

Effective Resumes and Cover Letters

Welcome to the DOD Career Decision Toolkit, Effective Resumes and Cover Letters!

Goal

The goal of this section is to provide you with the information and tools to write an attention-getting resume and an effective cover letter to earn a job interview.

Plan

This section contains a self-assessment to help you determine how ready you are to write an attention-getting resume (page 2 through page 7) and two modules:

Module 1: Effective Resumes (Pages 8 through 28)

In this module, you will learn the resume's purpose, the common resume formats and mistakes, and how to write your own resume.

Module 2: Effective Cover Letters (Pages 29 through 33)

In this module, you will learn the purpose of a cover letter, the necessary parts and how to write your own cover letter.

Succeed

You can download the Checklist for Success handout for the Effective Resumes section of the Toolkit from the main page.

Glossary

There is a course glossary on pages 34 through 37.

Note: There are several sample resume and cover letter handouts which you may wish to use during this section. These can be found on the main toolkit accessibility page.

Module 1: Effective Resumes

This section will discuss the basic types of resumes, the types that are appropriate for different job seekers, and what information should be included. It will also discuss the essential elements of cover letters to use with the resume.

Do you think you're ready to write an interview-getting resume and cover letter? Take this quiz to find out.

Resume Knowledge Check

Are you a resume expert? Or is your understanding of resumes a little more limited? Take our quiz and see if you are ready to write a winning resume.

Question 1:

What is a resume?

- A. A written representation of who you are.
- B. A self-marketing tool.
- C. A list of ingredients and a set of instructions as to what to do with them.

Answer: B

A resume is a self-marketing tool.

Feedback:

Your resume is a tool you use to sell yourself and your skills to your employer. It is not a complete representation of who you are, rather a representation of who you are in terms of the particular job you are applying for. Think of your resume as a commercial for yourself. Resumes and commercials are designed to gain people's attention so that they want to learn more about the product, which is you.

Question 2:

What is the purpose of a resume?

- A. To get you a job.
- B. To get you an interview.
- C. To get you a date.

Answer: B

The purpose of a resume is to get you an interview.

Feedback:

It is rare that an employer will hire a person solely on the basis of a resume. The resume is simply a screening tool for the employer, to reduce the potential candidates down to a more manageable number. You want your resume to highlight your qualifications in such a way that the employer will feel confident in your abilities and put your name on the short list of candidates who will be invited for an interview.

Question 3:

What information should you include in your resume?

- A. A comprehensive list of your past jobs, education, skills, hobbies, interests, and accomplishments.
- B. A list of education, work experience, and skills you think you would need for the job you want.
- C. A selective list of your education, work experience, and skills as they apply to the job you want.

Answer: C

A selective list of your education, work experience, and skills as they apply to the job you want.

Feedback:

You don't want to include everything there is to know about you. Don't you find a person who go on and on about themselves to be a frightful bore? Only include information about yourself that is relevant to the job for which you are applying. Employers appreciate brevity and conciseness when they have to read through a stack of resumes. And don't include skills or qualifications which you think the employer is looking for but which you don't actually possess. That is called lying, and most people agree that lying is bad!

Question 4:

How many resumes should you have?

- A. One for each unique type of job for which you are applying.
- B. Four.
- C. One.

Answer: A

You should have one for each unique type of job for which you are applying.

Feedback:

If you are applying for different types of jobs, you want your resume to be arranged in such a way that it includes only the information that is relevant to each job. For example, you might want to highlight different skills depending on the job requirements, or you may want to choose a different way of arranging the information to highlight different parts of your resume.

Question 5:

How long will the typical employer or recruiter spend on each resume he looks at?

- A. Thirty seconds to one minute.
- B. As long as it takes them to read the entire resume thoroughly and attentively.
- C. Until they find a reason to put it down and go to the next one.

Answer: C

Until they find a reason to put it down and go to the next one.

Feedback:

Employers or recruiters are always looking for an excuse to put down one resume and move on to the next. That means they will only spend a short time (20 to 60 seconds) on yours if it is poorly written, unappealing or if the information seems irrelevant. Advertisers understand this. When they write commercials, companies make sure to grab your attention immediately. Make sure you hold the employer's attention by arranging your resume in such a way that the most relevant information comes first and the least relevant information comes last. That way, they won't have an excuse to put your resume down until they have read the whole thing!

Question 6:

What do you need to know to write a good resume?

- A. Yourself.
- B. Yourself and the type of work you are applying for.
- C. Einstein's theory of relativity.

Answer: B

Yourself and the type of work you are applying for.

Feedback:

Knowing yourself is only one part of writing a good resume. Knowing the job is the other. If you know the job's requirements and duties, you can make sure you arrange your information in such a way that your qualifications and experiences catch the employer's attention. It will prevent you from wasting time applying for jobs that don't match your qualifications.

Question 7:

Is it ok to stretch the truth or "pad" your resume?

- A. No.
- B. Yes.
- C. Only if you are applying to work for the government.

Answer: A

Feedback:

You want to include all of your relevant skills and qualifications and present them in the most positive light. That does not mean lying or "stretching the truth." You also don't want to include irrelevant information just to make your resume longer. Remember: Employers will check your references. If they find that you have embellished your work experience or misrepresented your educational background, your chances of landing the job will disappear quicker than you can say, "What I meant was...."

Question 8:

What is the best way to organize information in a resume?

- A. Chronologically.
- B. Alphabetically.
- C. By always making what the reader is processing the next best thing about you.

Answer: C

By always making what the reader is processing the next best thing about you.

Feedback:

You want to catch the recruiter's attention and keep it as long as possible. Sometimes this may mean highlighting the work experience and education you have. At other times it might mean highlighting skills you may have developed through other avenues. A chronological format might work for some people and for some jobs you want to apply for, and not for others. Check out our section on resume formats and find out how to determine which format is the right one

for you. And forget the alphabetical arrangement, unless you are applying for a job as an indexer.

