Chapter 4

How To Write A Compelling Resume

A resume enables you to get your foot in the door. While a resume does not get you a job offer by itself, it can get you an interview opportunity which can lead to a job offer. Unless the employer already knows you, a prospective employer will review your resume to determine if they want to interview you. While your ultimate objective is to get a job offer, it's not the goal of a resume. In all my professional years, I have not seen or heard of offers being made from just reading a resume, no matter how compelling. The resume's key objective is to generate enough interest for potential employers to want to interview you. You have a much better chance of getting an interview if you produce a compelling resume that matches well with the job's requirements and makes you stand out against other candidates. In this chapter, I'll show you how to write such a resume by focusing on two areas - style and content development. In addition, I'll discuss the type of content to include in your LinkedIn profile.

Creating Resume Style
This is creating the looks and feels for your resume, including how to format, how to organize and how to make it easy to read and follow.

- **Keep a resume to maximum two pages**. If you are a new graduate without much work experience, one page resume may be sufficient. Focus on quality instead of quantity. The person reviewing your resume could be HR (Human Resources) staffing recruiter, outside recruiter, or a hiring manager. Due to the sheer volume of resumes to review, I would typically only spend a few minutes on each resume. I would look to see if you meet the required qualifications and how you stand out against other resumes. So if your resume is longer than two pages, I probably would scan through your resume even quicker, which would increase the likelihood of missing important information you want me to know. Moreover, a long resume indicates a possible lack of discipline to be succinct and lack of ability to prioritize key information about you. A four-page resume listing everything you have done in your career will likely create a negative impression even before the manager begins reading it.

- **Keep the format simple**. Since you will likely submit your resume online, PDF or text format is appropriate. Some employers use programs to scan for certain keywords on your resume to determine your potential fit. Use normal font size for the body content (10-12 point) and no need to use fancy fonts or colors.

- **Make the resume easy to read and follow**. Use "bullet" point format instead of long sentences. Try to keep each bullet point to one or two lines. If the manager has a few minutes to read your resume, you don't want him to have to re-read over certain things because he wasn't clear what you meant to say. Moreover, using bullet point format encourages you to be succinct and to the point.

- **Make your resume come alive**. Use active, "power" words as appropriate. For example, use "I lead" instead of "I was involved," "I initiated" instead of "I assisted," and "I delivered the project results ahead of schedule" instead of "I was able to finish…"

- **Check for spelling and grammar errors**. Misspelled words or grammatically incorrect sentences can turn a good resume into a mediocre one and the mistakes could negatively cloud the reviewer's opinion of you. It also indicates laziness and lack of attention to details. So it's worthwhile to spend a few minutes running through spell and grammar check.

Developing Resume Content

The objective of a resume is to generate interest for potential employers to want to interview you. To start off, focus on developing a great "foundational" resume that highlights your skills, experience, education, qualities and accomplishments without focusing on any specific company. In addition, be creative and use any relevant and factual information that will help you stand out and put you in as good a position as possible. Then as you find a specific job you want to apply for, you can tweak this foundational resume for that job. If you did a good job creating the resume, tweaking your resume to match the requirements should be quick and without a lot of effort needed.

The general structure of a resume includes:
1. Contact information and job objective.
2. Summary of skills/qualifications.
3. Education summary.
4. Experience summary.
5. Relevant hobbies/interests/other technical skills.

It's not necessary to include a Reference section. If the employer wants to check for references, they will ask you at that time. The order between Education Summary and Experience Summary can be interchanged. If you have a fair amount of experience, you may want to order your experience before education.

1. **Contact information should be straight forward.** For your contact information, use a phone number that you can be easily reached. Usually this is your cell phone. Don't list a phone you use infrequently. Since managers are usually busy, they would like to be able to talk to a candidate live on the phone when they call. If they need to leave a message, you run the risk of playing phone tag since it's a good possibility they will not be available when you call back. Also use an email account you check regularly. If the employer sends you an email message regarding your job interest and doesn't hear from you in a few days, they'll assume you're not interested.

   For job objective, reserve a line to fill in the job title/description when you want to apply for a specific job. For example: "Seeking a challenging and interesting Business Analyst position that will enable me to use my skills and growth with the company. (Job Requisition# 123REQ)." Remember to include the job requisition number if there is one so you can ensure the resume will reach the right person.

