

40+ Proven Résumé Strategies That Will Help You Achieve Your Career Objective

Being gainfully employed and it's most likely you haven't had to update your résumé in quite a while; so it can be really difficult to know where to begin. What experiences and accomplishments should you include for these new jobs you've set your sights on? Which new résumé strategies should you be taking advantage of?

Well, you don't have to look any farther: We've curated the very best of our trailblazing résumé wisdom that you need, all into one place. Check out the following strategies and recommendations that will ensure that you create an unbeatable résumé—and guarantee that you land the all-important interview for the position(s) you truly desire.

Delivering Your Message

1. Don't Produce an Elaborate Auto Biography

You probably don't need each and every work experience you've ever had, documented on it. Instead of thinking about your résumé as a comprehensive listing of your work history, *strategize it as a marketing tool selling you as the best qualified candidate for the job(s) you have in your sights*. For each résumé you send out, you'll want to focus on those accomplishments and skills that are most relevant to the job at hand (even if that means you don't include all of your experience).

2. But Keep a Master List of All Jobs

Think modularly! You've got to be able to strategically adapt different résumé versions to effectively target the variety of employment opportunities that you might choose to pursue! Since you'll need to substitute different information in and out, depending on the job you're applying for, keep a résumé master list on your computer where you hang on to any information you've ever included on a résumé: old positions, bullet points tailored for different applications, special projects that only sometimes make sense to include. Then, when you're strategizing each résumé, it's just a matter of cutting and pasting relevant information together. Think of this as your *brag file*.

3. PLACE YOUR MOST COMPELLING INFO CLOSE TO THE TOP

In marketing speak, "above the fold" refers to what you see on the front half of a folded newspaper (or, in the digital age, before you scroll down on a file or website), but basically, it's your first impression of a document. In résumé speak, it means you should make sure your most valuable experiences and accomplishments are visible on the top third of your résumé. Properly locating those attributes that will sell you most strongly into this position is what will get your résumé into the "*keeper pile*" instead of tossed into the *circular file*. This top section is what the hiring manager is going to see first—and what will serve as a hook for the reader to make them want to keep on reading. So, *focus on putting your best, most relevant experiences where they can't be missed and will be seen first*.

4. POSITION YOURSELF PROPERLY TO ENSURE THAT YOUR RÉSUMÉ GETS TO THE RIGHT PERSON

First off, you need to make certain that your résumé is delivered to the appropriate hiring authority instead of getting lost in the shuffle. You can do that in one of two ways: Headline and Positioning Statement or an Objective.

The two situations when an objective section makes the most sense is when you're making a dramatic change in your career direction and need to focus attention, from the very beginning, on how your non-traditional background would be advantageous to the position for which you are applying. The other is when you are just starting out and don't yet have much of a track record and need to sell your *potential* in lieu of achievements and accomplishments.

5. Avoid the Functional Format (in most cases) and Use the (Reverse) Chronological

There are numerous methods to organize the information on your résumé, but the traditional reverse chronological (where your most recent experience is listed first) is still (in the vast majority of cases) your best bet. Unless it's absolutely necessary in your situation, skip the skills-based résumé—hiring managers tend to wonder what it is that you're trying to hide.

6. Briefer is Better

In considering whether to use a multi-page résumé or pare things down to a single page consider the '*Prime Commandment*': *The length of your résumé should be predicated on this: what does it take to do justice to your background and effectively sell your potential value?*

Multi-page résumés definitely deserve serious consideration but the bottom-line determinant is this—you want the information here to be concise, and making yourself keep it to one page is a good way to force yourself to do this. If you *truly* have enough *relevant* and *important* experience, training, and credentials to showcase on more than one page of your résumé, then absolutely go for it. Remember that you don't want to "*cut off your nose to spite your face*" ... or in other words ... leave out critical selling points in an effort to limit your résumé to one page or use microscopic fonts to take up less space. But, ... if you can tell the same story in less space? ... Give it a try.

7. Consider an Online Enhancement

Can't figure out how to tell your whole story on just one or two pages, or want to be able to include some visual examples of your work? Instead of trying to have your résumé cover everything, cover the most important details on that document, and then include a link to your own personal website, where you can effectively focus the employer's attention on what makes you the ideal candidate.

