

# DOES YOUR RESUME NEED A TUNE-UP?

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**E**veryone knows that the resume is the key to the door of opportunity. However, my fellow recruiters and I see far too many resumes that fail to successfully gain entry. So, I offer you these “six secrets of successful resumes.”

**Your Resume is an Advertisement**—Not an Autobiography. The job search process is, by nature, a marketing program. You are trying to get someone interested in buying your services. So, you advertise the most salient features you have to offer. Consider this analogy. As a potential buyer of a new car, you are unlikely to be interested in the history of the company that made it, or the detail of the process by which it was manufactured. You really want to know what it can do relative to your specific needs and expectations of a new car. If you see an advertisement that addresses most, if not all, of your needs, then you’ll probably want to take it for a test drive.

So it is with company managers and recruiters who have to look at lots of “ads” (resumes) before they find some who may be worthy of a “test drive” (an interview). Tell the readers of your resume about your relevant skills and accomplishments, not your complete life history.

**Write for the Reader**—Not for Yourself. A common mistake many of us make is to record our proudest and greatest moments and share them with the world in the form of a resume. For some, that becomes very heavy reading (pun intended). The resume is supposed to get the reader interested, not put them to sleep.

As a general rule, all unrelated work history and positions held more than 10 years ago should only be given brief mention. Why sell features that are out-of-date or have no apparent value to the potential buyer? A clean, easy-to-read resume with lots of white space presented in a one- or two-page format is more likely to be read by a busy manager or recruiter than one that has the appearance of a novel.

**Make It Easy for Them to Screen You In**—Not Out. In case you haven’t noticed, most advertisements and job postings call for the same basic information—a minimum level of education, a range or minimum number of years of experience, and a few key skill requirements. If you know what they are looking for, don’t bury it the narrative of your resume.

Make it easy for them to see these things at a glance. Group your key skills in a special section and label it appropriately, e.g. Technical Skills, Computer Skills, or Areas of Expertise. Also, consolidate and label your relevant education and training so it can be found quickly. Your work history should include dates of employment for each employer to permit the reader to determine the extent of your experience. If these qualifications are not too extensive, you may prefer to open your resume with a Summary of Qualifications, encompassing these points in a brief paragraph.

Don’t make them look for it; put the important stuff where they can’t miss it.

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**Tell Them Only What They Want to Hear**—Take Out the Fluff. As you tune up your resume, ask yourself: Is it Recent? Is it Relevant? Is it Significant? Your recent experiences and accomplishments deserve the greatest attention because they are usually most representative of your current level of abilities. What you did 10 or 15 years ago seldom adds more than a sense of progression or chronology to your resume, so don't waste space talking about it.

State an objective at the beginning of your resume and make certain everything else in your resume is relevant and supports that objective. If it isn't, leave it out. For example, if you are applying for a job as a telephone customer service agent, it is not necessary to share that you are also a "volunteer firefighter" or "ordained minister."

If you had ten significant accomplishments in your last job, prioritize them and share only three or four in your resume. Save the rest for the interview. In an introductory resume, brevity always wins over verbosity.

**Give Them Proof**—Not Promises. If you get past the first screen for key skills, experience, and education, the final cut is usually dependent upon the past accomplishments you choose to reveal. Significant, factual, verifiable past accomplishments are far more believable than grand promises of what you plan to do in the future. Tell the reader what you did for a former employer and the results you attained, and she will infer that you can do the same for her. Sell your related past successes.

**Rifle-Shot Your Resume**—One Size Does NOT Fit All. A resume is not a one-of-a-kind document. In this computer age, your resume should be as easy to change as your clothes. If you care enough to dress appropriately for the occasion, then you should be willing to change the look and content of your resume to suit the opportunity. The generic, all-encompassing resume is a thing of the past. Such resumes are often too long and difficult to read, or they leave too much to the interpretation of the reader. In either case, the end result is usually a failure to capture the reader's interest.

A "shotgun" approach seldom hits the bulls-eye. If you really want a job, you must specifically tailor your resume to be the stand-out candidate for it. Write the resume to make yourself appear to be the perfect fit for the job for which you are applying.

Reload your resume with the right ammunition, aim it well at the target job you seek, and you should start getting a lot more hits than misses.