

1. Will someone scanning this in 15 seconds have a positive reaction?

Recruitment agencies and personnel departments are forever whittling down bundles of 200 resumes to shortlists of five or six candidates. The individual reviewing the resumes often times can be bored, tired or very junior (and possibly all three). A clear, well-laid-out resume has an immediate advantage in these circumstances over scruffy and lengthy documents.

2. Does this resume stand up as a marketing document?

Your resume is perceived as a marketing presentation of you. The resume should not be a long laundry list of your history.

3. What are my special features? How can I highlight them? How can I provide some proof of my claims?

Don't just sell yourself as a secretary if you really want to land a job that dozens of other candidates could be chasing. You need to find ways of focusing on your other attributes too - your technological or organizational skills.

However, your claims to be "well-organized and enthusiastic" will not be good enough for some recruiters who would prefer some proof. A good example might be: "having organized a department of 20 people and up to 15 meetings a week in my previous position, I am attentive to promptness, meeting deadlines and giving smooth support for the rest of the team..."

4. Which three people can I show this to for a variety of responses and constructive criticism?

You need a resume that can appeal to different pairs of eyes, rather than being perfect in the view of just one person (yourself). If your resume is going to be successful in getting you a job, it will probably be seen and sifted by several different people. Recruitment agencies, human resources departments and line managers will be reading it and looking for different qualities in it.

5. Is this an interesting document to read?

Resumes can make very dull reading if you looking at more than two or three (as most recruiters are when they are trying to fill a vacancy). Reduce the boredom potential for your readers by being concise and clear. Try to highlight your special features (see question 3) and give the occasional short description (see question 6 below).

6. Should I put in outside interests or not?

Views vary on whether you should do this. It is up to you. The disadvantage is that you could seem frivolous or that your interest in football could alienate you from the football-phobe who is going to interview you.

The advantage of listing them is that you can show what a well-rounded person you are. But if you do put them down, make them interesting. Instead of saying "reading" put something like "reading - mainly modern novels"; instead of putting "running" put "running - aiming to do a marathon in the spring".

7. What should I put in the cover letter rather than in the resume?

Sensitive issues such as your present salary and desired salary level are better off in the cover letter. If you are sending the resume by email, you'll want a cover note on the email just as though you were sending the resume by letter.

Ingredients for a Knock-out Resume

- Make your resume reflect the job description if you are sending it in for a particular job. If the job description asked for five main qualities in the ideal candidate, make sure those five qualities are clearly there on the first section of your resume.
- Put your contact details on the first page - including email address and mobile phone. Many recruiters are under time pressure when compiling short lists for interview and will have a slight preference for candidates who make their tasks easier.
- Reflect the words used in the job description and job advertisement. If they talk about "personnel", use the word "personnel" rather than "human resources".
- Highlight achievements, rather than listing everything you have done. You could say: "was a member of the top-billing sales team in the company" or "pioneered use of different kinds of technology for my department".
- Don't leave out useful skills. The fact that you can speak French, have the European Computer Driving License or regular driving license are all worth putting down.
- Tailor each resume to the job you are applying for. If you are an insurance claims manager applying for two different posts - one for a large insurer and one for a niche player - you will want to produce two different resumes. The one for the big company will highlight your experience working for large businesses; the one for the niche player will show how you can transfer your skills to a smaller player, how you can work in small teams and how you are happy to muck in if there is pressure on time.
- Try to avoid leaving gaps in your resume. If you were unemployed for a few months, you can sometimes glide over this by showing your job history in years rather than months (sales assistant 1996-9; sales manager 1999 to the present). Or if you did some traveling while unemployed, you can actually confess to it. Today, employers are more broad-minded about people who have had time out, but you do not want to raise unanswered questions in your resume that could make your interviewers feel uncomfortable or anxious about you.
- Make everything positive on your resume. Your resume should convey a sense of vitality and an image of you progressing smoothly and confidently through your career rather than having bumps.
- Don't waste words. Instead of long, rambling sentences such as, "*I was a sales manager with responsibility for a team of 15 people*" utilize more concise and articulate description, such as, "*sales manager running team of 15*". Keep your resume on the short side. You should keep your resume to **one page** - but anything more will have you immediately classified as a windbag.
- Put your resume in an attractive layout. Anyone with a word processor can now produce beautiful documents with different fonts and styles. Use good quality paper when you are sending a paper copy.
- Make your resume easy to photocopy. It could be photocopied if you go through a recruitment agency or get put onto a shortlist.
- Think carefully about emailed resumes. Many people send them as an attachment and forget to put in a covering note on the email as to why the person should read your resume at all. Some recipients will have trouble opening attachments, so you may want to put the resume in the main body of the email or convert the file to pdf format.