Question 9:

Should you include an "interests" area on your resume?

- A. Yes
- B. No
- C. Maybe

Answer: C

Maybe

Feedback:

We all have interests apart from work or school. Often this can tell the employer or recruiter something about us that would be hard to get across without including these on a resume. For example, the ability to play a musical instrument might demonstrate discipline, creativity, etc. Including a few interests also gives the interviewer a means of "breaking the ice" when you are asked in for an interview. However, if including your interests will identify potentially discriminatory information about you (age, religion, child care issues, politics, etc.), you should leave it off or find some way of making the information generic. Also, if you are short of space, leave off the interests section.

Question 10:

What should you always send along with your resume?

- A. A cover letter.
- B. A picture of yourself.
- C. A large wad of bills, preferably tens and twenties.

Answer: A

You should always send a cover letter along with your resume.

Feedback:

The cover letter is your opportunity to personalize your job application. It allows you to state the specific job for which you are applying and to explain how the qualifications outlined in your resume will allow you to perform that specific job. Pictures are generally considered unnecessary, unless you are applying for a job as a model or actor. Presumably you want to be

hired on the basis of your qualifications, not your physical attributes. And never send money in the mail!

You have completed the course self-assessment. Module 1 begins on the following page.

Module 1: Resumes

Resumes are probably one of the most common aspects of the job search process and the most essential tool in your employment toolbox.

However, many resumes are poorly done, and most others could be improved. Resume writing is an art and a science, so while there are some commonly held truths, you will frequently find different opinions about what “the perfect resume” looks like. The truth is that the merit of a resume is subjective, and what separates a good resume from a poor one is often a matter of opinion. However, there is some consensus among employers about what makes an effective resume.

In this module, you will learn some of the basic requirements for a resume in today's job market and ultimately create your own. You'll learn the purpose of the resume, the types of formats, common mistakes to avoid, and finally, tips for creating your own effective resume.

The resume is a document that contains a summary of relevant job experience and education. The resume is typically the first item a potential employer encounters regarding the job seeker and is used to screen applicants for a potential interview.

Since most jobs require you to fill out a job application, what is the purpose of a resume? Don't they contain basically the same information? The answer is yes and no. Resumes show employers more about your accomplishments and style than applications do. An application gives them the facts; the resume tells them the story.

Resume Formats

There are three common resume formats. Each has its pros and cons, and each has a set of recruiters who favor that particular kind over the others. You'll need to learn more about each type and decide which will highlight your skills and abilities most impressively, and de-emphasize those things you prefer not to bring attention to. The resume format you pick should reflect you, your skills and the kind of job you are looking for.

Let's meet the different resumes:

- Chronological
- Functional
- Combination

Chronological Resume

Here is a sample of a chronological resume.

Frank Manager

1234 Navy Road, Norfolk, Virginia 23501

fmanager@gmail.com, 757-123-4567 (H), 757-987-6543(W), 757-555-2222 (C)

SUMMARY PROFILE

- Results-oriented manager with over 20 years experience in operations management and logistics.
- Experience with all aspects of operations including budget management up to \$1.2 million.
- Proven track record of directing logistics for multi-million dollar projects while streamlining organizational processes.
- Proficient in a variety of military and commercial supply management software.
- Visionary leader with experience managing and mentoring cross-functional teams.
- Possess active Top Secret security clearance.

Core Competencies

- Leadership Team Building Budget Management
 - Logistics Risk Management Quality Assurance
 - Project Management Inventory Control Processes Cost Analysis
-

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

UNITED STATES NAVY (1990- 2010)

Logistics Manager (2008-2010)

- Directed twenty-member department providing \$30 million in supplies to Navy SEALs.
- Oversaw all transportation operations to local and overseas locations
- Streamlined internal processes that increased our delivery speed by 30%.
- Authorized all shipments and oversaw all the tracking of all transported supplies.
- Provided customer service to four military commands and twenty civilian agencies.
- Accountable for \$20 million in vehicles and equipment and oversaw all vehicle maintenance.
- Trained over thirty staff members on the use of supply management software.

Operations Manager (2005- 2008)

- Directed planning and operations for 100 military staff across six functional area divisions.
- Oversaw daily operations in cooperation with senior management from multiple departments.
- Generated and presented monthly reports on all operational activities using video teleconferencing.
- Received commendations for inventory inspection with 100% accuracy rating.

- Reorganized operations teams to maximize performance and reduced operational costs by 15%.
- Earned Top-Performance Achievement Award for staff productivity.

Assistant Operations Manager (2000-2005)

- Oversaw 35-member team and coordinated daily department operations.
- Compiled, analyzed and presented data critical to strategic planning.
- Trained and monitored all staff on safety and security procedures.
- Effectively led a diverse team in managing \$10 in equipment and supplies.
- Communicated all operations needs to senior management and consistently met all deadlines.
- Spearheaded the implementation of new operation management technologies.
- Performed all quality assurance checks for material shipments and equipment returns.

Assistant Logistics Officer (1997-2000)

- Provided logistical support to over twelve military commands on the west coast.
- Successfully identified and resolved inventory issues resulting in a 10% reduction in costs.
- Authored multiple process changes that streamlined delivery operations.
- Created new equipment maintenance check points that reduced costs by \$3,000 and increased overall efficiency.
- Generated monthly cost analysis reports and made recommendations for improvements.

