

# WHAT IS A TOMBSTONE RÉSUMÉ?

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Thank résumé guru Mark Berkowitz, of Career Development Resources, for the term “Tombstone” résumé which in short, is a résumé that fully qualifies the individual for their **last** position, and offers almost next-to-nothing to the employer or agency looking for a set of transferable skills that would fill the position they offer.

Consider the following phrase used in a résumé by “Jill”.

“Processed 1000 students’ applications during the University’s open day”.

Now in an instance such as this, it appears “Jill” is trying to show the reader that she can cope with high-pressure environments. But of course, all the sentence really conveys to the reader is that she can perform a set task—and that is, to process 1000 student applications in one day. This task is not one that is performed at that job she’s just applied to so how is that relevant to them?

Jill’s phrase is a good example of a ‘tombstone’ statement as it qualifies Jill for the position she is leaving! And if she was applying for the exact same position, then the hiring authority could potentially understand the rigours of completing such an assignment, but what if Jill is not returning to another University? What if she is trying to broaden her experience and apply for a job in a new sector? How does processing 1000 student applications on Open Day qualify her for say, a front-office role in a restaurant? Or a job at a travel agents? Or an insurance broker?

What Jill needs to do when relating experience is to look forward, not look back. She must remember that she is not qualifying herself for the position she has now, she is seeking to qualify herself for her next position!

So when writing your own résumé, look at the results, rather than the job task. Was it below standard? Above the standard? If above, then by how much? In Jill’s statement, 1000 students *seems* to be a lot of students, but maybe the other administrative assistant processed 1500 a day—or maybe the co-worker only processed 500 a day making the 1000 student applications an exemplary effort.

This is the critical point to ask yourself: how will this example of experience transfer to the next organisation? Perhaps the more compelling phrase would have been:

- Surpassed co-worker’s efforts by 50%, processing 1000 student applications on university Open Day. Error-free entry of data into the computerised system streamlined the process, eliminated long queues, and allowed demonstration classes to commence on-time.

This statement is infinitely improved as it tries to anticipate the needs of the next employer. Yes, while it still describes the current job, it also provides a promise to the next employer that Jill is competitive (surpassed co-worker’s efforts), she is accurate (entered data without errors), and she has an appreciation for the importance of time and productivity (classes being started on time). In short, it is a statement that anticipates the needs of the next employer, and looks to the future, while giving a nod of appreciation to the past.

Look at your résumé critically. Are you looking back with tombstone statements? Or striving forward with your next employer in your sights?

Gail was referencing a presentation that Mark Berkowitz made at a PARW/CC convention that included the following graphic:

THE  
**TOMBSTONE**  
COMPARISON



**JOB SEARCH**  
**EPITAPH**

*Here lies so and so,  
S/He went to \_\_\_\_\_ University graduating with a  
\_\_\_\_\_ degree.*

*S/He worked at \_\_\_\_\_ Corp.  
from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ in the capacity of*

*\_\_\_\_\_*  
*Duties involved: a, b, c, and was responsible for x, y, and z.*