

## How to Write a Resume People Actually Will Read

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Your résumé is an extremely important document. There are entire books written about how to craft them. [I have written at least one myself](#). There are scores of résumé consultants, companies, and others that will work on your résumé for a fee. Hiring one of these services can be useful and can improve your résumé. Nevertheless, most résumés can improve dramatically by following the below advice.

Some standard advice that you should follow includes:

- Make sure there are no typos or grammatical mistakes.
- Try to keep the résumé to one page.
- Use white paper if sending a hard copy.
- Make the font size a common font between 10 and 12 point.
- Use years, not months, for the dates of your past employment, especially if there were ever any gaps in your employment.
- Break your résumé into sections to make it easy to read.
- Make sure your résumé is tailored to each type of job for which you are applying.
- Focus only on the positive. For example, if you were in the bottom 25 percentile of your class, leave your class rank off the résumé.
- Use simple, easy-to-understand language. Write “helped” instead of “facilitated,” for example.
- Do not put “References available upon request” on the résumé.
- If you have been out of school less than five years, put your education before experience, but if you have been out of school more than five years, put your experience first.

Although these guidelines are helpful, I would like to give you some advice that will “turbocharge” the effectiveness of whatever résumé you ultimately come up with. This is not the sort of advice you are likely to get from most résumé consultants, and it is something that can benefit you greatly.

### Be Among the First Applicants

When employers place a [job advertisement online](#), whether on their website or on a job board, they generally start receiving résumés within minutes. These employers may begin opening résumés immediately and will schedule interviews for the first relevant résumés they see.

More often than not, employers hire from among the pool of applicants that they see in the first few hours after the job posting goes live. Why? This is just the way most employers operate. If you are the first person to show up on their computer screen, they are much more likely to hire you than later applicants.

If you are looking for a job, you should make sure that you are checking the [various job sites](#) you use at least a few times a day. Do not delay applying. You want to apply right away, and worry about whether or not you want the job later.

### Emphasize Results You Achieved For Employers, Not Your Duties

If you are in the market for a job paying a very good salary, most people do not care too much about your duties. They figure that you have the ability to do various tasks. You should not be too concerned about telling the employer what responsibilities you have carried in your past jobs. Instead, your résumé should emphasize the various results that you have produced for past employers.

Try to be as specific as possible about these results. For an attorney, it might look like this:

- Routinely ranked in the top 1% of salespeople in my company’s annual performance review
- Billed in the top 5% of all associates in my firm for the past 3 years
- Won (or received a favorable settlement) in more than 95% of cases I handled in the past 3 years

If you aren’t convinced, compare these two statements. Which do you think is more effective?

- In charge of document review on a big asbestos case

or

- Helped keep a \$10 million client by working 16 hours a day for four straight months to help win major asbestos case

I think it’s clear that a résumé that discusses results is far more effective than a résumé that simply lists various duties you have had with a prior [employer](#). It might be that you don’t know how to put your duties in the form of results. Here are results that may apply to you:

- You brought in money and sales.
- You did the work of several people single-handedly.
- You were part of a team that did something extraordinary.
- You were one of the only employees not let go during a major downsizing in the organization.
- You received extremely positive reviews.
- You developed a new procedure for the organization.
- You were continually given more and more responsibility.

Lots of people go into work and carry on their jobs on a daily basis with no passion for its subject matter. For example, if you go into the homes of many marketing executives, you will find few books about marketing. The same goes for attorneys, architects, doctors, and others.

If you have a [job](#) to fill, my guess is that you would be most interested in hiring someone with a major passion for the subject matter. We want to hire people we believe are extremely committed to what they do, and not people who are simply “ordinary.” Ordinary is easy to find.

When I was in my last year of college, I interviewed with several trading companies in Chicago. I had gotten to the final stages with one of the top companies and was sitting in my final interview.

“This résumé looks like someone who is going to law school—not a trader,” the trader said to me.

He was right. It was littered with all sorts of things someone going to law school would be interested in, and very little of the sort of stuff that would interest a trader.

Your résumé needs to show your passion for whatever it is you want to do. Your passion needs to “bleed” out of the résumé. Someone reading your résumé should feel your interest in the subject matter. Your résumé needs to look like it belongs to someone interested in doing the job for which you are applying. It needs to communicate this passion. If your résumé looks wishy-washy and does not communicate passion for the sort of job you are applying for, then there is a problem.

#### Customize Your Résumé for Each Job to Which You Apply

You need to describe your experience in such a way that all of it seems relevant to the job you are seeking. Every sentence of your résumé should closely track the sort of job you are applying for.

For example, if you were applying to be an accountant you would want to focus on terms that would be valued for an accountant, such as:

- Detail-oriented
- Hardworking
- Intelligent
- Creative
- Follows through
- Ability to meet deadlines
- Problem-solving abilities

If, however, you were applying for a job where you'd be supervising accountants you would want to focus on terms that would be of value for a supervisor:

- Team player
- Management skills
- Enthusiastic
- Leadership skills

In addition, you should even further customize your résumé for different employers. For example, you can generally get a sense of an employer's attitude toward various issues just by looking around on their website. You'll see the mission statement of the company as well as the civic organizations the employer supports. If you look at the biographies of the individual executives you will learn which activities they are involved in, and these activities will give you a good sense of the political and philosophical leaning of the organization.