Operations Coordinator (1994-1997)

- Coordinated all travel arrangements for twenty-member staff and handled all travel claims.
- Assured proper authorization for all travel and equipment shipments.
- Assisted with tracking and management of \$1 million in equipment, weapons and supplies.
- Averaged 98% inventory accuracy level for three years.
- Authored seven policy changes that were initiated by senior management.
- Earned multiple Navy achievement medals for performance and dedication.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (1990) Penn State University, State College, PA

Professional Development: Contract Management, Leadership and Strategic Analysis Courses

Technical Proficiencies

Microsoft Office (Word, PowerPoint, Excel, Outlook and Access)

This resume is the most traditional and commonly used format. In this type of resume, your most recent jobs are listed first and the focus is on your employment history.

Pros:

A chronological format is probably the most preferred format by employers because they are most familiar with these types and know exactly where to look for all information. They are good for individuals who have a stable work history and have seen some advancement in career positions over time.

Cons:

This format may not be your best option if you have not maintained a steady progression in your field, if you have large employment gaps, or if you are changing careers.

Functional Resume

An example of a functional resume begins on the next page.

John T. Davis
123 Fuller Ave jtdavis@somedomain.com (987) 555-3210 (h)
Jamestown, WA 12345 (987) 555-2106 (c)

OBJECTIVE

To manage the development and implementation of programs that improve profitability, reduce costs, streamline operations, and enhance customer service, utilizing problem solving, communication, and leadership skills developed as a U.S. Navy officer, based on my experience conducting logistical and strategic operations under intense pressure.

EDUCATION

Ferris State University Big Rapids, MI
B.A. Spanish and English. GPA: 3.60. Magna cum laude. May 2002
The Bulldog Hustler – Associate Editor and writer for semi-weekly official student newspaper.
Ferris State-in-Spain – Spring 2001 study abroad at Universidad de Complutense in Madrid.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

United States Navy Lieutenant
Supply and Public Affairs Officer Bangor, WA
USS Ohio (SSGN 727) Gold, Ohio class submarine Sept 2005 – Present
Leadership: As Supply Officer, worked directly for and advised the Commanding Officer on all logistics-related issues. Independently supervised, trained, and audited two divisions of personnel.
Project management: Fully responsible for the entire logistical preparation and continuous support for ballistic missile submarine during three successful 3-month strategic deterrent patrols and four in-port repair periods.

- Effectively managed ship's \$35 million, 36,000 item inventory and \$1,500,000 discretionary budget.
- Accountable for procurement, inventory, records, and sanitary preparation of over \$220,000 of food (about 60,000 meals).
- Trusted and proficient member of the Commanding Officer's strategic and conventional warfare teams, which required extensive training and Top Secret/SCI security clearance.

Sales Officer and Assistant Material Control Division Officer Yokosuka, Japan
USS Kitty Hawk (CV 63), aircraft carrier Sept 2003 – Aug 2005
Leadership: Immediately responsible for three 50- to 70-person divisions on first operational assignment.
Project management: Trusted to lead teams to complete time-sensitive logistics projects on limited budgets.

- Assistant Material Control Officer. Managed 50 sailors and the acquisition and distribution of material for the 5,500-person crew of an aircraft carrier, forward deployed and undergoing constant at-sea replenishment.

- Deck-rehabilitation Project Manager. Led a team of 60 sailors and 5 civilian contractors in the rehabilitation of over 40,000 square feet of tile; responsible for monitoring man hours, productivity, and quality assurance.
- Sales Officer. Revamped a division of over 70 sailors, running two ship's stores, two barbershops, two dozen vending machines, and laundry services for the entire crew, resulting in 10% increase in sailor retention.

PROVEN RESULTS

- As Sales Officer on USS Kitty Hawk, my team-based management strategy led to measurably improved operations and stock turnover. The division generated \$1,500,000 in sales, a 15% increase from the previous fiscal year, due to my organizational upgrades and morale-boosting efforts.
- Saved the Navy \$126,000 in 2006 by coordinating the transfer of valuable supplies from the decommissioning submarine USS Honolulu (SSN 718) to USS Nebraska, thereby conserving resources and reducing expenses.
- On USS Nebraska, my leadership and meticulous auditing helped the supply department earn the maximum score on the annual supply management inspection, maintained 100% Depot Level Repairable part accountability, and delivered over 96% of customer's consumable supply requests during in-port repair periods.
- Submarine and Surface Warfare qualified. Under stress, demonstrated comprehensive knowledge of ship's systems, design, and operations. Highly unusual to earn both of these rigorous qualifications.
- Earned CEO-level Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal for my dramatic improvements to the sales division, my effective leadership, and my overall contribution to mission readiness on USS Kitty Hawk.
- Recommended by senior officers for higher rank position as supply inspector for 26 East-coast based submarines.

OTHER QUALIFICATIONS

- Active Top Secret (SCI) Security Clearance
- Proficient in advanced Spanish communications
- U.S. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) intern
- Adept user of Microsoft Office programs
- Successfully lived and worked overseas
- Enjoy public speaking and training others

In a functional resume, company names, employment dates and position titles are omitted intentionally, and the resume is organized by skills and functions clusters.

Pros:

Functional resumes are frequently used to de-emphasize long gaps in employment history, limited experience or multiple unrelated jobs because it places a greater emphasis on your skills, as opposed to where you obtained them. They can also be used to summarize skills that seem unrelated but translate well into a new career field.

Cons:

The problem with functional resumes is that, unless they are used for a specific reason and are done well, they frequently undersell the job seeker. Many employers look at a functional resume as a means of covering up a mistake as evidence of limited experience, a checkered job history or a job history in multiple, unrelated career fields.

Combination

A sample combination resume begins on the next page.

PATRICIA BAKER

123 Main Street, Anytown, Virginia, 12345, 757-555-1234

QUALIFICATION AND OBJECTIVES

Rising from staff sergeant to the rank of captain is a clear indication of reliability, leadership, and character. Ten years of highly successful logistics management have prepared me to manage the transportation/trucking division of medium-sized organization in need of cost efficiency and innovation.

