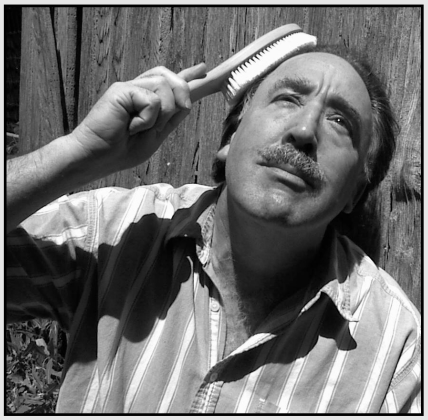
chapter 16

Getting a Job



Web Resume **422**

E-mail Resume **440**

Web Resume

We don't consider manual work as a curse, or a bitter necessity, not even as a means of making a living. We consider it as a high human function, as a basis of human life, the most dignified thing in the life of the human being, and which ought to be free, creative. Men ought to be proud of it.

—David Ben Gurion,
Statement, Anglo-American Commission of Inquiry

Getting a job has never been easy. Apprenticing yourself to a master craftsman, becoming an indentured servant to earn passage to America, knocking on the door of a sweatshop, elbowing your way into a work gang for the railroad, working on the family farm—the old ways of getting a job involved personal contact, directly meeting with the employer, and reaching an understanding together, however brutal the conditions. But now employers can't rely on neighborhood gossip to announce their openings because potential employees—like you—live all over the globe.

The Internet has transformed the job search into a heavily electronic effort, quadrupling the amount of work you have to do, but speeding up the process, and automating it in ways your parents could never have imagined. Eventually, you get to meet face-to-face with an employer, but in today's high-tech marketplace, the interview is the final stage, not the starting point.

You still need a resume, the summary of qualifications that first emerged as a genre when big business began to hire millions of white-collar workers based on their training, background, and knowledge. Eventually, every applicant for any job needed a resume, however brief, to beat out the competition. And, to help high school grads get their first jobs, guidance counselors began coaching students on "the right way" to write a resume. Now there are folks who make their living writing other people's resumes. Heck, we've edited more than a thousand resumes—for free—and we can tell you, there is no perfect way to write a resume. Ignore the self-righteous claims that "This is the only way to do it." No, there may be a slightly different approach that's right for you, when you apply for a particular job, at a particular stage in your career.

No model is universal. Even the advice we're about to give you should be tempered with your own common sense, your awareness of your own limitations, your need to cover over

embarrassing patches in your work history, and your pursuit of your own dreams. You should adapt your master resume each time you apply for a new job, so it seems as if you are the perfect candidate. (Crafting a resume is a writing job—even if you feel it verges on fiction). No more photocopying a single paper resume and mailing the copies out to a hundred employers. For every job you apply for, you should edit your resume so it stresses the job title that company uses, the skills asked for in the ad, and the tone of voice you sense will work for that employer. New opening? New resume. Hey, that's what word processing is for.

A resume answers the questions of the person who screens resumes

When you're working on developing a master resume—the one from which you will spin off all future variations and formats—you will often encounter doubts about whether to mention a particular skill, success, job, or school. One way to resolve your own uncertainty is to think about what the employer wants to know. Consider the resume to be your response to a bunch of questions that the boss typically has in mind when looking over your resume. Your main effort must be to answer those questions, and formatting—often the aspect stressed by resume counselors—is only a way of articulating your answers and getting them read. So fonts, layout, and the overall look of a resume are not as important as the degree to which you respond to the unstated, but intensely felt questions coming from the employer. To answer those, you are going to need to come up with a lot of factual information—and a little marketing spin.

Typical questions:

- Who are you? What's your name and address, e-mail, URL?
- Can you work at the level we are looking for?
- What exactly can you do for us?
- Have you already done something like that?
- Who trusted you enough to hire you to do that?
- Did they keep you on the job beyond the honeymoon?
- What exactly were you responsible for, on those jobs?
- What tasks have those organizations entrusted to you?

- Can I trust you?
- Do you generally back up your claims with specifics (numbers, dates, proper names)?
- What is the arc of your career so far?
- Where did you start? (High school, college, military).
- Are there any worrying gaps, twists, or turns in your history?
- Is the resume itself organized and written so that I can find out what I want, without much difficulty?
- How do I get hold of you to bring you in for an interview?

Adapt your style to speed up access to answers

As you write the master resume, imagine you are the boss—suspicious, dubious, or paranoid—reading the text. Here are some ways to write your resume so you allay those fears and show that you are a "can-do" person, full of energy, and eager to get to work.

