

The Ten- Minute “Short” Course: How to Write Your Best Resume Ever

There are some things you should know about resumes that, properly executed, will guarantee the strongest possible presentation of “You, Inc.”

1. **“You, Inc.”** No matter what, in the end, your resume represents you – not your resume writers or critics. You will have to explain your resume in interviews. You should be comfortable with every word, all the positioning. Do not accept anything less.
2. **Hook them early.** Surveys indicate that recruiters spend, on average, 15 seconds on each resume. They must see something they want quickly, or they’re gone.
3. A resume is like a **‘legal brief’** - it is not your biography. It should “build an argument” that a hiring manager should interview you. This means you must be extremely selective: include things that help your case, eliminate anything that distracts the reader, leads him down a wrong road, allows him to pitch the document into the trash. Like most of us, you have done many things over the course of your career. They don’t all belong here, and the hiring manager can’t handle them. Think of this as the ‘never volunteer’ rule. ‘More’ won’t necessarily help you, and may hurt you. STOP when you’ve addressed the hiring manager’s issues.
4. **Your resume is not really about YOU.** It’s not even about your past jobs - it’s about the job you are TARGETING. This is the time to “walk a mile in their moccasins.” Imagine the skills, abilities, traits, experience, key words, the hiring manager is seeking, and address them, and ONLY them.
5. **Write to an Uninformed Reader.** Do not expect readers to know anything about the companies you have worked for or even the work you do. Help them out (“...this \$100 million computer equipment company...”). For this reason, jargon is forbidden. Using good, jargon-free English is an important asset in your resume.
6. **Fill in the blanks.** Don’t leave gaps in employment to the reader’s imagination. Their fantasies will (almost) always be worse than the real story. If you were out of the job market for a while, tell them something. Were you in school? Raising a family? Caring for an ailing family member? Without information, they will probably assume you were in prison, or worse.
7. **What is truth?** Positioning is everything. You must never lie, but there are many versions of the truth; use the one that helps your case. An example: “I left my last job because my boss was a bully.” Or, “I left my last job because I wasn’t able to meet my professional goals, which were to help grow the company aggressively to be a world class leader in its industry.” Both may be true, but the latter will serve you better. This is one of the reasons that REHEARSAL IS EVERYTHING when it comes to responding to interview questions.
8. **Use action verbs and short phrases.** Avoid passive voice. Action verbs give your resume energy, convey a sense that you are in control of your work and career. Use short bullet points to state your case.
9. **Soft skills.** Find an opportunity to address character, to create a word picture of your personality. Companies are good at identifying candidates with the right technical skills; it’s harder to discern character. Think about the soft skills that are critical to the work you want to do. Adding statements from performance reviews or personality assessments are possibilities.
10. **The Power of Anecdotes.** It will help you greatly to make a list of anecdotes - every problem you solved, deadline you met, project you volunteered for, promotion you received, good things your favorite boss said about you, every bullet you dodged. (Non-work related experience counts, too.) You will use these as accomplishments on your resume, in cover letters, and to answer interview questions. They are powerful because they: graphically communicate that you understand the issue at hand; document real experience; separate you from your competition in a memorable way; put ‘meat on the bones’ of stale headlines - compare “I’m a very dedicated worker” to “I worked all night to finish a presentation for my boss” - and for all of these reasons, help the interviewer conduct a better interview.
11. **Key Strengths.** Because web robots are designed to conduct key word searches, resumes should be loaded with those key words, and here is a way to do it. This list lets the reader scan quickly to decide if he’s seeing the key things he needs. The list should be tailored for each opportunity, if possible, using the resume philosophy (Item #3): leave it in (or add

it) if it helps, take it out if it doesn't. Think of the words that reflect the key elements of the position, and those that the hiring manager is likely to use to select candidates.

12. **Your Branding Statement.** In today's tweeting, texting world, we search for the fastest, most direct way to telegraph your 'positioning' and place it at the top of the resume. It should address your "essence" and what the employer is seeking. "Sales Executive with [Industry] Experience" is one example.
13. **What makes you a "must-see" candidate?** It's accomplishments, not functions. We all pretty much perform the same functions in similar jobs. Don't bury your accomplishments! A simple approach is the "C-A-R" model. What was the **Challenge**? What was my **Action**? What was the **Result**? You can format your statements like this: "Here's what I accomplished, here's the problem I solved, here's how I did it." ("Reduced expenses 10% by consolidating vendor list."). Using your 'anecdote' list, be selective: use only accomplishments that address the position you are targeting.
14. **Quantify and Qualify.** You can strengthen your accomplishment statements by quantifying and qualifying them (remember your uninformed readers). Use numbers when you can ("handled 10 phone lines...") or be descriptive when you can't ("handled busy multiple phone lines..."). The exception to this is when the facts may harm the case you are building (for instance, they want someone who has managed at least 12 people, you have only managed two).
15. **Transferable skills.** Resumes are really about transferable skills – especially when you're trying to make a career change. You have to spell it out for your readers; they are not going to try to figure it out themselves. Break down the target job into desired skill sets, then document your experience through accomplishments and anecdotes.
16. **Past history?** Rule of thumb is that a resume should cover (at least) ten years. This is always a judgment call. Is there a job in your distant past that is directly relevant to the opportunity? Then you need to find a way to include it.
17. **Age discrimination.** Yes, it's out there. However, there are some enlightened managers that want some maturity, seasoning, experience, especially after the '90's dotcom meltdown. How much experience to include will be a judgment call. The more you know about an opportunity, the better you will be able to tailor your resume.

18. **Chronological or functional?** Some readers think that a 'functional' resume means the candidate is trying to hide something, and, of course, they have a point. However, generally if that is the case, then the chronological resume wasn't going to work anyway, so viewed in this light, the functional format is relatively low risk.
19. **No mistakes.** It's amazing how mistakes stand out on a resume. Especially bad if you're claiming to have a 'detail orientation.' Proof, proof, proof. Then have someone else proof.
20. **Is it pretty?** We used to spend a lot of time worrying about pretty resumes. Today, with automated applicant tracking systems and on-line applications, candidates have limited control over the appearance of the resume. This makes the content even more important than ever before. Your formatting should suit the technology. Hiring managers often won't bother with a resume if it's playing hard to get.
21. **Who will blow your horn?** In the job market, this is left to you. It is difficult to find the right, comfortable way to assert your desirability as a candidate without crossing the line to arrogance, boasting, lack of credibility. This is one of the reasons a third party resume writer can often be helpful.

P. S. Cover letter. For most applicants, the cover letter is a huge, wasted opportunity. You can greatly strengthen your candidacy with an effective cover letter – meaning, make it real. Tell the hiring manager something important that he can't get from the resume - why you changed jobs a lot, why you moved from one city to another; why you want this job, highlight your transferable skills, weave your career history into a coherent story, even if it isn't. Find ways to emphasize how your experience is relevant to their needs.

P.P.S. Do you have your one-minute story? Some call it the 'elevator pitch.' Let's say you're attending an industry conference, and find yourself in an elevator with a good prospect. You suddenly have a golden opportunity, but have less than a minute to be charming, compelling, memorable. You should be prepared to tell a stranger about you, your history, your goals, in 30 to 60 seconds. This takes a surprising amount of preparation.

Great work! Here's to your successful job search!