WORK EXPERIENCE

- Organized, managed and budgeted for 150-vehicle transportation center involving an annual operating budget of nearly \$1 million.
- Initiated, developed, and directed a computer scheduling, system that resulted in 25% improvement of deliveries, an annual cost saving of \$208, 000.
- Effectively implemented personnel policies that led to 19% increase efficiency rating over two year period. Received two commendations from management leadership.
- Improved measurement and communication of safety-related issues resulting in 19 months of accident-free work activity.

WORK HISTORY

2001 - Present: Regional Director, Transportation and Logistics Command, U.S. Army, Washington, D.C.

1998-2001 : Director, Transportation Section, Fort Campbell, Georgia

1993-1998 : Division Manager, Motor Pool, Fort Campbell, Georgia

1981 -1983: Supply Officer, 3rd Army Saigon.

MILITARY RANK

Captain, U.S. Army

EDUCATION

Diploma, Greensboro High School, Greensboro, North Carolina

FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Spanish, Vietnamese

Somewhere between the chronological and functional resume lies the combination resume. Combination resumes have a mostly functional format, but also include a bare-bones chronological work history. The work history section need only include job title, name and location of employer, and dates of employment. Skills and accomplishments are listed in the functional sections.

Pros:

This resume type highlights outstanding skills and achievements that otherwise might be buried within the job-history section. It presents, but also de-emphasizes, the chronology of jobs. Its focus is on clusters of transferable skills and the experiences that are most relevant to the desired position. It is good for those with a diverse job history that does not add up to a clear-cut path, as well as for transitioning service members if they want to pull skills from various parts of their careers.

Cons:

This is a relatively new type of resume, so it may not be as familiar to employers. Also, because it combines chronological and functional resume formats, it carries the risks of both formats. They are also not accepted by many electronic job boards.

Resume Length

There is some debate about how long a resume should be. There are valid arguments on each side, but in general, resumes should be one to two pages, depending on the amount of content you have to cover.

Less-experienced job seekers can easily use a one-page resume. A one-page version is particularly handy for job fairs, where recruiters are likely to get tired of looking at long resumes.

Experienced job seekers will probably need more pages to cover everything. However, unless you are going into certain industries, keep your resume to a maximum of two pages and make sure to completely fill both pages; don't leave half of your second page blank. Be sure that your name (and possibly your contact information) is on both pages.

Resume Mistakes

Resumes should be perfect in every way. Here is an example of a resume with several mistakes. This resume will be used to illustrate the errors in the information below the resume.

Military Joe

1234 Main Street Lakes, MI 44952

Home Phone: (123) 555-1234 Cell Phone: (123) 555-6789

EDUCATION

MBA – University of New York, 19xx

Bachelor of Science – United States Air Force Academy, 19xx Major – Business Management

Professional Military

Armed Forces Staff College – September 19xx to December 19xx Air War College – Marshall Air Force Base, August 19xx to June 19xx Air Command and Staff College – Marshall Air Force Base, August 19xx to June 19xx Squadron Officers School – Marshall Air Force Base, June – July 19xx

MILITARY HISTORY

Promoted to Colonel on June 8, 19xx. Possess Top Secret security clearance with Special Background Investigation. Received United States Air Force Commission through the United States Air Force Academy, June, 19xx.

Vice Commander, 991st Xxxx Wing, Xxxx AFB, XX – Second in command of Air Force’s largest wing; more than 9,000 active duty personnel, \$6 billion in assets/resources, and an operating budget of \$95 million. Maintain combat readiness of unit. 3/20xx – present

Commander, 991st Support Group, Xxxx AFB, XX – Commanded 1,000 personnel and managed \$65 million budget for base operations; provided mission-essential civil engineering, services, education, base security, human resource development, information management, and communications support. 2/19xx – 2/20xx

Deputy Chief, Requirements Division, Headquarters, U.S. Xxxx Xxxxxx, Xxxxx AFB, XX – Planned and developed near and far term warfighter space requirements. Supervised initiatives linking future space system requirements to near-term acquisition process. 6/19xx – 1/19xx

Student, Air War College, Maxwell AFB, AL – Senior leadership selective assignment, top X percent of peer group. 7/19xx – 5/19xx

Deputy Commander, 999th Operations Group, Xxxx AFB, XX – Second in command of over 1,600 officers, enlisted personnel and civilians, operating more than 50 Department of Defense and allied nation satellites - \$60 billion in operational assets. 8/19xx – 6/19xx

Commander, 999th Missile Squadron, Xxxx AFB, XX – Commanded missile unit comprised of 50 officers, 20 non-commissioned officers, and facilities - \$200 million in assets. 7/19xx – 7/19xx

This resume contains the following mistakes:

Lacks Focus

It is estimated that a resume reviewer spends between 2.5 and 20 seconds screening a resume. Your resume needs to focus the reader's attention and enable them to determine quickly what you want to do and what you do well.

Lists Duties, Not Accomplishments

Resumes should consist primarily of high-impact accomplishment statements that sell the job seeker's qualifications as the best candidate.

It is critical that you list accomplishments that demonstrate you can do more than just the bare minimum to get the job done.

Poorly Organized

Resume items should be listed in an order that considers the reader's interests with the most important information first.

Missing Bullets

Use a bulleted style to make your resume more reader friendly. Employers like to have resumes that are easy to read and highlight your skills.

Lacks Keywords

Keywords help a resume reviewer match a candidate with a job. Resumes typically are scanned for keywords before being reviewed for specific positions.

Resume Mistakes Corrected

The same resume with the common mistakes corrected starts on the next page.