- Begin items with verbs in the past tense ("Created budget"), not adjectives following forms of the verb *to be* ("Was responsible for budget"). Verbs give your claims activity and energy.
- Use nouns that correspond to the terms the company includes in the job listing (such as tools, document types, skills). The software reviewing your resume looks for these keywords, and if it finds a lot of the keywords it is looking for, raises your priority, so you have a better chance of getting noticed by the humans.
- Include dollars and cents, numbers, dates, names, titles, and anything that can be checked to confirm your claims. Many of these details cannot be checked, but they look as if they could be. Including these details—particularly the ones involving numbers—will give your text a gritty feel, as if it must be true. (How true it is, of course, depends on your own conscience).
- Be specific, but not long-winded. No more than two lines of text for any particular item. No long paragraphs. They baffle the human readers.
- Open the page up with white space and bulleted lists.

Computers don't much care about the white space, but people do. If you make it easy to skim through the resume, they can get the gist of it faster, and they feel more confident in your ability to communicate.

- Write simply. Edit out extra clauses, redundant phrases, unnecessary words—without sacrificing key details.
- Organize the components of the resume to answer the key questions, following well-worn conventions (so the reader knows where to look for what).

Prepare four versions

All work, even cotton-spinning, is noble; work is alone noble.

—Thomas Carlyle,
Past and Present

If you want to write or edit content on the Web, you're going to need to make a master copy of your resume and then spin that off into several different formats.

If you're applying to a company that lives or dies by the Internet—including almost any Fortune 1000 firm—you can be sure that they will want to receive resumes embedded within an e-mail message, using software to sift through the text looking for keywords describing the job, ranking you in competition with other candidates, and automatically putting your information into a database. Or, using a job board or its own Web site, the company will invite you to enter your text directly into the database, one field at a time, essentially carving up your resume into their bits and pieces. (We call this version of your resume the all-text, or **ASCII version**).

If the company accepts scannable paper resumes, someone lays each page onto the scanner bed and runs the Optical Character Recognition software, sucking up your text (more or less accurately) and feeding it into the same human resource software, to rank you and drop you into a database. (We call this version of your resume the **scannable paper version**).

If your resume can't be read quickly and accurately by the Optical Character Recognition software during scanning, or if the software reading your e-mail resume has trouble figuring out what you are talking about, then you don't get the job.

If you are aiming for a job having anything to do with the Web, you will also create a personal **Web resume** (without any pictures of your pets).

And finally, if you get invited for an interview, or you meet a VIP at a conference, you need a **fancy paper version** of your resume—that's the old-fashioned kind.

So, all told, you will need four versions of your resume. The last, and least important, is the fancy paper version, but you may want to use that as your master copy. It's the least valuable because machines have trouble reading unusual fonts, lines, and other neat graphic effects you might choose to use in a resume that is now relegated to the interview, or other moments when you can personally hand someone a piece of paper. (Or when someone has specifically asked for your resume, and you know that only humans will be reading it).

Devolving from your formal version, you create a Web version by splitting it up into individual pages and formatting it for easy browsing.

Finally, you make a drab, all-text version that can be included within e-mail messages, carved up and dropped into job board databases, and printed out to be easily read by a machine. (Even though humans would think the unformatted look a bit plain, OCR software gobbles it up).

Here's the sequence most people follow creating these different editions of the same resume:

1. Master copy. This is the fancy paper version, to show how well you can format, when given the chance, for hand delivery or mail follow-up (not for scanning, not to be sent as an attachment).
2. Web version to prove you can put up a site, and to offer samples of your work, testimonials, and links to your online work.
3. Ascii (plaintext) for e-mailing or posting on databases.
4. Scannable paper version to fax or mail for scanning into the corporate database.

Make the master copy

Given the number of spin-offs, you need a master copy of your resume for each type of job you are applying for (one master for writing jobs, say, another for graphic jobs, and so on, through your

Blessed is he who has found his work; let him ask no other blessedness. He has a work, a life-purpose; he has found it and will follow it.

—Thomas Carlyle, ***Past and Present***

whole range of careers). The master resume acts as a repository for all your successes, all the details of your past jobs, so that you can pick the right ingredients to spin off into a resume for a particular employer. When you realize you forgot to mention an award or a promotion, you add that to the master resume. Often, the master resume is longer and more complete than the resume you will end up creating for a job. The idea is that you need a lot of ammunition, and the master resume is where you store that, carefully.

The master resume can be organized in several different ways. If you have worked for a long time in exactly the kind of job you will be applying for, a traditional chronological resume, organized job by job back into the mists of time, will work OK for you. But if you are looking for your first job, changing careers, or re-entering the work force after raising a family, that chronological resume makes you look bad—suggesting you have not held enough jobs, or you have had jobs with the wrong job titles, or worse, you have had long periods with no paying job. In these circumstances, a chronological resume can make you look inexperienced, irrelevant, or lazy.

