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Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

Selling Yourself: A Guide to Writing Effective Resumes¹

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Introduction

With the recent job market in decline and many Americans searching for employment, one vital tool to have when seeking employment is a powerful, effective, well-written resume. While a resume is not the sole deciding factor in hiring, it is a major deciding factor in interviewing. It is for this reason that the resume is so important.

There are a number of basics that must be covered before beginning the process of writing of a resume or cover letter. This paper will guide the reader through the basics of resumes and cover letters and provide comments on frequently asked questions.

The Cover Letter

The cover letter introduces the applicant to the potential employer. There are no stringent guidelines to writing a cover letter, but it should effectively highlight the applicant's skills and qualifications and explain the reason for the letter and enclosed resume.

It should be assumed that there are many applicants for the position and that few will get interviewed. When writing a cover letter, the

applicant should ask the question: "How can my knowledge of sales and the selling process increase a company's sales and profits?"

The Resume

The Basics

First, a common myth about the resume is that it must be limited to one page. In today's business setting, nothing could be further from the truth. Some experts now advise expanding the resume to two or more pages if the information has value (Rockport Institute, 2002). That is, never use unnecessary "filler" information that has no value to the potential employer.

Second, it is important to print the resume on high quality paper. What does it say to the potential employer when a resume is printed on standard photocopier paper? Retail office stores offer high quality resume paper that comes in many colors and textures to express the individuality of the applicant.

Third, it is very important for the resume to be easy to read and well organized (Rockport Institute, 2002). A well-written resume demonstrates the writing and organizational skills of the applicant.

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Finally, the resume should be written from the perspective of the potential employer (Rockport Institute, 2002). Resumes should be written with this question in mind: "Why should this employer interview or hire me?" A sample resume is included to illustrate the various parts of a resume.

The Heading

The heading is one of the most important areas of the resume. It should include the following contact information:

- Full name
- Current address
- Current phone number
- E-mail address

The applicant's name should be printed in large, bold text at the top of the page so that it stands out from the rest of the resume. Some applicants use a different font for the heading, but this is an individual preference.

Including the address and phone number is standard operating procedure in all resumes. Contact information should be concise and listed at the top of the resume under the applicant's name.

Because many employers contact applicants via e-mail, it is advisable to include an e-mail address as part of the heading, if possible. Avoid using an "unprofessional" e-mail address (e.g., bigstud@aol.com) on a resume.

One can see in the sample resume that the name is typed in very large, bold print. It is undoubtedly the first thing that a reader notices about the resume. Also included are the applicant's address, phone number, and e-mail address.

Objective Section

The objective section should be a short, concise statement that outlines exactly what the applicant intends to accomplish by writing the resume. The applicant should consider both his goals and the company's goals when writing the objective statement. Whatever is chosen for the objective

statement should entice the potential employer to read the resume.

Note how in the objective statement of the sample resume that the applicant states how he wishes to increase company sales and profits. This is obviously of benefit to the potential employer. The applicant's leadership, organization, and interpersonal skills will almost certainly be of benefit to the employer as well.

Education Section

The education section is very important for both current college students and recent graduates with no experience because it provides them the opportunity to explain their potential skills for the job. Both current college students and recent graduates would be well advised to list the education section before experience, while seasoned veterans of the workforce might elect to list employment experience before education.

The education section should be listed in chronological order, with the most recent diploma/degree listed before the name of the school attended. For example, in the sample resume, Bachelor of Science comes before University of Florida. It is also advisable to list the major and specialization. Consider including any coursework, as well as skills developed from that coursework, that might be relevant to the position for which the applicant is applying. As illustrated in the sample resume, the applicant listed four college courses and the skills developed from those courses that might have an impact on the applicant's ability to perform the position for which he is applying in the most effective manner.

There is much debate relating to the issue of including grade point averages (GPA) in the education section of a resume. It is the authors' belief that the GPA should be included if it is higher than 3.0. Because there are different GPAs that can be used in the resume (e.g., overall GPA, upper division GPA, major GPA, specialization GPA, etc.), the applicant should include the highest GPA. Not listing a GPA in the resume might be interpreted that the applicant has something to hide.

If the applicant is a college student or recent graduate, there is no need to include high school education information. High school graduates should follow the same rules for completing the education section as college students.

As a final note on the education section, applicants who self-funded all or a majority of their college expenses might want to list that fact on their resumes. This would demonstrate that the applicant is well rounded and can balance a busy schedule.

Experience Section

The employment experience section offers the applicant the opportunity to demonstrate work skills. The authors believe that employers hire people for SKILLS developed, not DUTIES performed. Therefore, the applicant's resume should heavily emphasize skills that were developed from performing duties, rather than just enumerating the duties performed.

Heavy emphasis should also be placed on special achievements in the workplace. The authors advise avoiding the use of terms such as “responsible for” and “assisted in.” For example, instead of the statement, “Assisted Dr. Allen F. Wysocki in the instruction of AEB 3341,” a more favorable statement would be, “By working with Dr. Allen F. Wysocki in the instruction of AEB 3341, I developed exemplary organizational and people skills by interacting with students in a classroom setting.”