MILITARY JOE
1234 Main Street, Lakes, MI, 44952, Home (123) 555-1234 ,Cell (123) 555-6789
militaryjoe@military.com

QUALIFICATIONS SUMMARY

Seasoned management executive with extensive experience creating, developing and executing strategic plans for assessment, consolidation, cost reduction and improving the value of organizations. Innovative leader and motivator possessing solid convictions, morals and business ethics. Exceptional written, verbal and interpersonal communication skills.

CAREER EXPERIENCE

UNITED STATES AIR FORCE 991st XXXX WING – XXXXX AFB May20xx – Present
Vice Commander Promoted to second-in-command of the United States Air Force’s largest wing, responsible for combat readiness of 200 cruise missiles. Managed executive liaison affairs on behalf of the installation commander during his absence. Coordinated facilities management and provided oversight and supervision of more than 9,000 active duty personnel. Accountable for \$6 billion in assets and resources, as well as an annual operating budget in excess of \$95 million.

- Baselined operational requirements as the Wing transitions to performance-based contracts, striving to enhance performance while cutting contract costs.
- Planned and implemented a structured, streamlined, and disciplined four-month preparation plan.
- Served as military liaison and authority for space initiative to compete AFB as a future base for the space plane, a replacement for the space shuttle.

991st XXXX SUPPORT GROUP – XXXXX AFB February 19xx – May 20xx
Commander Selected to command of 1,000 Air Force, civilian and contract personnel, maintaining accountability for all base management and administrative operations while assuming additional responsibility for budget administration of \$65 million. Supervised mission-essential civil engineering, services, education, base security, human resource development, information management and communications support.

- Through aggressive management, led benchmarking project that developed and achieved new goals, and attained awards for the base such as: “Best Base in Air Force Command,” “Best Readiness in Command” and runner-up, “Best Installation in the Air Force.”
- Spearheaded projects valued at more than \$136 million to improve on-base quality of life through various infrastructure improvements to aid in the recruitment and retention issues that face the Armed Forces today.
- Through leadership, all squadrons earned “Best in Air Force” honors.
- Promoted to commander, possessing Top Secret security clearance with Special Background Investigation.

U.S. XXXX COMMAND – XXXXX AFB

June 19xx – January 19xx

Deputy Chief Space Requirements Division Chosen for forecast development and funding prioritization of future requirements in order to enhance capabilities in the areas of communications, surveillance, intelligence, reconnaissance, threat warning, weather and navigation.

- Guided long-range planning for Air Force requirements. Instituted and supervised initiatives linking long-term requirements with short-term acquisitions process.

After the corrections made to this example, this resume now:

Gains Focus

The resume now has a qualification summary that tells an employer what you want to do and what you do well.

Appearance

The resume has been changed to add bullets and important resume information in a bold-font style.

Keywords

Keywords were used so that when a company searches databases for a person to fill a position, this resume will appear in the results. Keywords should be used to tailor the resume to the job, and they allow the job seeker to communicate multiple skills and qualifications.

Organized Data

Career experience is organized and transferable skills that apply to the desired position are properly cited.

Additional Information

For more information on common resume mistakes, refer to the Common Resume Mistakes handout which can be accessed on the main access page.

You can also visit:

- Top 10 Resume Mistakes to Avoid: <http://career-advice.monster.com/resumes-cover-letters/resume-writing-tips/avoid-the-top-10-resume-mistakes/article.aspx>
- How to Write a Resume: <http://career-advice.monster.com/resumes-cover-letters/resume-writing-tips/how-to-write-a-resume/article.aspx>

Keep in mind that the so-called rules really are not rules at all but rather a matter of opinion. In fact, almost every rule you have ever heard about resumes can be broken, if you have a compelling reason. However, there are two absolute rules of resumes that can never be broken.

Number One:

Never submit a resume with errors. Submitting a resume with any type of misspelling or grammatical error attacks your professionalism. Employers may throw away a resume if they run across even one error. Think like an employer: What would you think about a person who

did not practice due care in a document that affects their own personal circumstances? What degree of care can you expect them to exercise for your company?

Number Two:

Never lie. Lying, even fudging the truth a little bit about education, dates, salary or reason for leaving, is never a good idea. A resume is a statement of facts, and the ramifications of not being 100 percent truthful can extend well beyond being denied a job.

Planning/Resume Preparation:

So, how do you start writing your resume? It can seem overwhelming at first, but like other writing, it is an iterative process. Job seekers may revise their resume dozens of times before they are satisfied with it, so don't expect perfection the first time. This section will explore the steps in the resume writing process.

Purpose

Start by deciding what you want your resume to do for you. What is the desired goal you want? How can your resume help you reach that goal? Decide what you want to say and how you want to say it.

Format

Decide on a format for your resume. Will a chronological, functional, or combination format work best for you?

Template

Consult/view several different resume samples and templates to get an idea of what you think would work best for you. Use them as a model when drafting your own resume.

Resume Components:

Contact Information

Be sure to include sufficient contact information, including:

- Name
- Address
- Multiple phone numbers
- E-mail

While it may seem obvious, many employers report the inability to contact a job seeker due to insufficient information.

Qualification Summary

A qualification summary, professional summary, profile, or other section that quickly tells the reader who you are, what you can do and what position you are seeking.

Education

Prospective employers want to know how you have been trained for the role you want to fill. Some candidates fail to include education and training because they do not realize it is expected or because they may believe theirs is deficient (but this is rare).

Your education and training need to be listed because employers want (and expect) to see it. If you prefer to de-emphasize your education and formal training, place this section toward the end of your resume, but be sure to include it.

Experience and Skills

No matter what resume format you choose, skills and experience are the meat of the resume. They offer prospective employers the most clues about job qualifications. Carefully crafted statements about your abilities and your work experience typically are the most important piece of information you can bring to the table.

Other Information

Other information, such as volunteer experience, professional and social associations, and awards and honors can be included if they are applicable to your desired job. However, when in doubt, leave out other information.