To emphasize your skills, and de-emphasize previous job titles, chronology, and age, we like the functional structure, which brings your skills to the top, and leaves work history for a little lower down. The idea is to communicate to the employer that you know what skills are needed on the job, and you have those skills—before admitting that, well, you have never actually held a job that has the same title, or maybe, but only once, and not for very long, or... well, you know how that goes.

If you already have a gigantic master resume, great. If not, here are some tips on building up each section, if you decide it's relevant to the job you are applying for, and shows off your own experience well.

Identification Area—Put your name right up there at the top, big and bold. But—sad to say—more important than your actual name is your contact info. Let people know how to reach you, if they want to interview you or hire you today. You'd be amazed at how many people forget to put their phone number on the resume. If you are writing or editing on the Web, of course you have to highlight your e-mail address and the address of your resume Web site.

Functional Resume
Identification
Job Objective
Summary of Qualifications
Skills
Professional Experience
Additional Experience
Tools
Education

When more and more people are thrown out of work, unemployment results.

—Calvin Coolidge

Job Objective—Yes, you need one because the software reviewing your e-mailed resume needs to know what job to file you under, and the humans who have to sort your paper resume into tubs in Human Resources need to know which folder to drop your papers into, and the person who has to scan your resume needs to know which job category to list you under. If you don't mention a job objective, none of these folks know where to put you, and you end up in the circular file, or the pile of resumes to be looked at "sometime, when we have time." Logically, the job you want is the job the company is offering, so put in whatever title the company uses for the job. That has always been your career objective, right?

Just the job title, please. No malarkey about looking for a challenging position in the food services field. Yes, if geographic location is critical, say so at the end of the job objective: "Marketing copywriter at Peninsula organization." If you absolutely will not go into the office, admit that here: "Job objective: Freelance Web journalist."

Summary of Qualifications—Not necessary, but often urged on you by earnest counselors in job programs, to help you overcome a diffuse or irrelevant job history—what was once known as "a checkered career." These blocks help you state your case when you fear that the rest of your resume won't make clear what your strengths are. We think you can skip this section, but if you feel nervous, then put in three to five bulleted items, or a very short paragraph, singing your own praises—while using keywords from the ad.

Skills—The guts of your resume, the skill blocks, ought to appear early enough so an employer catches sight of them right away (another reason to leave out the summary of qualifications). These items are built around the skills you think are necessary on the job you are applying for. Identify three to five skills (no more), such as Writing, Editing, Managing, Production, Customer Service, or Marketing. Put the most relevant skill first. Then, under each skill, describe three to five successes—achievements that demonstrate you really have that skill. Each success should start with a bullet in the master version (asterisks or plus signs in the e-mail and scannable versions, to avoid confusing the soft-

ware). Then put a verb in the present or past tense ("Wrote," "Edited"). And follow with details, stressing keywords from the ad (the terms the software is looking for), then inserting data such as numbers of people affected, amount of money involved, page count, software used, titles of content, and target audiences—the specifics that create a rich picture of your work, in the mind of the employer. By the way, money really matters. Stretch to include some hint of the company's investment in the site, the revenues (if any) relevant to your work, the savings brought about by your innovations. Particularly in the United States, you are considered a better candidate if you have been hanging around with a lot of money. Overcome your natural modesty about mentioning money, and guess—if you don't have exact figures, an approximation helps the employer get a sense of the scale of your work and its relative importance.

A man has a right to work only if he can get a job, and he has also a right not to work.

—Clarence Darrow,
The Railroad Trainman

Professional Experience—Here's where you put in the chronological history of your jobs going back five or ten years—not forever. You have to include these because if you just mention skills, suspicious employers think you have something to hide.

- Dates. Each job has its own block of text, with a start date and end date, so the software knows it is a job. Start with the latest job and work backward (reverse chronological).
- Job you did. Use a lowercase noun for the name of the job you did, rather than a verb. (In this way, you may avoid the actual job title, if it is embarrassing). If you are proud of all the job titles, go ahead and use them. But be consistent. If you fudge one, fudge all.
- Company name and location (city, phone number). If you worked at a company that changed its name, make sure you mention that, so an employer sees that job as one job, not two or three.
- Responsibilities. Briefly, because all the best achievements already appear above, under skills.

Additional Experience—Optional section. If you have had big gaps in your job history, create a cover story here ("Consulted with Indian ashram," "Freelance travel writer in Brazil," or "Dry cleaning specialist in state facility" to explain that year of meditation, the

year off, or your brief period in the state pen). If you have had some totally irrelevant jobs, put those here. By separating them out, you show that you understand they are less relevant, but you are a thorough person, and want to provide this extra information. You might, for instance, include volunteer jobs on which you learned important skills, mention the job of mothering, or excuse a long slow spell as consulting. The format is the same as for professional experience.

