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Resume Writing FAQs

By Linda Tancs

Times New Roman or Arial, that is the question. Actually, that's one of several questions that befuddles resume writers. Don't despair. Read on for some popular resume writing FAQs.

Should I put my cell phone number on my resume?

You should include your cell phone number on your resume if it is likely to assist a hiring party in reaching you. If you never turn your cell phone on except for emergency situations, then don't use it as a contact number. Likewise, if calls are likely to drop off the planet due to reception in your calling area, it might not be a great idea to use it as your chief communicating tool. And don't use ring-back tones for business callers.

Which font should I use?

Despite what you may have heard, there is no general rule on the appropriate font for a resume. Any commonly recognized business-style font (such as Arial, Verdana, or Times New Roman) using a 10- or 12-point setting is acceptable unless the employer gives instructions otherwise.

How do I account for a series of short-term jobs?

Short-term employment can be a bit problematic as, depending on the circumstances, it may render you a job hopper—even though there is much more movement among employees these days. The bottom line is that you want to convey a sense of stability in your employment history. So consider dividing your work history into categories (like M&A, commercial real estate, etc.), provide a description of your key responsibilities and skills for each area, and then list your employers. The focus should be on the skills that you bring to the table rather than on your chronological history.

Should I leave off addresses of employers if I need room?

Don't scrimp on the information you provide about employers. Every detail about a workplace, including its size, location, ticker symbol, and description of the business aids a prospective employer in evaluating the depth of your credentials and whether you would be a good fit for their organization. If you're worried about your resume exceeding one page in length, then, depending on your level of experience (e.g., a two-page resume is much more common and acceptable for a senior-level candidate with ten or more years' experience), change your font selection, size and margins to create a better fit.

I illustrate management and leadership skills on my resume but it doesn't get me results. Why?

Provided that the jobs you're applying for are looking for these traits, then the problem could be your word choice. If you use bland, overused verbs such as "managed" and "led," then you need to revitalize your resume. Consider using more powerful verbs such as "spearheaded" and "championed." And be sure that you put appropriate detail around these verbs. For instance, consider the difference between "spearheaded launch of franchising practice group" and "spearheaded the launch of a new practice area in franchising, resulting in increased collaboration among corporate, tax and intellectual property practices." Review each verb that you use in your resume and consult a thesaurus for a more powerful alternative where appropriate.

Should I use an "Objective" section?

No. In other industries, an "objective" may very well be *de rigueur*, but it isn't expected in the legal arena. Make better use of that white space by beefing up the skills and qualifications in the main section of your resume. That's what will ultimately set you apart from other candidates applying for your position.

I'm concerned about identity theft. Can I leave my address off my resume?

Whether your address should appear on your resume depends in part on how you make your resume available to others. Do you transmit it privately in response to a specific advertisement or direct it to recruiters? Do you use public job boards? If you use public boards, then one alternative is to use only your city and state or take advantage of any option to make your resume confidential. Recognize, however, that confidential submissions are not as widely

searched or considered by recruiters or employers. Generally, prospective employers want some reasonable detail as to your location to determine whether you are a geographic fit, among other things. If you're submitting your resume in a secure system, you should be less reluctant to provide your full address. Failure to do so could divert attention away from the crux of the matter, which is how your skills and background benefit the employer.

Should I create my resume using Word or is any word processing system good enough?

Arguably, Word is the gold standard these days for document transmission even though for many years WordPerfect was the darling of the legal industry. Unless the employer specifies a means of transmission, use Word. In some instances, the employer may specify that the resume should be cut and pasted into the body of an e-mail or an online application system may so require. In that case, save your resume in text (.txt) version and use that format to cut and paste as required to avoid formatting errors. Similarly, if the employer requires a PDF version of your resume, then be sure to send it in that manner.

Is it necessary to provide my date of graduation?

This concern usually arises from older applicants who are fearful of age discrimination in the hiring process. However, omitting a graduation date actually calls attention to the very issue you seek to mitigate. Moreover, it's relatively easy to arrive at an age or a range by counting back through dates of employment or subsequently through a background check. Provide the date and focus your efforts on casting your valuable years of experience in the best possible light.

How many years of experience should I include on my resume?

Focus on your accomplishments during the past 10-15 years of employment. You can list earlier employers in a brief summary thereafter.

Use the answers to these commonly-asked questions to help demystify the resume writing process and help you craft an attention-grabbing document for your job hunt.