Tips for Effective Resumes:

Action Verbs

Try to start most sentences/phrases with strong action verbs that describe your accomplishments. For a great list of action verbs, see this list on the Quintessential Careers website: <http://www.quintcareers.com/>.

Achievement Statements

Don't tell employers just what you did; tell them what you accomplished that made you an outstanding employee and one they can't afford to pass up.

Show the results of what you did, and quantify those results whenever possible.

Keywords

Inundated by resumes from job seekers, employers have increasingly relied on placing those resumes in keyword-searchable databases, and using software to search for specific keywords that relate to job vacancies.

Use the employer's keywords in your resume. You can get these keywords from the position description, job posting and other recruiting/advertising material. Keywords should be used strategically in your qualification summary, resume content or keyword section.

Military Skills Translator

Not sure how to translate the skills you learned in the military into terms civilian hiring managers will understand? Check out these military skills translators to help:

- Military Skills Translator: <http://www.military.com/skills-translator/mos-translator>.
- Military to Civilian Occupation Translator: <http://www.acinet.org/moc>.

What to Leave Out

Leave out negative information whenever possible; the resume should present you in the best possible light and represent what you are capable of doing.

Leave out information that might inadvertently cause the reviewer to be prejudiced against you, including references to any of the following (often included in categories like "Extracurricular Activities" or "Volunteer Activities"):

- Age.
- Sex.
- Religion.
- Political preferences.
- Sexual preferences.

Proofread

Typos, grammatical errors, spelling errors, and so on are the kiss of death in a resume! Take the time to review your resume carefully, and ask others to proofread it for you as well. Don't rely on spell check to do it all!

Take this quick quiz to test your resume-writing knowledge.

Question 1:

This type of resume has company names, employment dates and position titles omitted intentionally; it is good for job seekers with long gaps.

- A. Chronological
- B. Functional
- C. Combination

Answer: B

Functional Resume

Question 2:

This type of resume is mostly functional in format, but includes a bare-bones work history in reverse order. It is good for those with a diverse job history.

- A. Chronological
- B. Functional
- C. Combination

Answer: C

Combination Resume

Question 3:

Traditional resume that is good for job seekers with a stable work history.

- A. Chronological
- B. Functional
- C. Combination

Answer: A

Chronological Resume

Question 4:

Here is an example of a resume. What type of resume is it?

PATRICIA BAKER

123 Main Street, Anytown, Virginia, 12345, 757-555-1234

QUALIFICATION AND OBJECTIVES

Rising from staff sergeant to the rank of captain is a clear indication of reliability, leadership, and character. Ten years of highly successful logistics management have prepared me to manage the transportation/trucking division of medium-sized organization in need of cost efficiency and innovation.

WORK EXPERIENCE

- Organized, managed and budgeted for 150-vehicle transportation center involving an annual operating budget of nearly \$1 million.
- Initiated, developed, and directed a computer scheduling, system that resulted in 25% improvement of deliveries, an annual cost saving of \$208, 000.
- Effectively implemented personnel policies that led to 19% increase efficiency rating over two year period. Received two commendations from management leadership.
- Improved measurement and communication of safety-related issues resulting in 19 months of accident-free work activity.

WORK HISTORY

2001 - Present: Regional Director, Transportation and Logistics Command, U.S. Army, Washington, D.C.

1998-2001 : Director, Transportation Section, Fort Campbell, Georgia

1993-1998 : Division Manager, Motor Pool, Fort Campbell, Georgia

1981 -1983: Supply Officer, 3rd Army Saigon.

MILITARY RANK

Captain, U.S. Army

EDUCATION

Diploma, Greensboro High School, Greensboro, North Carolina

FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Spanish, Vietnamese

Choices:

- A. Chronological
- B. Combination
- C. Functional

Answer: B

Combination Resume

Feedback:

You can tell by the employment history section that this is a combination resume.

Question 5:

When creating a resume, what are some common mistakes you want to avoid? Choose all answers that apply.

- A. Leaving out negative information whenever possible.
- B. Avoiding the use of an objective statement to keep your resume useable for any job posting.
- C. Using a template exactly as it appears in your word processing program so that it looks identical to all other resumes.
- D. Including additional information about your church.
- E. Checking for grammatical errors.

The following answers are correct: B, C, and D

- B. Avoiding the use of an objective statement to keep your resume useable for any job posting.
- C. Using a template exactly as it appears in your word processing program so that it looks identical to all other resumes.
- D. Including additional information about your church.

Feedback:

Resume seekers want to use an objective statement, tailor a template to meet their needs, and exclude any age/sex/religion/sexual orientation from their resume.

Question 6:

Place the resume writing steps in the correct order.

- A. Ask someone to proofread your final draft.
- B. Determine the format best for you (chronological, functional, combination).
- C. Compose the components (contact information, education, experience and skills).
- D. Determine the purpose/goal of what you want.
- E. Confirm that you have included appropriate action and key words in your written resume.

The correct order is: D, B, C, E, A

Feedback:

The order is purpose, format, compose the components, confirm and proofread.

Question 7:

Which of the following would be an example of an accomplishment-based bullet because it shows the results of what the candidate did?

- A. Managed 50 sailors and the acquisition and distribution of material.
- B. Trusted to lead teams to complete time-sensitive logistics projects on limited budgets.
- C. Revamped a division of more than 72 sailors, resulting in an 11 percent increase in sailor retention.
- D. Assistant Material Control Officer.

Answer: C

Revamped a division of more than 72 sailors, resulting in an 11 percent increase in sailor retention.

Feedback:

Increasing 11 percent Sailor retention is an accomplishment-based bullet.

Question 8:

True or False: There are many ways to write a resume. But the two things that all employers agree that they hate seeing include lying and typos.