Formatting

8. Keep it Simple

We'll touch on getting creative in order to stand out later on. But the most basic principle of proper résumé formatting and design? Keep it simple. Use a basic but modern font, like Helvetica, Arial, Tahoma, or Century Gothic. Make your résumé easy on hiring managers' eyes by using a font size between 10 and 12 point and leaving all four margins at half an inch of white space on the page. You can use a contrasting (think headline) font or typeface for your name, your résumé headers, and either the companies for which you've worked, **OR** your job titles; but keep it simple and keep it *consistent*. Your main focus here should be on readability for the

hiring manager. That being said, you should feel free to explore options to enhance your opportunities to both catch the eye of the readers and keep their attention on the value that you offer.

9. Carefully Stand Out

Do you truly want your résumé stand out from the sea of Times New Roman? Yes, creative résumés—like infographics, videos, or presentations—or résumés with icons or graphics *can* set you apart, but you should use them thoughtfully. Keep it professional-looking for the industry AND level that you're targeting. If you're applying through an ATS (Applicant Tracking System), keep to the standard formatting without any bells and whistles so the computer can effectively read it. If you're applying to a more traditional company, don't get too crazy, but feel free to add some tasteful design elements or a little color to make it *pop*. No matter what, don't do it unless you're willing to put in the time, creativity, and design work to make it awesome, otherwise seek help from a professional.

10. Make Your Contact Information Prominent

You don't need to include your address on your résumé anymore (really!), but you do need to make sure to include a phone number and professional email address (*not your work address!*) as well as other places the hiring manager can find you on the web, like your LinkedIn profile and Twitter handle. (It is critical that you keep these social media profiles suitable for prospective employers.)

11. Design for 'Skimability' and Scannability

You've probably heard numerous times before that recruiters and hiring managers don't devote a lot of time to reading résumés. Your document will most likely only get a quick '*eyeball scan*' on the first round. So, make sure that the information that is most critical to your candidacy is located where they will find it in the shortest time possible; ... make it impossible for them to miss it. Make it difficult for them to screen your résumé out. {From the Job-Seeker's perspective, there are four phases to the employment process ... and your objective for the first two is to *not get screened out!!!*} Information critical to your candidacy needs to be located right where the reader's eyeballs naturally fall. Remember, in those first ten seconds the decision maker is determining whether your résumé goes into the '*keeper*' file or into the *circular file*.

12. Get Help From A Professional

Perhaps you recognize that self-promotion or graphic design skills aren't your forté, but want your résumé to look spectacular? There's no dishonor in asking for help. Here's a smart move: consider seeking the assistance of a certified résumé writer / career strategist. This is certainly your most important job search tool, so it's worth getting it exactly right!

Work Experience

13. Keep it Recent, Keep it Relevant

As a general rule, you should only need to document the most recent 10-15 years of your employment history and focus on the experience that is most relevant to the positions for which you are applying. Make sure that you allocate adequate real estate on your résumé in proportion to importance. If there's a choice between including one more college internship *or* going into more detail about your current role, always choose the latter (unless a previous job was *more relevant* to your current job target).

14. Maybe You're Lacking In Directly Related Experience? Don't Sweat It!

Don't lose your nerve if you don't have the exact experience that matches a listed {in the job description} requirement. Instead, **focus your résumé on your relevant and transferable skills** along with any related side or academic projects, and then make sure to pair it with a strong cover letter telling the narrative of why you're ideal for the job. Remember: you have nothing to lose by applying for the job. At CAREER DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES, we've frequently found that the hiring manager will find that something in your background is *even more valuable* than a particular qualification they *thought* they were looking for to begin with!

15. Don't Over-Do It With Bullet Points

No matter how long you've been in a job, or how much you've accomplished there, (*in most cases*) you should *rarely* exceed more than five or six bullets in a given section. No matter how good your bullets are, the recruiter just isn't going to get through them all. (At CAREER DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES, we often pare down a résumé into a much more concise format specifically when working with a recruiter ... advising the candidate to bring (and use) the full-fledged version during the interview. Some recruiters will claim "... *I can't furnish this 3-page résumé to the hiring company ... they won't accept it!*" Our three plus decades of experience has proven this to be mostly false. But if you are working through an executive search firm, fully cooperate with their requests if it will help you win the interview opportunity. Once you are there for your interview, it's all up to you and you can strategically present the more comprehensive version.

"My recruiter recommended that I shorten my résumé. However I feel that this version will give you a better sense of my background and the value I can offer to 'XYZ' Corp."