Tools—Important if the job involves high-tech toys. Also, this section responds to the employer's questions about whether you can get to work immediately without extra training. Do you know the same software we use here? Ads often make it sound as if you must know all kinds of tools, but in reality, if an employer sees you can do the job and learn the tools quickly, you may get the nod. Don't overclaim, here. If you know a tool well, include it; if the ad says another tool is required, and you have a little experience with it, put that in. But don't claim tools you have never heard of. If you have a lot of tools, carve the list up into groups such as:

- Software: (include product names, not general categories, such as "word-processing programs.")
- Operating Systems
- Programming Environments
- Hardware

Education—Often the most ticklish section to write. If you have just graduated, or are about to graduate, Education may have to move up ahead of Professional Experience, because you have so little of that, and you will need to go into some real detail about the actual courses you have taken (not just their names) so the employer has an idea what you might know. If you went to a college for a while, then dropped out, just say, "Attended." If you graduated years ago, the Education block dwindles to a line or two.

For college or university education include:

- Date of graduation. Include the date unless you have a very strong reason not to. (HR departments do toss resumes if they suspect you are covering something up, like failure to graduate at all, by omitting dates). (On the other hand, if you have been out of school for more than

Every man has the inalienable right to work.

—Eugene Debs

10 years, the education section is going to be unimportant, and may not require any dates).
- School and location.
- Major, particularly if the ad requests a specific major and yours matches it.
- Awards and scholarships (more if you only recently graduated, fewer or none if college was more than ten years ago).
- Courses. Include a list of courses if you have just graduated in the last few years, or if your coursework was in a field that is relevant to the business. Rewrite course titles as subjects studied, to reflect actual content, so the reader can tell what went on. If these courses are critical to your job search, mention three to five topics covered in them, in parentheses.

You do not have to include your grade-point average unless it is fantastic. If you do choose to include some mention of your grades, you can say your overall average or your average in your major. If your grades were below 3.0 or B, then discretely omit them. (Only include grades if they give you bragging rights).

If you started a program, but did not finish, but you still want to get some credit for it, summarize what you did accomplish. "Colorado University, Boulder, CO, Doctoral study in English Literature (All but dissertation). June 2000. Completed 42 of 48 credits."

Add any training programs after regular education. Include workshop or program names (rewriting if necessary so that the titles will make sense to the employer), along with a list of three to five of the topics covered, to get across what you learned. If you got a certificate, say so.

Professional Affiliations—Optional. If relevant, membership in an industry organization may boost your credibility. Drop these mentions in after education.

FAQ about the master resume

Why do hiring managers throw away a resume?

"It does not respond to my needs, requirements, or makes it hard for me to find out whether the candidate can do the job."

Solution: Include keywords, successes that mirror the requirements. Squeeze in plenty of specifics, to clarify real achievements

Solution: Move the relevant skills to the top.

Solution: Use lists and white space to enable skimming.

"Makes me suspect that the person is lying."

Solution: Include facts and figures that give a full picture of each success, job, educational experience—if relevant to the job you are applying for.

Solution: Avoid including dates for one job, but omitting them for another. Be consistent in areas that HR folks consider critical: job titles, company names, and dates.

I never did anything worth doing by accident; nor did any of my inventions come by accident; they came by work.

—Thomas Alva Edison

"Includes too much irrelevant stuff I have to wade through."

Solution: Revise the resume for each job, to demote or ax skills that are not really relevant to the job you are applying for.

Solution: Drop any info about hobbies and personal interests.

"Looks dense, thick, hard-to-read right off."

Solution: Use more white space. On paper, use bulleted lists and hierarchy of tabbed indents.

"Does not seem to know our organization."

Solution: Use the terms, ideas, and approaches you gather from their job description.

"Weak language from someone applying for a writing job. Typos and misspellings. All-purpose platitudes, particularly at the start. Seeking a challenging position in a high-tech firm..." (No focus on the needs of this particular employer; lame writing). Also, too many items starting with an adjective: 'Responsible for... .' Too much reliance on adverbs to inflate the achievement: "Distributed spectacularly successful brochure..."

Solution: Energetic writing with lots of nouns and verbs, facts, figures, and specifics.

"The applicant was applying for a different job or had no particular job objective. Cover letter focuses on the applicant's needs, wishes, and dreams."

Solution: Focus on what you can do for the employer.

Man has indeed as much right to work as he has to live, to be free, to own property.

—William O. Douglas, Dissent, *Barsky v. Regents*

What about a job I was fired from within a few months?

Generally, omit it from the resume. If it is your best experience, then you should explain why you left so fast in your cover letter. If you leave it out, assume that the HR folks will uncover the unsightly gap and ask you what you did during that time. 'Fess up. There is no shame in saying that the job just wasn't a good fit. (You have a grace period of 2-6 months in which leaving is not considered a disgrace).

How should I handle the request for salary history?