- A. True
- B. False

Answer: True

You have completed Module 1. Module 2 on Cover Letters starts on the following page.

Module 2: Cover Letters

This module will review cover letters, including the purpose of a cover letter, the best format for writing a cover letter and what should and shouldn't be included in the content of a cover letter.

The goal of this module is for you to write an attention-getting cover letter that will get your resume the attention it deserves.

If a cover letter is simply a written introduction, why is there all the fuss about it? The truth is that cover letters are critically important to the job seeker. A good resume is one of the most important documents you will create when it comes to your employment search; however, it may never receive the attention it is due without a strong cover letter. A good cover letter will compel the reader to learn more about you, and a poor cover letter will get the letter and the accompanying resume tossed into the trash.

A cover letter has several purposes. For you, the purpose is to get the interview. For an employer, the purpose is to clarify how the candidate's skills match the position requirements and motivate them to read your resume and invite you to an interview.

Cover letters should consist of three to four brief paragraphs that address a specific purpose.

A sample cover letter starts on the next page.

1250 Garden State Court
Cliffwood, NJ 07721 (848) 555-5784

Ms. Joey Mondaca
B & B Air Conditioning and Heating
209 Bath Ave Long Branch, NJ 07740-6102

Dear Ms. Mondaca,

My 10 years of comprehensive air conditioning training and a successful technical with the U.S. Army, where I progressed through the rank of Master Sergeant, make me an ideal candidate for the HVAC technician you have posted on your company job board.

I am fully certified to work on residential, commercial, and industrial heating and cooling systems. My experience makes me well equipped for installing, troubleshooting, and repairing all types of systems.

My years in the military have also helped me hone my interpersonal skills, thus I not only know my way around schematic drawings, compressors, and air handlers, but I also have a strong customer service focus. I know how to make customers feel confident in my abilities -- and the services I provide.

I am sure my services would be useful to you, and I will call you in the next week to discuss an interview where we can review my qualifications in greater depth.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Jorge Nedvins

What a Good Cover Letter Includes

A good cover letter should explain the following:

"Why I'm Writing"

Here is first paragraph of the example cover letter:

"My 10 years of comprehensive air conditioning training and a successful technical with the U.S. Army, where I progressed through the rank of Master Sergeant, make me an ideal candidate for the HVAC technician you have posted on your company job board."

Your first paragraph should consist of an introduction and a statement of interest. Do this in a way that says something unique about yourself and something that arouses the employer's interest. This is known as your unique selling proposition. You will want to be extremely specific about the type of position you seek and what you can offer.

"How I'm Qualified"

Here is paragraph two which explains the candidate's qualifications:

"I am fully certified to work on residential, commercial, and industrial heating and cooling systems. My experience makes me well equipped for installing, troubleshooting, and repairing all types of systems."

This paragraph should briefly describe your academic or professional qualifications and experience.

"Why I'm Right for This Job"

Here is paragraph three which lists why the candidate feels he is right for the job.

"My years in the military have also helped me hone my interpersonal skills, thus I not only know my way around schematic drawings, compressors, and air handlers, but I also have a strong customer service focus. I know how to make customers feel confident in my abilities -- and the services I provide."

Your next step is to address "Why I'm right for this job." You may want to do this with a third paragraph or add it to your second paragraph. Relate yourself to the company and give details about why you should be considered for the job. Demonstrate your knowledge of the company or industry; few job seekers take the time to do this, and those who do are bound to stand out.

"Steps I'll take to make sure we talk further"

Here is the concluding paragraph of the sample cover letter:

"I am sure my services would be useful to you, and I will call you in the next week to discuss an interview where we can review my qualifications in greater depth."

Your concluding paragraph should address “What steps I’ll take to make sure we talk further about my qualifications.” You want to request some action in this paragraph, such as scheduling an interview or having additional communication. Tell the employer that you intend to contact them within a specific period, such as a week, 10 days or two weeks. Best practices also suggest that you let the employer know the best way to contact you during business and non-business hours.

Cover Letter Samples

Looking for more sample cover letters? Try the websites listed below:

- Quintessential Careers: <http://www.quintcareers.com/>
- Best Cover Letters: <http://www.bestcoverletters.com/>
- Cover Letter Samples: http://jobsearch.about.com/od/coverlettersamples/Sample_Cover_Letters.htm

Cover Letter: SHARP

It is important that you give your cover letter the same attention as your resume. This section reviews some important points to remember that can be summarized in the SHARP model.

S = Standard business format

Your letter should follow a standard business format, which typically is block-style formatting aligned to the left-hand side of the page. Your cover letter is a business communication and should be typed and printed using a quality printer.

Format your cover letter to match your resume (same font, design elements and so forth). If printing it out, use the same type of paper you used for your resume.

H = Highlight important skills

You probably will have many skills listed on your resume and hopefully have the most applicable skills in a qualification summary at the beginning of your resume.

Your cover letter offers you yet another opportunity to explain and expand upon those critical skills needed for your desired job. It is a place where you can put your skills into context, connect them to an employer’s specific need, explain transferable skills, or otherwise mention keywords that will get your resume noticed.

A = Appropriate length

Your cover letter should be brief, consisting of three or four paragraphs with one to three sentences each. It should not exceed one page without a compelling reason.

If your letter is being e-mailed, it should fit within one computer screen without the reviewer having to scroll through the letter.

R = Reviewed for accuracy

Like your resume, there is no excuse for spelling or grammatical errors on your cover letter.

Take the time to have it reviewed by someone else for typos or misspellings. One error could result in your resume never receiving the attention it deserves.

P = Proper salutation and signature

If possible, you should address your letter to a specific person, even if that means you will need to perform a little investigative research. Addressing a letter to a person, with the correct spelling of their name, is much more effective than addressing it to “Dear Sir/Madam” or “Dear Employment Manager.”

