



Career Transition Series

A Brief Guide to Writing Your Resume



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*Finding Exceptional Talent.
Building Exceptional Organizations.*

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Anita Shuper is a writer, researcher, and business consultant. With a background in the arts, science, and business, including an MBA from the Rotman School of Management, she has written on topics ranging from language to lasers to local entrepreneurship. Anita regularly contributes her communications expertise to projects and programs in not-for-profit and startup organizations. Her current focus is developing career management resources for students and executives.

Table of Contents

Point of View	3
W5H.....	4
Attitude.....	5
Plan: Creating SMART Goals	5
Execution: 1. Get organized.....	6
Execution: 2. Create a chronological resume	6
Execution: 3. Create an online resume	7
Execution: 4. Create a one-page biography.....	7
Execution: 5. Create a cover letter.....	8
Top 10 Mistakes	9
Titles in the Career Transition Series	10

Point of View

Your resume opens doors. It allows you to get to the next stage—the interview. A resume prepares both you and your interviewer for conversation and discussion. It's a living document that needs to be constantly improved and evolved throughout your career.

Gathering your thoughts and organizing your documents will help you create your resume's content. Whether you're drafting a one-page biography, chronological resume, or online resume, it's key to critically review how you present yourself. This will help you showcase your accomplishments and experience honestly and positively.

Don't expect to get it all done the first time you try – it's an evolution. It takes practice, editing, and constant revision. Creating a great resume takes time and effort, but once you have the “big job” done of getting it drafted, subsequent maintenance and tweaking will be easier.

Employers have suggested taking about 30 seconds before deciding whether to trash your resume or keep it for further review. It's probably less than that! Maximize the chances of your resume being considered by making it impactful at a glance. Your resume isn't your life story—it's a digest. Give enough information to make the reader want to learn more. Save the details for the interview.

Crafting a resume doesn't just inform the employer – it also tells you. It will help you understand what exactly it is that you do, what you're good at, and what you've accomplished. This exercise will help give you the confidence to carry you through the rest of your job search.

Bill Holland

W5H

Why?

No matter how you feel about them, resumes are expected. Whether you're responding to a job posting, working with a recruiter, or following up on a job lead through a networking contact, you will most likely be asked for your resume. It's an essential part of your job search tool kit, and not having one will put you at a disadvantage.

What?

The top three things you need to do are: (1) have the right attitude, (2) make a plan and (3) take action. A good attitude will put you in the right frame of mind, a plan will keep you on track, and executing that plan is the key to success.

Who?

While you can hire a resume writing professional to write your resume, it's an exercise best done by you. Getting guidance and feedback is always a good thing, but you're the one with the content knowledge. Having others edit and proofread your resume is encouraged, but try to draft it independently. It's an excellent exercise to get to know yourself and will better prepare you for interviews.

When?

Most people only think about their resume when looking for a job. However, get into the habit of revising it even when you're not actively looking. Update it with new accomplishments and credentials as you earn them. If you don't have a resume, start drafting it as soon as possible to have a working document. Then, schedule regular reviews of your resume to revise it as necessary.

Where?

Your resume should be easily accessible. If you're networking, keep hard copies on hand. File previous versions in case you need to refer back to them. Keep electronic versions organized so that you know which version you sent to which employer or contact.

How?

It's all about execution. With a plan in place, the "how" is a commitment to doing it. In this guide, we've set out the following goals for you to start working on (1) getting organized, (2) creating a chronological resume, (3) creating an online resume, (4) creating a one-page biography, and (5) creating a cover letter. If you focus on these at a very minimum, you will be off to a good start. It's up to you to supplement the activities we suggest with others that make sense for you. There's no shortage of resources in bookstores and online to keep moving you forward.

Attitude

While many recognize the importance of having a good resume, creating one causes people a great deal of anxiety, and so it becomes a low priority. Make it a high priority. As with many sources of stress, procrastinating just makes it worse. It takes up valuable space in your psyche that could be freed up for more important things. The nagging feeling of not having your resume in order can suck your energy and prevent you from moving forward in your job search. Tackling it once and for all may be initially painful, but you will feel tremendously relieved afterward.

Get into the resume mindset by first accepting that you must do it. Consider it an exercise in personal development and an investment in your career. It will take time, effort, and energy, but it's all well spent when it means you'll be positioning yourself in the best light for your next job opportunity. Having the right attitude when preparing your resume will boost your confidence. You'll start to recognize just how much you've accomplished in your career and what you have to offer.

Plan: Creating SMART Goals

With the right attitude, the next step is to make a plan. Having a roadmap to keep you focused and on track is essential. Without a plan, you'll engage in aimless activities and wonder why you're not reaching your ultimate goal of finding a job.

A complicated plan will just prevent you from getting things done, so keep it simple. Overplanning invariably leads to underdoing. However, to be efficient and effective, you must spend some time upfront identifying your goals and creating a workable action plan.

An excellent way to approach your goals is to make them SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-driven.) On the following pages, we review several goals and provide some advice to help you:

1. Get organized
2. Create a chronological resume
3. Create an online resume
4. Create a one-page biography
5. Create a cover letter

Execution: 1. Get organized

Assemble all of your materials. This includes academic information (degrees, diplomas, transcripts), work information (job descriptions, resumes), and any other information that may be relevant to your job search. List your credentials, including professional designations, special training, awards, volunteer experience, and anything else that contributed to your knowledge and expertise. List all of the jobs you've ever had – you'll be coming back to this list later.

Also, note the people you want to have as your references, including their names, titles, contact information, relationship to you, and other relevant information that comes to mind. Having all these items on hand, or knowing how to access them if necessary, will save you time and effort when you're focused on other things.