2. **Summary of Skills/Qualifications**. This is the most important section of the resume. This is where you can summarize a few key points you want the manager to remember about you because he's not going to remember everything on your resume. The analogy here is similar to writing a thesis paper where you put your theme and main points at the beginning of the paper. Instead of having the manager try to come up with what to remember about you, why not make it easy for him by stating it upfront. This section should include a short list of 4-5 skills and accomplishments that best match the position's requirements and put you in the best possible light. Here are some example bullet points for graduating college students:
   - Strong technical skills and experience that match very well with the position's requirements;

- Track record of successfully leading different groups of people on multiple school projects;
- Exceptional communication skills developed through communication classes and internship at ABC company;
- Dean's list for 3 consecutive quarters;
- Demonstrated ability to get up to speed quickly, solve problems and go above and beyond to get things done right and on time.

You need to support these skills and qualifications by providing "proofs" in subsequent sections of your resume. If you have difficulty writing this section first, skip it and work on the last three sections. After you have completed those sections, pick out key nuggets and include them in your Summary of Skills/Qualifications section. You may find this method more helpful in writing this summary section.

3. **Education Summary**. Many graduating students don't make full use of this part of the resume. They simply list their college major and a few classes they completed. As a result, they miss an opportunity to reveal special accomplishments or unique skills they have learned. It's not enough to just list out your major and classes taken. This does not separate you from others. Focus on pointing out and highlighting any excellent results you achieved with your education. Some specific suggestions:
   - Include College Major(s), degree, high GPA. If you have a Minor degree, list it as well.
   - Include relevant and successfully completed classes as well as results and accomplishments from significant research projects, group projects or other completed papers. Also highlight the skills you developed. For example, learning leadership skills from leading a group project, developing analytical skills from research projects, writing skills from publishing papers, etc.

     If part of your education program involved working with a real company on a specific project where you/your team delivered tangible benefits to the companies and at the same time, learned and developed concrete skills, you should definitely highlight this experience. This is especially useful in situations where a company requires a certain amount of work experience which you don't have. However, this kind of "school" experience can serve as a good substitute for the lack of "real world" experience.

     In a business class I taught, we had a business plan group project. Students formed in teams of four and their objective was to create a business startup that serves an unmet need in the community. They developed a complete business plan with detailed marketing strategy, operational plan, financial analysis and forecast. Upon completion of the project, each team gave a presentation on their business plan. As a member/leader of the team, this would be a great experience to include in the resume – highlighting skills the students developed including leadership, communication, collaboration, analytical and presentation skills. This would be viewed positively by the hiring manager.
   - Include key awards and accomplishments during your educational years such as Honor Roll, Valedictorian, Dean List, top 10% of class, scholarships, etc.

4. **Experience Summary**. I want to emphasize two important points here. First, focus on highlighting your positive results and accomplishments on each of your jobs. Many people only provide a list of job responsibilities and activities they performed. While it makes sense to describe the job, it's not enough and is only a small part of what you should include. You want to make yourself stand out as much as possible. Just listing your job responsibilities does nothing to highlight you. Pointing out good results and accomplishments will separate you from others. Secondly, think about your paying as well as non-paying jobs and volunteer work experience. Work experience is not limited to paid

positions only. The experience and skills you gained in your volunteer work are as meaningful and valuable, and in many cases, create better impression to hiring managers than a paid position.

If you have a long work history, put more focus on recent employment experience (within the last 5 years). If you limit your resume to 2 pages, you will not have enough space to cover every job in detail. Here is how to develop the content for Experience Summary section:

- For each position, list job title, company's name, location and employment duration.
- Describe briefly your job and key responsibilities. Keep to one or two lines.
- List successful results and key accomplishments. Think about how your results helped contribute to your team or your company's success. Excellent results include finishing a project ahead of schedule or below budget, helping sales to exceed target, saving company cost, increasing customer satisfaction, and improving quality of product and services. It's best if you can show quantitative results. For example, finishing a key project two months ahead of schedule or reducing the defective products by twenty percent is a tangible result. When I was a product manager working on a new computer product, we completed the project three months ahead of schedule. This allowed the company to launch the product in a peak buying season and as a result, the company gained an advantage in the market. You bet I included this in my resume. One more point, you need be able to support your claims and explain them in details if you're asked about them in the interview.
- Think about examples that demonstrate your value and standing in the company, such as bonus awards, excellent job review/ranking, praise from managers, company recognition, customer/partner appreciation, employee of the month/year award, significant salary raises and stock grants. Don't forget to include anything that makes you look good and separate you from the crowd. This is not the time to be bashful.
- Another way to show your skills and qualities is highlighting the times you were a leader or played a leading role in motivating people and driving the team to get the job done. This shows you were a skilled, dedicated leader and not just an average employee. Companies don't want to hire average employees.