It also helps ensure that your letter will get to the person you intend it to reach. Equally important is your signature, so make sure your letter has one. In their haste to get a resume in the mail, many job seekers forget to sign their cover letter, which draws immediate attention to a careless mistake.

Now that you’ve had a chance to review the basics of creating winning cover letters, it is time to put that knowledge to work!

Print the handout “Effective Cover Letters,” which can be found on the main toolkit accessibility page and complete it.

Next, write your own sample cover letter. If it helps, write it for a specific job you have found that you are especially interested in.

You have now completed Module 2.

Congratulations on completing the Effective Resumes and Cover Letters section of your Career Decision Toolkit. Additional information that may be useful to you can be found in the handouts located on the main toolkit accessibility page.

The glossary for this section begins on the next page.

Glossary:

Accomplishments

The achievements you have had in your career. These key points help sell you to an employer, more so than everyday job duties or responsibilities. In your cover letters, resumes and job interviews focus on key career accomplishments -- especially the ones you can quantify.

Action Verbs

A verb that shows someone did something. For example, "I earned a raise."

Chronological Resume

Organize a chronological resume by your employment history in reverse order - your last job should be listed first. Include the name of the company, your job title, any relevant accomplishments and the dates your employment began and ended.

Cover Letter

A letter of introduction from you to the prospective employer. A cover letter accompanies a resume; it grabs the reader's attention and describes what makes you the best candidate for the job. It helps job candidates get interviews.

Electronic Resume (E-Resume)

A resume sent to the employer electronically, either by e-mail, by submitting it to Internet job boards or submitting it through the company's own website. Includes numerous formats of resumes linked by their mode of delivery.

Elevator Speech

A 30-second to two-minute commercial that job seekers use in a variety of situations (career fairs, networking events, job interviews, cold calling) that succinctly tells a new professional contact who you are, what makes you unique and the benefits you can provide.

Employment History

A section on a resume that lists your paid work.

Follow-Up

An often overlooked and critical part of job hunting. In the early phases of searching for a job, job seekers must be proactive in showing continued interest in all job leads -- contacting employers after you've submitted your resume.

Functional Resume

Organize a functional resume by skills and functions, such as leadership, accounting, information security, training, technology, and so forth.

Job Skills

The skills you need to do a particular job. For example, an accountant needs to have good math and accounting skills; a doctor needs to have good medical, scientific and personal skills.

Keywords

Nouns and noun phrases that relate to the skills and experience employers use to recall resumes scanned into a database. Keywords can be precise "hard" skills: job-specific/profession-specific/industry-specific skills, technological terms and descriptions of technical expertise, job titles, certifications, names of products and services, industry buzzwords, etc.

Letter of Acceptance

Used to confirm the offer of employment and the conditions of the offer; i.e., salary, benefits, starting employment date, etc. It is always a good idea to get the entire offer in writing.

Letter of Recommendation

A letter of support for your skills, abilities and work ethic, usually written by a former boss or co-worker, but it could also be from a teacher or personal reference. Good for applying to graduate school, but seen as fairly worthless in job hunting because no one who would write you a recommendation letter would say anything negative about you. Job seekers today are more often asked to provide references (see References entry for more details).

Offer of Employment/Job Offer

An offer by an employer to a prospective employee that usually specifies the terms of an employment arrangement, including starting date, salary, benefits, working conditions. Also called a job offer.

Passive Verb

A verb that tells what happened to someone or something that is usually preceded by a helping verb, such as “had,” “have” or “was.” For example, “A raise was given to me.” Avoid using passive verbs in resumes, cover letters, and interviews. Stick with action verbs instead (see Action Verbs entry for more information).

Recruiters/Headhunters/Executive Search Firms

Professionals paid by employers to find candidates for specific positions. They often recruit candidates, but job seekers can also approach them. Recruiters often specialize by industry or geographic region. Generally, all fees are paid by the hiring companies; candidates should not have to pay fees for most recruiters or headhunters.

References

A group of people who will say good things about you and who know the specific strengths you offer. Can include work references (current and past supervisors), educational references (former teachers or school administrators) and personal references (who can speak of your character). Always ask people before including them as a reference for you, let them know if you give their name to an interviewer, and give them a copy of the job description. This allows them to speak directly to how you can meet the requirements of a specific job.

Resume

A key job-hunting tool used to get an interview. It summarizes your accomplishments, your education and your work experience and should reflect your special mix of skills and strengths.

Resume Bank

An electronic database that holds many resumes. Most resume banks have search capabilities to select resumes according to job objective, resume headline and keywords specified by the employer or headhunter.

Scannable Resume

A scannable resume is a specially prepared resume that will be scanned into an employer's database. No longer as popular as they once were; most companies ask for electronic resumes rather than scannable resumes. In some cases, companies may ask for a plain text version of your resume to enter into their database. Plain text resumes leave out all formatting elements, including bolding, italics, underlines, bullets, etc. and focus only on the text.

Summary of Qualifications

A section on a resume that contains a brief set of points that say the job seeker is qualified for his job objective. This section can also be called highlights of qualifications, qualifications, highlights, summary or profile.

Template

A formatted guideline, not a boilerplate (a rigid form in which you simply fill in the blanks). If you use a template to create your resume, consider modifying some aspects so it doesn't look exactly like someone else's resume.

Transferable Skills

Skills you acquire during any activity in your life -- jobs, classes, projects, parenting, hobbies, and sports, virtually anything -- that are transferable and applicable to what you want to do in your next job.

Web-Based Resumes

A term used for resumes posted on the Internet. Web-based resumes can be plain or elaborate, depending on where they reside and who is expected to see them. The same principles apply to Web-based resumes as to any other kind of resume.

Work History

The work history section on a resume may include paid and unpaid work (because work is work, whether it's done for free or for hire).