Once again, chronological order is preferred, with employment history beginning with most recent employment. In this case, place of employment should come first, as in the sample resume.

Additional/Other Information Section

The additional/other information section allows the applicant to emphasize special activities and achievements acquired outside the workforce or through college extra-curricular activities. Emphasis should be placed on skills developed and achievements accomplished. Because organizational activities are of interest to employers, the applicant should use this section as an opportunity to demonstrate how he is a well-rounded individual with

strong leadership abilities. The applicant should state how he participated in student organizations, not just the names of the organizations. For example, in the sample resume, the applicant provided examples of student organizations with which he was involved, along with an explanation of his roles in those organizations and achievements accomplished.

In addition to organizational activities, the applicant should also list scholarship awards along with the recognition criteria for the awards and the grantors of awards. For example, in the sample resume, the applicant not only listed the awards he received, but also the recognition criteria for the awards and the grantors of the awards.

It is advisable to include any special abilities, licenses, etc., that may be applicable to a potential position. The applicant should include anything that might be appealing to a potential employer.

There is a debate on whether to include any interests or hobbies in this section. The authors believe that this can certainly do no harm. Who knows? Perhaps the potential employer has similar interests, which might help the applicant gain employment.

There is also a debate on whether to list references. Some advise listing references on the resume, while others advise listing references as “available upon request.” The authors believe that it is best to leave a reference section out of the resume because almost all employers assume that references are available upon request. The applicant should have an available list of references (including how to contact the references and what information the references may provide) to give to the potential employer when requested.

Conclusion

A resume is basically a document that is designed to present the applicant in the best possible way. It should be written to effectively set the applicant apart from the other applicants by focusing on achievements.

When composing a resume, it is important to consider the audience. Accent Resume Writing

(2002) offers the following four tips for writing resumes:

1. Determine who is reading your resume.
2. Write what the reader wants to hear.
3. Make your resume easy to read.
4. Write a resume with substance and depth.

Good luck and happy job-hunting!

References

Rockport Institute. How to write a masterpiece resume.

<http://www.rockportinstitute.com/resumes.html>.

Visited April 8, 2002.

Accent Resume Writing.

<http://www.accent-resume-writing.com>. Visited April 12, 2002.

John Student

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Objective To obtain a position as sales territory manager with Gator Pharmaceuticals using my exemplary leadership, organizational and interpersonal skills to increase company sales and profits

Education **B.S. Food and Resource Economics**
*University of Florida, Department of Food and Resource Economics
* August 1998–May 2002
* Minor: Agricultural Law
* Overall GPA: 3.84
* Funded 75% of college expenses with scholarships and employment
* Relevant coursework included:
* Selling Strategically: learned valuable skills involving science of sales and skills of negotiating win-win agreements
* Human Resource Management: developed leadership and interpersonal skills for effective people management
* Agricultural Finance: learned valuable concepts involving risks and rewards of business, as well as minimizing risks
* Investing: developed strong knowledge of financial markets and skills for successful company and portfolio evaluation

Experience **University of Florida FRE Department**
* Office assistant
* August 2001–May 2002
* Learned interpersonal skills as front line for telephone contacts
* Developed organizational skills managing professors' travel schedules
* Gained knowledge of software, including Word, Excel, and Outlook

- Activities**
- FRE-NAMA** (*National Agri-Marketing Association*)
- * UF FRE Undergraduate Student Organization
 - * Member, August 1998–May 2002
 - * President, August 2001–May 2002
 - * Vice President, August 2000–May 2001
 - * Developed valuable leadership, interpersonal, and organizational skills by organizing and running effective club meetings
- Alpha Zeta**
- * UF College of Agricultural and Life Sciences Honorary Fraternity
 - * Students representing top 40% of College are invited to join. Only those with outstanding academic scholarship and leadership are initiated
 - * Member, August 1999–May 2002
 - * Fundraising Committee Chair, August 2001–May 2002
 - * Developed leadership, interpersonal, and planning skills by planning and implementing successful fundraising activities. As fundraising chair, raised over \$5,000 for activities, scholarship funds, and charities
- CALS Ambassadors**
- * College of Agricultural and Life Sciences Leadership Organization
 - * Member, August 2000–May 2002
 - * Chosen by committee for academic performance and leadership
 - * Developed outstanding interpersonal and presentation skills by speaking and recruiting high school students for the College
 - * Developed exemplary leadership skills at U.S. leadership workshops
- Awards**
- Agri-Gator Scholarship**
- * \$3,000 annual scholarship awarded to CALS student for excellent academic performance and leadership
 - * Scholarship is awarded by a committee, including the CALS Dean
- CALS Ambassador Leadership Award**
- * Award is given to Ambassador with most exemplary leadership skills
 - * Award is chosen by a vote of all CALS Ambassador members