The easiest way is to put the last salary you earned after each job you mention. Of course, if you earned more than the employer is willing to pay, these figures may disqualify you; and if you earned a lot less, you lose some negotiating muscle for a better salary. Also, salaries from jobs more than ten years ago will seem diminutive compared to current salaries, due to inflation. (Consider including salaries for the last five years).

If the company asks for a salary history, but does not require it, and you see some real disadvantages, leave it out, but be prepared to be rejected for that reason alone, or interrogated at length if you are asked for an interview.

In general, do not include salaries in your resume.

Should I include really trivial experiences or skills?

No. Don't make your resume seem like a puff.

What if I lack a college degree?

- If you have no education beyond high school, omit the education section, and be prepared to answer questions about college in your interview. If you have some college, just put "Attended..." with the dates. If this was long ago, just be ready to explain why you left school before the degree. If recent, explain it in your cover letter.

- If you have a lot of experience in the industry you are applying for, the degree may be a non-issue—unless the company specifies a college degree as a requirement for the job. (Many do). If you have the interest and stamina, take night courses and complete your degree.

Should I include personal interests and hobbies?

No. If these after-hours activities relate to the job, put them into the description of your skills. If not, skip them. They don't help, and may get you in trouble, particularly during an interview if you claim more knowledge than you have. If you pretend you do gardening as a hobby, you are sure to be interviewed by someone who used to run a gardening supply house. David Jensen, who helps research scientists find work, argues that 7 of 10 hiring managers dislike personal info, where the other 3 love it.

How can I handle the fact that I am twice the age of the employer (or so)?

- Emphasize what you can do. Show you know what this company really needs. Include phrases that address the unstated suspicion that you are inflexible ("Led change management seminars..."), low-tech (use the company's own buzzwords), unable to get along with others (emphasize words like *team*, *participated*, *cooperated*), low energy (show real enthusiasm, and demonstrate work done recently).
- Emphasize work done in the last ten years. If your writing skills go back before then, mention them in the skill section and in the employment history. But avoid giving much detail about jobs you held more than 15 years ago in the work or employment history section. Act as if you have moved beyond all that.
- Also, look for companies whose customers are your age or older, so that you can empathize with your audiences. And target companies that receive money from the state or federal government: they have to prove they are not discriminating because of age in hiring.

There will never be a system invented which will do away with the necessity for work.

—Henry Ford

What are the most common lies on resumes, and how easy are they to catch?

- Wrong job title (easy to catch)
- Exaggerated statement of responsibilities on a job (harder to catch)
- Wrong dates to cover unemployment or exaggerate length of time on the job (the bigger the fib, the easier to catch)
- Made-up degrees (easy to catch)
- Exaggerated claim of participation in a project (time-consuming to check)

Develop a list of potential references

Line up references ahead of time—half a dozen would be great. Don't put these on the resume. In fact, don't even say "References available upon request." Of course they are! Otherwise, you won't get the job. Just get the references ready for the moment a company shows some interest.

- Make sure you have up-to-date information such as name, phone, fax, e-mail, and snail mail addresses.
- Find at least one person who can talk knowledgeably about the skills relevant to the jobs you want.
- Consider former colleagues, subordinates, suppliers, clients, and people you have assisted over the years.
- Recognize that each previous employer will be checked, whether you list a contact as a reference or not. The employment verification may lead to a discussion of your qualifications.
- Talk to each potential reference, explain you are looking for work, ask for ideas, and ask permission to use them as a reference. If yes, remind them of what you did for them, what your job title was, and what years you worked there. (Even enthusiastic references forget).
- Worried about what a former boss might say? Hire a company to ask for your references, and tell you what was said, and how the response sounded. A team at www.myreferences.com will check your references for a hundred bucks, asking about performance, skills, judg-

ment, integrity, productivity, technical savvy, employment dates, job title and description, and reason for departure. (They say that half the references they check range from lukewarm to downright negative. Also, some employers hand out misinformation about dates, job titles, and so on, which a potential employer might take as proof that you are lying).

- Whenever the target company asks for references, call all of them, telling them to expect a call and briefing them on the key points to make to the employer. (These differ from job to job).
- If someone offers to give you a letter of recommendation, accept and ask if you can post that on your resume Web site, as a testimonial.
- Thank them after they have been interviewed by the employer. Hey, these little interviews take anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour, so your references are investing in your future.

Money makes a man laugh.

—John Selden, *Table Talk*

Turn the master resume into a Web resume

Moving the content from your master resume onto Web pages lets you demonstrate your Web skills. At a minimum, you must show you can create a reasonably useful menu system, an easy way to move forward and back through the pages, and, underneath, a sensible architecture. If you can also add some other bells, whistles, and sirens to show off particular skills, by all means do so. Here, though, we will talk about the basics.

Format simply.

