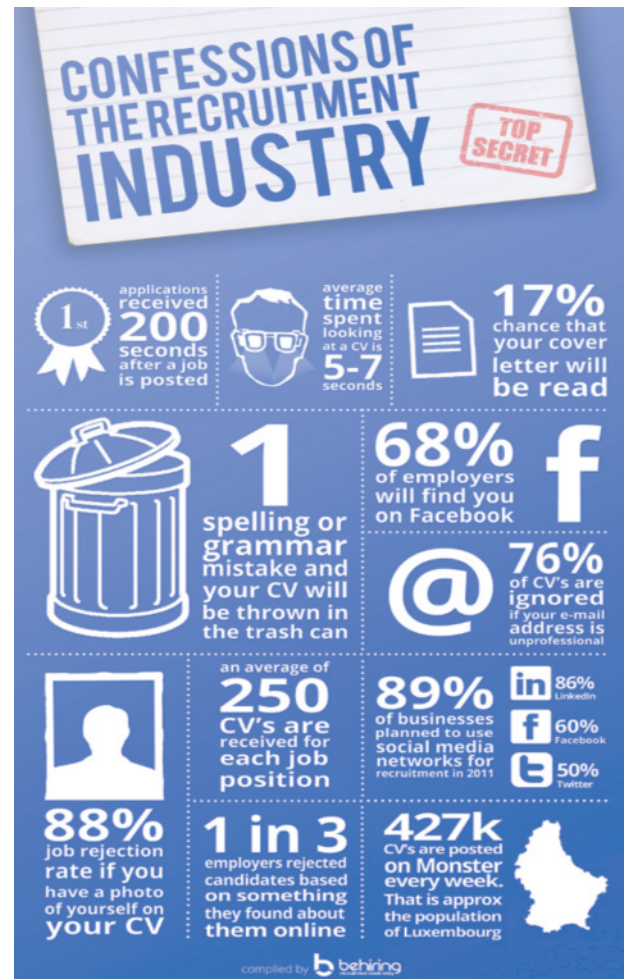
No Work Experience Detail

I don't know how many times I've seen resumes with just a job title and the employer's name - no detail about the job you did, where you did it and what you achieved - You're binned!

Applying for the Wrong Job

It's an easy mistake to make. You send a cover letter and resume addressed to Company A to Company B - You're binned!

Resume Too Long

With hundreds of resumes to narrow down into a shortlist of 8-10, no-one is going to read your 9 page resume, so you're binned!

CONFESSIONS OF THE RECRUITMENT INDUSTRY · TOP SECRET

200 seconds · 1st applications received · seconds after a job is posted

average time spent looking at a CV is 5-7 seconds

17% chance that your cover letter will be read

1 spelling or grammar mistake and your CV will be thrown in the trash can

68% of employers will find you on Facebook

76% of CV's are ignored if your e-mail address is unprofessional

an average of 250 CV's are received for each job position

89% of businesses planned to use social media networks for recruitment in 2011

LinkedIn 86% · Facebook 60% · Twitter 50%

88% job rejection rate if you have a photo of yourself on your CV

1 in 3 employers rejected candidates based on something they found about them online

427k CV's are posted on Monster every week. That is approx the population of Luxembourg

compiled by behiring

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