5. **Relevant hobbies/interests/technical skills**. Use this section to highlight yourself in other areas you have not covered in the resume. Many people give this section little focus, no more than just a cursory attempt to add the same hobbies most people put on their resume which don't convey anything unique about them. Here's what you should do:
   - Include hobbies or interests that enhance your appeal to the position or provide even more support for the qualities you highlighted. For example, if you are a long distance runner and have participated in long distance races, including this hobby demonstrates your self-motivation, dedication and discipline. If you play a musical instrument, including this hobby shows you have creativity. If you participated in competitive events in sports, technology or arts, including this shows your passion, competitiveness and motivation to succeed.
   - If you hold professional certificates, even ones not in your related area, including them demonstrates your range of interests and curiosity. If you belong to the IEEE association or have a professional accounting certificate, highlight it. Although I was a product manager for a high tech company, I also had a real estate license. I included this in my resume to highlight my people skills, negotiation skills and communication skills– all important qualities for my product management job.
   - Organizations you belong to and hold a key position such as Treasurer, Finance Analyst and Marketing Specialist. All this goes to show your ability or at least, your motivation to develop and improve key skills required in the workplace.

- Any other technical skills that highlight you even more, such as expertise in certain technology areas, Web Design for example, or deep knowledge about specific and unique accounting audit processes.

Creating Your LinkedIn Profile

LinkedIn is a popular online networking site for professionals. It's a platform where they can stay connected, share information, stay current on their field, research for job opportunities, and advertise themselves. The good news is you can use your resume's content for your LinkedIn profile. With LinkedIn, you have an opportunity to personalize your resume and tell more of a story about you. Below are a few things to keep in mind when creating your profile.

- You can expand on your resume's specific content. While I advocate keeping your resume content succinct, you can use your profile space here to add more color to your bullet points. If you mentioned a great accomplishment in your resume, you can tell a story behind that result. For example, during your internship, you delivered a proposal that impressed company management so much they decided to implement it. On your profile, you can elaborate on what made the proposal compelling and go into more details about your role and contributions.
- With your LinkedIn profile, you don't need to be as narrowly focused on your professional skills as you do in your resume. You should include other skills and areas of interest and expertise to demonstrate your versatility, curiosity and aspirations.
- Another excellent LinkedIn feature you can use is posting endorsements and recommendations. A powerful way to promote yourself is to have other people endorse you. Solicit your co-workers, managers, professors and others to write you a recommendation on LinkedIn or endorse your specific skills or expertise. It's also a great way to back up your claim. For instance, if you claim that you have excellent leadership skills and ability to work with people to get things done, having your manager or colleague's testimony is a powerful proof.
- Sharing photos, posting videos or articles is an effective way to stay connected with people as well as highlight your unique skill or expertise. You can keep your profile fresh by posting professional or personal updates as often as you like. Through LinkedIn, you can greatly expand your network of contacts. It provides and suggests people you either have a direct or indirect connection to link to your network. Through LinkedIn, I was able to stay connected to people who I would have otherwise lost touch with years ago.
- Take your profile as seriously as you take your resume. Be thoughtful and careful about what you include in your description. Since anyone can look at your profile, you don't want to post anything that could affect your image negatively or show you in a bad light. This advice applies to your LinkedIn account as well as all your other social media platforms. Employers will check your social media postings and anything that raises a red flag can potentially hurt your employment chances.

Additional Tips

- Don't include a cover letter unless you are asked to provide one. This is not a common practice. Most managers only have time read the resume to determine your fit for the position.
- Don't include references on resume. This is not needed. If you get far enough into the hiring process, the employer will ask for references at that time. So use the extra space on your resume to promote yourself.
- Don't use slang, jargon or acronyms that are not easy to understand, unless the acronym is common and widely understood (such as IEEE). If you need to, spell out the acronyms. Slang may not be easily understood, especially by people whose native language is not English.

- Don't include personal information that may negatively affect your chance of getting an interview, particularly if you don't know who will be reviewing your resume and whether that person has any biases. You need to use your judgment here; there is no right or wrong answer. For example, I was asked by a student whether he should include in the resume his membership in the National Rifle Association (NRA). Since neither he nor I know if the potential reviewer has any strong opposition to people owning guns, I advised him to use his judgement and to think whether this detail is relevant and helpful to the position and whether it is worth taking the risk.
- Don't lie. While you definitely should promote and make yourself look as good as possible, be sure that every fact or claim is accurate and can be supported. In today's world, your records can be easily verified. You probably have heard of famous people losing their jobs because they lied on their resume. On a consulting service project with a high tech company, the prospective employer did a background check on me before I started the job. When I received the report, it provided a detailed record of the last ten years of my life.