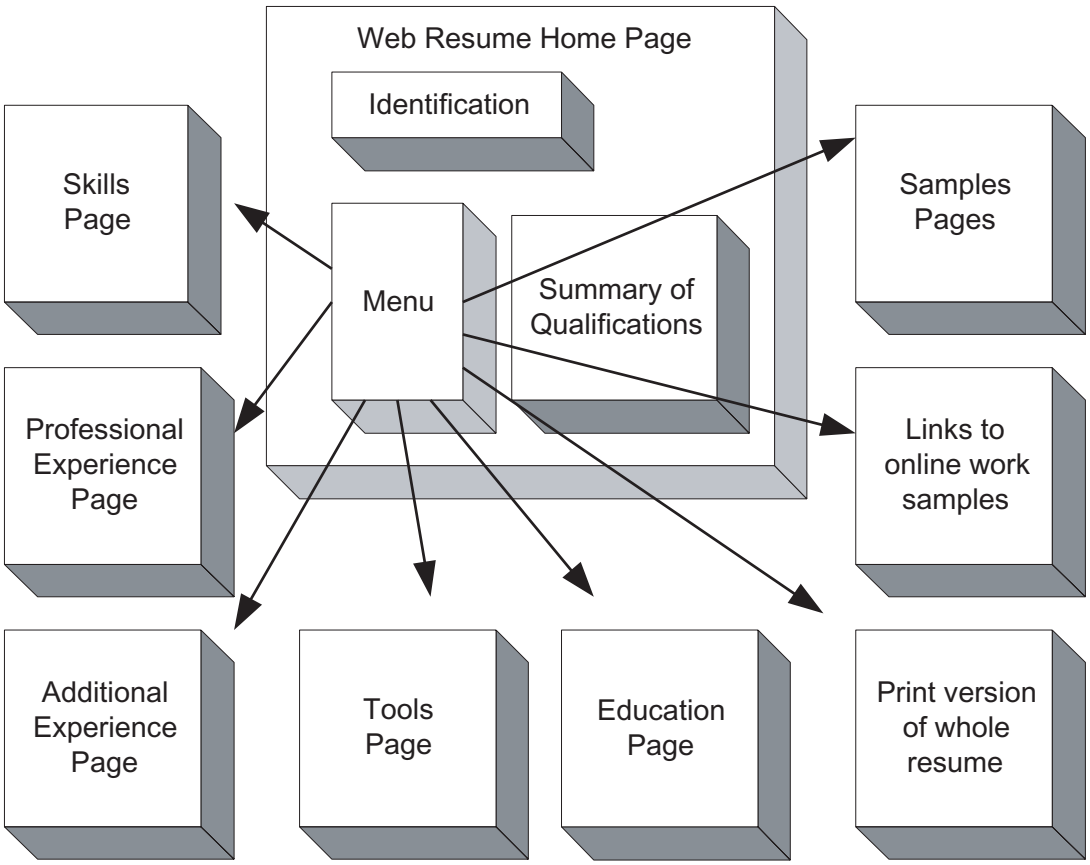
- Use standard fonts (such as Arial and Times New Roman). Do not require fonts that may not appear on the employer's machine, because your pages may end up displayed in a substitute font you hate, making you look silly.
- Keep your HTML clean. Don't just pour a Word file into Front Page because Microsoft sends so much junk along. Remember: If the job involves the Web, the employer is going to View Source.

We may see the small value God has for riches by the people he gives them to.

—Alexander Pope,
Thoughts on Various Subjects

- Make the layout simple. Each page should include the main menu, top and bottom, plus the content of that part of your resume, and not much else.
- Include a button to a page that has an entire resume ready to print or save. (This print version is another HTML page, laid out so it will print well). The idea is to offer a way for someone to get the whole resume in printed form without having to go to a bunch of pages, print each one, and staple them all together.

Create a straightforward architecture. Create a main menu pointing to individual pages that contain the major sections of your resume, such as Skills, Professional Experience, and Education. Add pages that show off your sample work (or provide a linklist to online examples).



Publish your Web resume

If you already have a professional site, and want to add the resume pages there, go ahead. Otherwise, create a new site just for your Web resume. Do not, repeat NOT, attach your resume to your family site, even if your dog and cat pictures look cute.

