

A Relauncher's Resume Guide

Having worked as both an external and internal corporate recruiter, I've been asked to review a lot of friends' resumes lately. While there's no one-size-fits-all solution, I believe the following guide will help you both improve your current draft and avoid the worst resume pitfalls. For those seeking to return to work after a career break of three years or more, we highly recommend making contact with a prospective employer first, either in person or through a mutual connection, before forwarding your resume. Most relaunchers do not fare well using only online job boards and application systems.

1. Remember, most people spend only a few seconds looking at your resume

Therefore, you need to think of your resume as a billboard-- attracting interest and giving people a good sense of who you are and what you can do, quickly. Your resume should resemble an executive summary of your career, not the full report. If you've only had a few jobs, one page should do it. If you've worked in a number of different positions, you might run to two. And consider a third page only if you have academic publications to list and use a lot of white space. There's no greater turnoff than three pages of densely-packed 8pt type. Finally, even though most managers will not read every word, make sure you've zapped any spelling or grammatical errors. Use both spell check and friends to proofread your way to perfection.

2. Looks matter

Spend some time experimenting with fonts, spacing, bolding, underlining, italics, bullet points, boxes, shading, etc. to produce a document that looks good. This is especially important if you're in marketing, PR, any creative or design-oriented field and even sales. A resume is, in essence, your professional brochure. But don't get crazy with the fonts and highlighting. Design elements should reinforce your message, not overpower it. A conservative typeface and judicious use of bolding will keep you from appearing gimmicky. And don't forget to use a professional-sounding e-mail address. Soccerbaby@gmail.com will not cut it.

3. Choose chronological over functional

Functional resumes make you look like you've got something to hide. To highlight your transferable skills, use a Summary at the very top of your resume (see #4 below). If you've been out of the workforce, start the Experience section with your last paid position, even if it ended years ago. If you've done an occasional consulting project during your career break, some for pay and some for free, you can list Consultant at the top of your Experience section and briefly describe your engagements. Even if you've only taken on an occasional project between, for example, 2003-present, you can describe yourself as having been a consultant during that period. If your primary activities during your career break have been school-related or other volunteer work, you should put that in a Community or Career Break Experience section after the Experience section (see #6 below). The only exception to this is if you are changing careers and your current career

break experience is especially relevant to this new career direction. Then you might want to lead with it even though it was unpaid. Just note that it was pro bono so recruiters don't think you're trying to imply that you were paid when you were not.

4. Out with the Objective, in with the Summary

I've rarely seen a well-written Objective statement on a resume. Most are either too vague or too high falutin'. Instead, dedicate that all-important top of the page real estate to a Summary statement. To write an effective Summary, wait until you've completed the rest of your resume. Afterwards, take a break for a day or two, reread your resume, think about your personal qualities and then try to compose one punchy little paragraph about yourself that will make employers just dying to meet you. Trumpet the skills employers tend to covet, like sales, cost cutting or project management. (If you're not sure what these are, read online ads in your field to see the skills and traits that relevant employers value.) Mention all the industries in which you've worked to indicate that you could be employed by a variety of sectors. Finally, pull out key words in your field and list them directly below your Summary paragraph. Here's an example:

SUMMARY

Award-winning corporate marketing and public relations executive with over twenty years experience in positions of increasing responsibility. Demonstrated track record in sales and business development. Superior project management and written and oral communication skills. Industry expertise includes technology, consumer products, chemicals, financial services, the environment, not-for-profit and childcare. Results-oriented, self-motivated problem-solver and creative thinker.

>Media Relations > Public Relations > Corporate Communications > Digital Marketing

5. Just the highlights, please!

In the Experience section, don't feel you have to include every responsibility you held at every job. Focus on your major accomplishments, particularly those that match the kind of work you're currently seeking. And quantify your results whenever possible. If you're updating an old resume, don't just add on your most recent work experiences. Review your old job descriptions to make sure they employ the vocabulary that recruiters use today to describe the jobs you're targeting. Absolutely do not cut and paste the job description you received from your boss or HR onto your resume. Recruiters want to know what you *accomplished* in your role, not just your responsibilities. So instead of: "interfaces between sales and accounting to ensure accurate billing," write: "reduced billing errors by 10% by improving information flow between sales and accounting."

6. Include substantive volunteer or community work on your resume

Many people ask if they should include this sort of experience on their resume. Absolutely. If you've been out of the workforce, it shows that you've been building skills and getting things done, even if you weren't paid. And if you've been working, it shows that you're involved with the community and have connections outside of the job, viewed as a plus by most employers. Just be sure you describe your volunteer experiences in business terms. For example: "Recruited and managed 20 volunteers to design and execute PTA fundraiser. Event yielded a 25% increase in donations over prior years." If you're seeking to return to the workforce after a career break, you may want to call this section "Relevant Community Experience" or "Relevant Career Break Experience" to highlight that you've been engaged in activity that will make you a better employee. There is no need to use the word Volunteer, which calls less attention to the fact that you weren't paid.

7. Don't shy away from dates, but don't get bold with them either

Even if you're over age X (40? 50? 60?), don't leave the year of graduation off your resume. If you do, recruiters may think you didn't actually get a degree. Also, make sure to include the years you worked at your various jobs. But you don't need to account for every month. In other words, 1996-1998 is fine; 5/96-7/98 is overly specific. And there's no need to put dates in bold or otherwise call attention to them.

8. Take Inspiration from Others

If you haven't seen a resume in awhile, look at resume books in the library or at your local bookstore just to get some ideas. You can also access plenty of examples and templates online. Just Google "resumes" and explore some of the sites that pop up. Find a resume you like and imitate its format. Emurse.com has a list of power words for resumes that's worth reviewing. <http://www.emurse.com/blog/2007/02/08/complete-list-of-english-power-words/> Deploying a variety of strong, active verbs in your resume will invigorate the document as well as demonstrate your written communication skills.

Do you have a favorite site or book for resume inspiration? I'd like to hear about it.