16. Bring it Down a Level

You may be tempted to throw in tons of industry jargon so you sound like you know what you're talking about, but ultimately you want your résumé to be understandable to the average person. Remember that the first person who sees your résumé might be a recruiter, an assistant, or even a high-level H.R. executive {who may not have much expertise in your specialized field} —and you want to be sure that it is understandable, interesting, and relevant to all of them.

17. Give 'Em the Numbers

Use as many facts, figures, and numbers as you can in your bullet points. How many people were impacted by your work? By what percentage did you exceed your goals? By quantifying your accomplishments, you really allow the hiring manager to picture the level of work or responsibility you demonstrated to achieve them. Even if you don't actually work with numbers, here are some little-known secrets to adding more to your résumé.

18. Take it One Step Further

People hire performers, so you need to demonstrate that you didn't just carry out your job functions, but that you actually achieved some significant results! As you review your bullet point statements, think about how you can elevate each statement one step higher and demonstrate the value and benefits of the actions that you delivered to your boss or your organization. In so doing, you can clearly communicate not only what you're capable of, but also the direct benefit the employer will receive by hiring you.

19. Show—Don't Tell—Your Soft Skills

Describing soft skills on a résumé often starts to sound like a list of meaningless buzzwords, fast. But being a "strong leader" or an "effective communicator" are important characteristics you want to get across. Think

about how you can demonstrate these attributes in your bullet points without actually saying them. {Look for an up-coming article showing how you can strategically expand one bullet point into multiple bullets.}

20. Don't Neglect Non-Traditional Work

There's no law that says you can only put full-time or paid work on your résumé. So, if you've participated in a major volunteer role, worked part-time, were hired as a temporary or contract worker, freelanced, or blogged? Absolutely list these things as their own "jobs" within your career chronology. At CAREER DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES, we write up these situations just the same, as if they were regular, paid employment situations. Keep in mind Either you did it or you didn't have that experience. Does it matter whether or not you got paid for it. But make sure that you focus on the benefit of the outcome.

21. Never Use 'RESPONSIBLE FOR' In Your Bulleted Statements

Responsible for _____ essentially says "This is something I was 'sort-of, kind-of' *supposed to do.*" It doesn't say that you actually did it. Nor does it provide any performance indicator. Is this candidate any good at what s/he does? Introducing a statement with *Duties Include* is just as bad. Both are extremely passive and a total waste of valuable résumé 'real estate'. If your bullet point statement doesn't **A**) tell the reader that you actually did something relevant, **and B**) include some performance metric (telling them that you did something well) ... why bother wasting that space on the page?

22. Make Your Résumé **K-W-S: Key Word Searchable**

Use keywords in your résumé: Scan the job description, see what words are used most often, and make sure that your bullet points reflect the employer's priorities. Not only is this a self-check that you're targeting your résumé to the job, it'll make sure you get noticed in APPLICANT TRACKING SYSTEMS. *Confused* about which words to include? Paste the job description into a tool such as TagCrowd, which will analyze and provide the most used, relevant keywords.

23. Avoid Empty Words

What words shouldn't you include? Detail-oriented, team player, and hard worker—among other vague terms that recruiters say are constantly overused. We're convinced that there's a better way to describe how valuable you are.

Education

24. Experience First, Education Afterwards

Unless you're a recent graduate, put your experience before your education. Chances are, your last couple of jobs are more important and relevant to you getting the job than where and when you earned your degree.

However, be advised that putting your education first delivers this self-defeating message to the potential employer: **BRAND-SPANKING-NEW GRAD; NOT MUCH EXPERIENCEWhy Bother????**

Despite the fact that most colleges tell new grads to '*be proud of your new degree and put it first on your résumé*'. Let's face it; putting your education first *clearly advertises that your new degree is the most valuable thing that you have to offer!* [However if your profession requires a CV, short for curriculum vita, then the opposite is true for doctors and those in research or upper academia, where and when you graduated pretty much says it all.]

For those with more experience, you can highlight early on that you hold an advanced degree or certification; i.e. JANET GOLDSMITH, M.B.A.; C.P.A. right at the very top. Or you can state, right near the top of the page, in your executive summary/profile: ‘... *Hold Harvard MBA in Organizational Development...*’

Both of these strategies can deliver the fact that you have valuable educational experience without having to devote four or more lines, of *highly-valuable real estate* above the fold on page one of your résumé!