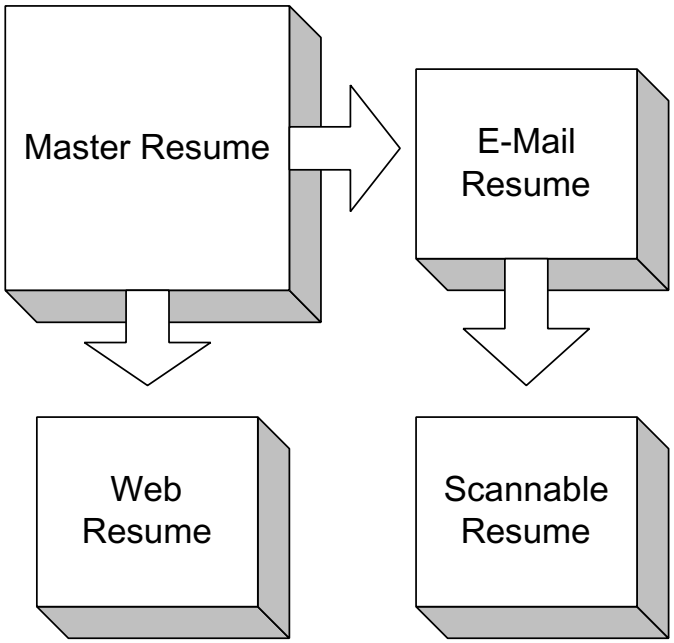
- It is OK to use a personal site on America Online, or at a similar place, like Microsoft Network. You do not need your own domain name.
- If you don't have a site, go to a portal that offers a free page.
- Post samples as an online portfolio and provide links to current Web pages you have done.

Link back

- Include links to your resume site on all other versions of your resume.
- Put your URL in your e-mail signature.
- Participate in newsgroups that the employer might frequent and use your e-mail signature with the URL.

See: Bolles (1999), Dikel (2001), Dixon (2000a, 2000b), Kennedy (1995), Parker (2001), Smith (2000a, 2000b), Troutman (2001).

E-mail Resume



To respond to ads, you need a version of your resume that you can insert into an e-mail message without creating a mess of strange characters and ugly line breaks. Often these messages are read by software that must deduce what each line means and put its text into the right field in the corporate database. Essentially, this is a text-only version of your resume. Hence, it can also be used when you need to copy and paste your resume, in chunks, into the fields of an online database at the employer's site or a job board.

To make this version of your resume, you take your master resume, save it as a text file to strip out all the formatting, and then build it back up out of raw text, using only the formatting options available to the crudest e-mail program.

There is nothing so habit-forming as money.

—Don Marquis

Use job boards with restraint

If you are looking for a first job or an entry-level position, you probably won't face the problem of contract companies grabbing your resume without your permission and running it around to see if they can get a fee when you get the job, or just pretending you work for them. But if you have a fair amount of experience, watch out.

These unscrupulous firms may submit your resume to your own company, or a partner, which could get you fired. Some recruiters post bogus job listings to collect resumes, and then shop those around to other recruiters.

When your knowledge is in demand, or your skills are hot, avoid general postings, to keep your inbox free of junk, and respond only to actual listings if the description names the employer. Also, make sure that the job board will notify you of each request for your resume, allowing you to deny the resume to certain firms. And only use job boards that let you block your current employer from reading your resume.

Don't send your resume as an attachment

Many employers resist reading attachments because:

- Company policy prevents attachments from coming through, or orders people not to open them because of the very real threat of viruses.
- Even if someone downloads the attachment, it may end up in some strange location on the server, and the person may never find it again.
- Perhaps the employer does not have a word processing program that can read your resume.
- Perhaps the employer does not have the same fonts you do.

Also, think of time-and-motion studies. The employer has to choose to download, specify a place to save the file, wait while the file is downloaded, leave the e-mail program, double-click the file, and if the file comes from an alien system, identify an application that might just read the file, wait for the application to open, wait for the document to open, discover that the document is a bunch of rectangles with hexadecimal numbers, close the document, close

the application, find another application that will read the file, open the application, open the file, print the file. If you expect anyone to do all this for a stranger, you are dreaming.

Format for the machine

Here's some formatting advice for resumes a computer will read (that is, included within e-mails to the employer, in fields in an online database, or in a paper resume that will be scanned).

- Use single spacing within paragraphs.
- Only put dates with descriptions of individual jobs and education.
- Ramble, if you must. You can go to three or four pages if you have a lot of relevant experience because the computer can handle the length.
- Include the key terms from the ad, several times if possible.
- Write in your word processor, save as ASCII, which is also known as Text Only, or MsDOS Text, and spits out a file in Windows with a .txt suffix.
- If your word processor will limit lines to 65 characters, do so. (Setting margins does not force lines to wrap in the text-only version. Pressing Shift-Enter, which generates a line break in a word processor, is just interpreted as a return character in ASCII).
- Do *not* use bullets. Use asterisks instead. Your tabs will probably survive.
- Use extra returns to separate sections.
- If you want to emphasize the name of a section, go ahead and use ALL CAPS even though they are ugly as hell. (Better to use upper and lower case, and make the heading stand out on its own by putting a return ahead of it and after it.)

The shortest and best way to make your fortune is to let people see that it is in their interests to promote yours.