Our company's main office has been in Los Angeles for some time. Over the past ten or more years I have interviewed people for accounting, legal, and other positions with our company who formerly worked in the pornography industry. You would never know this by their résumés—and I hate to say it but I probably never would have interviewed them if I knew they were coming out of that industry. Yet these people were absolute experts in making their background fit what they thought would interest other industries.

For example, pornography companies have parent companies, subsidiaries, and other more respectable divisions. So instead of listing “Smut Pictures” as their most recent employer, the applicant will list the parent company (“West Coast Studios,” for example). Further, the applicant will then tailor the accomplishments and duties on their résumé in such a way that you would believe they worked for the most conservative company in the world.

These applicants knew how to get an interview simply by tailoring their résumés. You need to tailor your résumé as well. Tailor it not just for each job type, but for each employer as well.

#### Include Letters of Reference and Testimonials with Your Résumé

Including a letter of reference from a past employer (or even someone who's known you a long time) can make a huge difference in the number of interviews you get.

Nothing sells more than showing the employer that your former employer and coworkers loved working with you. People are trained to instinctively question the things we say about ourselves, but they're much more likely to believe things that others say about us. That's why you see so many testimonials on television. Advertisers know we're much more likely to be influenced by what someone else says about them rather than what they say about themselves.

If you have contacts—former employers, friends, or coworkers—who can say good things about you, put quotes and other information from them in your application materials. As an added bonus, it will also humanize you.

What if you were fired from your last job? Who cares! Use a testimonial from the employer before that. Got fired from that one too? Then use a testimonial from a friend. The testimonial needs to say something about how you are a hard worker, a pleasure to be around, trustworthy, and the other qualities of a good employee. Let your former employer or friend write it. It needs to be genuine.

This can be such a powerful tool. I'd estimate it will improve your chances of getting interviews and job offers by four or five times.

Employers want to hire people who are continually improving. You want to make it appear as if each successive job you have had has resulted in increased responsibility and duties. You want to show a pattern of upward mobility and progression—not stasis. Employers want to hire people who are hungry and trying to get better at everything they do.

I have no doubt that there is a certain amount of age discrimination in the employment market. One of the reasons that this exists is the perception that many older workers have “given up” and lack the “fire in the belly” that younger workers have. Whether or not this is true, it is something that I have heard many employers say.

When people are younger they often believe they can do anything, which benefits the employers. People with this sort of enthusiasm will work harder and do everything they can to get the best possible results for the company. These are the people an employer wants to hire. [Employers](#) want people who are hungry, because hunger means motivation. Employers want people who want to rise up the organization's food chain.

At some point, the disappointments that many young people suffer can crush their enthusiasm. Often, they become more interested in a job where they can “settle down,” collect a paycheck, and go home at the end of the day. This is exactly the sort of person an employer does not want.

I remember several years ago seriously debating between two finalists for a job opening I had. One finalist was a woman who had graduated from a top-fifteen law school, worked for one of the ten largest law firms in the United States, and was about as polished as they come. The other contender was a man from the Philippines who spoke broken English and had no college degree. The woman was professional but not hungry. The man was incredibly enthusiastic. He said in the interview that he would work fifteen hours a day, seven days a week. The woman let on that she was looking to get out of the stressful world of law firms. She asked about working at home on Fridays so she could run errands. I hired the woman because of her credentials and she lasted in the position less than a year before deciding she wanted to do something less stressful.

When I looked up the Filipino man a few years later, he had become incredibly successful doing the same job I had interviewed him for at another company.

Employers need to believe that working for them represents the next step in your climb up the ladder to success. You are hungry and want to do well. You are going to do great things.

Your résumé needs to communicate this drive and motivation.

If you apply these broad strokes to your résumé, your application will get noticed. You will have emphasized all of the most important qualifications employers are looking for. But you should never send a résumé without a [cover letter](#).

Two services I recommend for résumé revision and review are included below:

[PreferredRésumés.com](#)

I recommend [AttorneyRésumé.com](#) for attorney résumés.

Now that you have a revised résumé, how are you going to use it? Of course you need to have a good way of [finding jobs](#). One way that I would highly recommend to find jobs is to use [Granted.com](#), a site created by my company that has been more than a year in the making. [Granted](#) is completely free to job seekers, and is very easy to use and functional. [Granted](#) collects jobs from employer websites, newspapers, and many other sources of jobs and puts them all in one place, making your job search much easier. Best of all, it lets you upload your current résumé or résumés so that you can submit an application directly to employers that allow this. If you don't have a résumé yet, you can create one directly on the site very easily. [Granted](#) makes it easier to fully utilize your résumé in your job search.