25. Also Keep it Reverse Chronological

Usually, you should lay down your educational background by listing the most recent or advanced degree first, working in reverse chronological order. But if older coursework is more specific to the job, list that first to grab the reviewer’s attention. {some rules are made to be broken under the proper circumstance.}

26. But You Can Skip the Dates

You don’t have to list your graduation dates. The reviewer cares more about whether or not you *have* the degree than *when* you earned it.

27. Highlight Honors, Not GPA

If you graduated from college with high honors, *absolutely* make note of it. While you don’t need to list your GPA, don’t be afraid to showcase that summa cum laude status or the fact that you were in the honors college at your university, or that you graduated 5/970 from an academy.

28. Include Continuing or Online Education

Headline a separate section, just before your regular education, and title it: Continuing Education or On-Going Professional Development. Don’t be afraid to include additional education, professional development coursework, or online courses, especially if your résumé feels a little light. Online courses are a more-than-accepted norm nowadays, and your participation in them can actually show your determination and motivation to obtain / improve the skills you need for your profession.

Skills, Awards, and Interests

29. List Your Skills

Be sure to add a section that showcases all the *relevant* skills you have for a position, including tech skills like HTML and Adobe Creative Suite and any industry-related certifications. Although there are some ‘commentators’ on the net that say to leave out MS Word and e-mail because ‘*it will make you seem less tech savvy*’ leaving out your proficiency with the Microsoft Office Suite or google docs may be conspicuous in its absence, *especially if they are requirements listed in the job posting / help wanted ad.*

30. Separate Them Into Categories

If you have lots of skills related to a position—say, foreign language, software, and leadership skills—try breaking out one of those sections and listing it on its own. Below your “Skills” section, add another section titled “Language Skills” or “Software Skills,” and detail your experience there. Again—we’re going for *warp-speed skim-ability here, folks!*

31. Show Some Personality

Feel free to include an “Interests” section on your résumé, but *only add those that are relevant to the job*. Are you a guitar player with your eye on a music company? Definitely include it. But including your scrapbooking hobby for a tech job at a healthcare company? Don’t waste the space on it!

32. Consider That Some Of Your Interests Could Be Controversial

Maybe you regularly help raise money for your house of worship. Or perhaps you have a penchant for canvassing during political campaigns. Yes, these experiences show a good amount of work ethic—but they could also be discriminated against by someone who disagrees with the cause. No matter how proud you are of something; if it doesn’t add to your qualifications, leave it out! For more on this topic, see our article on [“Eliminating the Trivia From Your Résumé”](#).

33. Strut Your Stuff

Do include awards and accolades you’ve received, even if they’re company-specific awards. Make sure you explain what the award is all about. Everyone knows what the Oscar, Emmy, or Tony award is. But who outside of advertising knows what the CLIO is? Also show what you earned them for, e.g., “Earned Golden Keg Award for having the (*beverage industry*) company’s top sales record four quarters in a row.” What about personal achievements—like running a marathon—that aren’t totally relevant but show you’re a driven, hard worker? Not sure what to include vs. leave out? Ask a reputable CPRW or certified career coach!

‘Black Holes’ Gaps and Other Problematic Résumé Situations

34. Delete the Short-Term Jobs

If you stayed at a (non-temporary) job for only a matter of months, consider eliminating it from your résumé. Leaving a particularly short-lived job or two off your work history shouldn’t hurt, as long as you’re honest about your experience if asked in an interview. Additionally, this helps you avoid appearing to be a ‘job hopper’.

35. Deal with the Gaps

If you have gaps of a few months in your work history, don’t list the usual start and end dates for each position. Just use the YEARS of employment (2010-2012), or just the number of years or months you worked at your earlier positions.

36. Explain Serial Job Hopping

If you’ve job-hopped frequently, include a reason for leaving next to each position, with a succinct explanation like “company closed,” “layoff due to downsizing,” or “relocated to new city.” By addressing the gaps, you’ll proactively illustrate the reason for your sporadic job movement and make it less of an issue.

37. Explain a Long Break in Jobs

Re-entering the workforce after a long hiatus? This is the perfect opportunity for a summary statement at the top, outlining your best skills and accomplishments. Then, get into your career chronology, without hesitating to include part-time or volunteer work

38. Don’t Try to Get Cute

Don’t try to creatively fill in gaps on your résumé. For example, if you took time out of the workforce to raise kids, don’t list your parenting experience on your résumé, à la “effectively managed the growing pile of

laundry” (we’ve seen it). While parenting is as demanding and intense a job as any out there, most corporate decision makers aren’t going to take this section of your résumé seriously.