—La Bruyère, *Characters*

Start the e-mail with the job reference number in the subject line and in the contents.

Write out the full text of most jargon and then use the abbreviation or acronym as well. (Remember: you are writing for a computer, not a human).

Here are the steps to starting an e-mail resume:

1. Write your master resume in your word processor, so you can write it easily with as much formatting as you like, reorganizing and rewriting until it is perfect.
2. Spell check the document, print it out and proofread it. Ask someone else to proof it, too.
3. Save as text only (raw text, or ASCII text), with the suffix ".txt" at the end, on a PC.

Then, reopen the file in a text editor such as Notepad, Wordpad, or Simple Text to edit the raw text. (You can't trust your word processor to leave the text unformatted, even when you open the file as a Text Only file.)

1. Make each line break after 65 characters. Yes, you have to count a line to figure out where this will be, if your software doesn't allow you to set line lengths by characters.
2. Put each phone number on its own line.
3. Instead of bullets, use asterisks (*) or plus signs (+) at the beginning of lines.
4. Instead of horizontal lines, use a series of dashes to separate sections, if you want. But insert a carriage return before and after the line, so the scanner does not confuse the dashes with text.
5. Do not use boxes, columns, vertical lines, or graphics.
6. Instead of bold text for headings, put the text on its own line starting and ending with four or five asterisks.
7. If your editor allows tabbing, make sure that all items at the same level have the same number of tabs, so they line up correctly for any stray human that happens to look at this. If tabbing does not work, use one, two, or three hyphens or space characters to indicate the indents.
8. Print it out and proof it.
9. E-mail yourself a copy and make sure that the process has not changed your line breaks or arrangement.
10. Compare your resume with those of your competitors in the job market, any time you can.

Get ready to go public

If you do not want total strangers getting your phone number, get a voice mail account. (You must have a phone number.) If you use your home number, consider the feature that lets you call back using the caller ID because many recruiters' voices are distorted, since they are on cell phones or speaker phones.

If you don't want to give out your street address, get a post office box for the length of your job search.

Before you post your resume, find out

- Who will be allowed to read it?
- Will you be notified if your resume is requested or forwarded to an employer?
- Can your current boss discover that you are looking for work? (Or can you block certain companies or people from discovering your resume?)
- Are updates free? (They should be).
- Will the old resume be deleted after a reasonable amount of time, such as 3-6 months, so you do not have an antique version representing you next year?

Post with restraint

Leafleting makes you look desperate. Hit two or three major job databases and some targeted databases (in the industry); then wait. The more places you post, the more likely you are to get spammed with get-rich-quick schemes, multi-level marketing scams, and ads for porn.

No response in a month? Remove the resume from that site and move on.

If recruiters find you by themselves, they persuade themselves that you fit the job; if you send your resume to them, they may nit-pick. Higher-level jobs are often handled by headhunters and recruiters without ever posting an ad because the ad might upset someone inside the company.

Reuse the text resume as a scannable paper resume

Once you've made an e-mail version of your resume, you can use that as the basis for a scannable paper version. This goes to employers who ask for a resume to scan, which includes most Fortune 1000 companies when they advertise in the newspapers. If you are going for a Web job, send your e-mail resume, rather than sending in a paper version for scanning, if you can. You'll end up with fewer errors in their database. But if you must put something on paper for a company that will be scanning it, follow this advice. Note that you still want a formal resume for your interview, but because of its very formatting, it may not scan well. These tips help you make a version just for the scanner.

- Use plain white 8.5"x 11" paper. Colored backgrounds and specks on the sheet may confuse the Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software. Other sizes will get crunched in the scanner.
- If faxing it, use the highest resolution your fax machine offers.
- Do not staple.
- Avoid shading, patterns, lines, and boxes, for the same reason.
- Make the text 12-14 points, even if that extends your resume to three or four pages.
- Use the most common fonts you can find, such as the sans-serif fonts Arial or Helvetica, not narrow.
- Use asterisks or solid bullets.
- Do not use italic, bold, or underlining.
- Do not use ampersands, parentheses, brackets, percent signs, or math symbols.
- If you must use slashes, put a space before and after each, so the OCR does not mistake the slash as part of one of the surrounding characters.
- Left justify.
- Do not use multiple columns.
- Do not include a picture.
- Put your name at the top of every page.

- Give each phone number its own line.
- Print at 600 dpi or better.
- Use white paper.
- Do not photocopy: Rewrite and print anew.
- Do not staple or bold.

Suggestion: If you fax this version, follow up by mailing this version (or the really fancy paper-only version) to the employer, because the faxing process may have made some words a bit fuzzy, and therefore hard for the computer to read.

See: Bolles (1999), Dikel (2001), Dixon (2000a, 2000b), Kennedy (1995), Parker (2001), Smith (2000a, 2000b), Troutman (2001).

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