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# Twelve Killer Steps to Improving Your Resume

By Pat Criscito

Writing an effective resume often is one of the most difficult aspects of job hunting. After all, it requires turning your life history into a glittering one-page advertisement that highlights all your best attributes. Fortunately, by using this 12-step process, you can make this daunting task much easier.

## ***Step 1: Select a focus.***

Decide what type of job you will be applying for, then write it at the top of a piece of paper. This can become your objective statement, should you decide to use one, or it can become the first line of the profile section of your resume that will give your reader a general idea of your area or areas of expertise. An objective isn't required on a resume, but if you use one, make sure it's precise. For example, "A marketing management position with an aggressive international consumer goods manufacturer" is better than "A position that utilizes my education and experience to mutual benefit."

## ***Step 2: List your educational qualifications.***

Include any relevant education or training that might relate. Don't forget continuing education. It shows that you care about life-long learning and self-development. Relevant is the key word here. Always look at your resume from the perspective of a potential employer. Don't waste space by listing training that isn't related to your target job.

## ***Step 3: Review job descriptions.***

Get your hands on a written description of the job you wish to obtain and for any jobs you have held in the past. If you're currently employed, your human-resources department is the first place to look. If not, then go to your local library and ask for a copy of "The Dictionary of Occupational Titles" (Jist, 1999) or the "Occupational Outlook Handbook" published annually by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. These references offer occupational titles and job descriptions for everyone from abalone divers to zoo veterinarians. Your local library may have Job Scribe, a software program with more than 3,000 job descriptions. Other places to look for job descriptions include local government job service agencies, professional and technical organizations, recruiters, associates, newspaper advertisements, and online job postings, which tend to have longer job descriptions than print ads. Make a copy of the applicable descriptions and then highlight the sentences that describe what you've done in your past or present jobs.

## ***Step 4: Insert keywords.***

In today's world of e-mailed and scannable resumes, your sentences must contain the buzzwords of your industry to get noticed. Keywords are the nouns or short phrases that describe the essential knowledge, abilities and skills required to do your job that might be used to find your qualifications in a keyword search of a resume database. They're concrete descriptions like: C++, UNIX, fiber-optic cable, network, project management, among others. Even well-known company names and universities are sometimes used as keywords, especially when narrowing an initial search that calls up hundreds of resumes from a resume database. For management positions, soft skills such as "communicate effectively," "self-motivated," and "team player" should be cited as well. The job descriptions you've found are great sources for keywords. Use those words somewhere in your resume, plus synonyms wherever you can — but never include any keywords that aren't true or don't fairly represent your experience.

### ***Step 5: Catalog your jobs.***

Starting with your present position, list the title of every job you've held, along with the name of the company, the city and state, and the years you worked there. You can list years only (1996-present) or months and years (May 1996-present), depending on your preference, but be consistent. It helps to put each job on a separate sheet of paper.

### ***Step 6: Detail your duties.***

Under each position, make a list of your job responsibilities. Incorporate phrases and keywords from the job description wherever they apply. You don't have to worry about writing great sentences yet or narrowing your list.

### ***Step 7: Inventory your accomplishments.***

Now, go back to each job and think about what you might have done above and beyond the call of duty. Did you exceed sales quotas by 150% each month? Did you save the company more than \$100,000 by developing a new procedure? Did you generate new product publicity in the trade press? Write down any accomplishments that show potential employers what you have done in the past, which translates into what you might be able to do for them in the future. Quantify your accomplishments whenever possible. Numbers are always impressive.

### ***Step 8: Make appropriate deletions.***

Now that you have the words on paper, go back to each list and think about which items are relevant to your target job. Cross out those things that don't relate, including entire jobs (like flipping hamburgers in high school if you're an electrical engineer with 10 years of experience). Remember, your resume is just an enticer, a way to get your foot in the door. It isn't intended to be all-inclusive. You can choose to go back only as far as your jobs relate to your present objective. Be careful not to delete sentences that contain the keywords you identified earlier.

### ***Step 9: Write clear, compelling sentences.***

Make sentences of the duties you have listed under each job, combining related items to avoid short, choppy phrases. Remember to structure the sentences so they're interesting to read. Never use

personal pronouns (I, my, me). Instead, begin sentences with verbs (planned, organized, directed) to make them more powerful. Make your sentences positive, brief and accurate. Make certain each word means something and contributes to the quality of the sentence.

### ***Step 10: Rearrange.***

You're almost done! Return to the sentences you've written and think about the order they're in. Put a number 1 by the most important description of what you did for each job. Then place a number 2 by the next most important duty or accomplishment, and so on until you've numbered each sentence. Keep related items together so the reader doesn't jump from one concept to another. Make the thoughts flow smoothly.

### ***Step 11: Add related qualifications.***

Think about anything else that might qualify you for your job objective and place it at the bottom of your resume. This includes licenses, certifications, affiliations, and sometimes even interests if they truly relate. For example, if you want a job in sports marketing, stating on your resume that you play tennis or are a triathlete would help your candidacy.

### ***Step 12: Include a profile.***

Last but not least, write four or five sentences that give an overview of your qualifications. This profile or qualifications summary should be placed at the beginning of your resume. You can include some of your personal traits or special skills that might have been difficult to get across in your job descriptions. This profile section must be relevant to the type of job for which you're applying. It might be true that you're "compassionate," but will it help you get a job as a high-pressure salesperson? Write this profile from the perspective of a potential employer. What will convince a hiring manager to call you instead of someone else?

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