Finishing Touches

39. If You’re Running Out Of Room and Don’t want to add an additional page then Leave Out “References Available On Request”

If a hiring manager is interested in you, he or she will ask you for references—and will assume that you have them. There’s no need to address the obvious (and doing so might even make you look a little presumptuous!).

40. Proofread, Proofread, Proofread

Goofs on your résumé equal the *job-search kiss-of-death*. It should go without saying, but make sure your résumé is free of typos. And don’t rely on spell check and grammar check alone—ask family or friends to take a look at it for you. A colleague of mine shared a humorous (and embarrassing) experience:

She produced a résumé for a client in the accounting field credentialing him as a “*Certified Pubic Accountant*”! You read that right ... should have been PUBLIC, but *pubic* got through the spell checker. ‘Manger’ is a beautiful word during the December Holiday season BUT IT’S **NOT MANAGER**. Be careful!!! Proof-read the traditional way!!!

41. Save it as a .PDF

If emailing your résumé, make sure to always send a PDF as well as a .doc. The .doc file accelerates the computer’s ability to read your résumé into the Applicant Tracking System. Including a .pdf version *ensures that the reader will see the document just the way that it was formatted*. That way all of your careful formatting won’t accidentally get ruined when the hiring manager opens it on his or her computer. To make sure it won’t look bizarre when you send it off, Berkowitz of Career Development Resources suggests, “Send it to yourself via e-mail. Then Look at it in both Google Docs and Word, and then attach it to an email (to yourself) and open it as a preview.”

42. Name Your File Smartly

Ready to save your résumé and send it off? Properly naming your résumé file will not only simplify your own file management, but also make it easier for the hiring manager. Therefore save it as “Your Name Résumé” instead of “Résumé.”

43. Constantly Update It

Carve out some time every quarter or so to update your résumé and make some improvements. Have you taken on any new responsibilities? Learned new skills? Add them in. When your résumé is updated on a regular basis, you’re ready to spring into action when an opportunity presents itself. And, even if you’re not initiating a new job search campaign, there are a multitude of reasons to keep your prime marketing document in ‘ready-to-go’ shape. (Check out our article on ‘8 great reasons to keep your résumé updated’.) Harvey McKay of ‘Shark-Proof’ recommends: “ALWAYS KEEP YOUR RÉSUMÉ LOCKED, LOADED AND READY AT ALL TIMES!”

Mark Berkowitz is the owner and President of CAREER DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES, LLC. Changing lives and revolutionizing careers since 1985, Mark provides one-on-one career consulting services, résumé building assistance and guidance to help each client achieve not only job advancement, but lasting and meaningful success in their career path as well. A distinguished figure in his field, Berkowitz is one of the top career builders in the country and has been quoted in dozens of books and publications on the topics of résumé strategy and career advancement.

Passionate about empowering others to realize their dreams, Mark served as an executive board member of the Professional Assn. of Résumé Writers and Career Coaches. He has been helping clients successfully advance in and/or change their careers for over 36 years. With a Master's Degree in Career Development and four specialized certifications (National Certified Career Counselor, Certified Professional Résumé Writer, Int'l Certified Job & Career Transition Coach, and Certified Employment Interview Professional), he is uniquely qualified to help you improve your career situation. A recognized expert in the field, he had not only taught in Graduate Schools and led workshops and seminars, but also trained other counselors. Mark served as chairman of the Certification Board for the Professional Assn. of Résumé Writers and Career Coaches and was a founding member {and CAREER COUNSELING MASTER} of the Career Management Alliance (fkn Career Masters Institute). Additionally, he has shared his expertise in effectively utilizing career assessment tools with graduate counseling students from nearby Fordham University, helping to prepare them for their future counseling careers.

Mark connects with clients locally as well as international clients via the internet. He also provides outreach to high school and college students, presenting career planning and job search strategy workshops.

- Highly regarded with résumés, cover letters, and interview strategies showcased in nearly two dozen books.
- Enjoys an INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION as a "Résumé Guru" by members of the Professional Assn. of Résumé Writers and Career Coaches.

You can contact him at 1+ (910) 833-5013 or cardevres1@gmail.com to find out how he can assist you in launching your career into a higher orbit.

See how you can benefit from his expertise instead of suffering from your career mistakes.