As you assemble your documentation, start creating a Master Resume document. In this Master, capture all of the details you can remember to support the different sections of your resume: work experience, education and other credentials, awards, volunteer experience, and hobbies. This Master will be pages long; you would never use it as a resume. Instead, refer to it when assembling your resume for specific opportunities.

Execution: 2. Create a chronological resume

Typically, hiring managers expect to see chronological resumes that list their previous jobs in reverse order. Refer to the entries in your Master Resume section by section and determine which points are appropriate for your current resume. Start dropping your selections into the various sections of the resume template. Start with your work experience (companies, positions held) and education credentials (degrees, diplomas, certificates), listing them in reverse chronological order. Be sure to include dates and durations.

Enrich the content you've outlined so far, beefing it up with essential details. If you have a job description, use it as a guide, but don't simply list your responsibilities – showcase your experience and accomplishments. Draft three to four main points for each job or skills area.

Once you've drafted your resume, put it away for a day or two. When you come back to it, proofread and edit it. Pay attention to the finishing touches, including formatting, style, grammar, and spelling.

Execution: 3. Create an online resume

Your electronic resume is any version that will be generated, stored, or searched online or in an electronic database. No matter which electronic service you're using, taking the time to familiarize yourself with its features will help you create an effective resume. It needs to perform how it was designed to – namely, searchable through keywords. As with your traditional resume, keep your electronic one clear, concise, and relevant. While it may be created and used slightly differently, the goal is essentially the same – to showcase your skills and accomplishments to the “reader” – even if it is a computer! Your online resume should be plain text only. This way, it can be copied and pasted into online forms or used with online resume databases. Avoid formatting, as this won't be reflected when you copy and paste it, and you'll have less “clean up” to do to make it look presentable and readable. Some companies can fill in their database online field by field. You may choose to do this, but it's much more efficient to create a document in advance and avoid repetitive typing. This will also reduce the occurrence of typing errors.

Execution: 4. Create a one-page biography

You should have a one-page biography and a traditional resume as an executive. While a resume provides detailed information, a biography is more of a general overview. Of course, it will contain details, but the format and delivery are more of a narrative and not a bullet-pointed list of accomplishments. It's excellent networking collateral and not as forward as presenting someone with a resume. It can, however, have the same results: opening the door for new opportunities.

Your one-page biography will outline your qualifications, experience, and skills in an easy-to-read and easy-to-follow format. You will present as a polished and prepared professional if you write it well. Your main objective is to let the reader know who you are, what you do, and what you're looking for. It's like the written version of your pitch.

As with your resume, you won't write this in one draft. Start with an outline and build it out. Edit it, revise it, and come back to it regularly. Do major revisions when you change jobs or have some new accomplishment or skill to highlight. Use strong, descriptive words and clear, concise language. Keep it professional – you might want to add a point or two about a hobby, but it's best to use the real estate for business details.

Execution: 5. Create a cover letter

Your cover letter is a statement of interest in a specific job or company. Make a significant impact by keeping it as concise as possible. You can create a relatively generic cover letter for the ones you'll send. Each company or opportunity will have a unique focus and recipient, so you'll want to customize it accordingly. Don't simply repeat the facts as outlined in your resume. Open your cover letter with an introduction and a positioning statement about yourself. Indicate why you want the job or to work for that company. In the body, support your statement of interest and highlight your credentials in a few lines. Briefly wrap up the letter with a thank you and your intention to follow up.

Top 10 Mistakes

1. **You don't have the right content.** Your resume should highlight your experience and accomplishments rather than your job duties. Employers want to see your capabilities, not just your responsibilities.
2. **You are not being organized.** Your resume should be organized into discrete sections to focus the reader's attention. Decide whether you want a chronological or functional resume and organize it into appropriate sections.
3. **Not proofreading.** In addition to checking grammar and spelling thoroughly, make sure your contact information is correct. Have another set of eyes proofread your resume to catch mistakes you might have missed.
4. **Being vague.** Avoid generic or "empty" statements in your resume. Use concrete examples and descriptions to illustrate what you've done and what you're looking for, rather than vague and meaningless commentary.
5. **You are misleading.** Providing false credentials, overstating your accomplishments, and omitting information are all misleading. Of course, you want to position yourself in the best possible light, but dishonesty will catch up with you.
6. **You are using an inappropriate writing style.** Keep your writing style polished and professional. While you want to demonstrate a certain level of writing competence, don't go over the top with too much creativity.
7. **You are neglecting formatting.** Typeface, font, margins, bullets, and spacing are all important. Your goal is legibility, so don't overdo your resume with too much stylization. Please keep it simple and readable.
8. **Not having the right length.** An appropriate size for a typical resume would be one or two pages. Longer resumes are reserved for contract workers. If your resume is too short, you're not providing enough detail.
9. **Including too much personal information.** Including hobbies and interests is great, particularly if they illustrate qualities, skills, and experiences relevant to the job you're applying for. However, don't overdo it – it's not a personal ad.
10. **Being repetitive.** Use a variety of action words to introduce each point on your resume. You also want to showcase different experiences rather than list similar ones for every job you've had.

Titles in the Career Transition Series

A Brief Guide to Executive Branding

As an executive, it's essential to establish and develop your brand. Nobody else will do it for you! In this guide, we'll introduce you to the "5 Cs" of executive branding: clarity, consistency, constancy, credibility, and confidence.

A Brief Guide to Job Search Networking

Networking is an integral part of your job search strategy. It's also easier than most people think! In this guide, we'll get you started on some essential networking activities, including building your base network, preparing your pitches, getting set up on LinkedIn, and having face-to-face meetings.

A Brief Guide to Writing Your Resume

Resumes open doors. They can also close them. To be considered for the opportunities you want, it's up to you to make a great first impression with your resume. In this guide, we'll get you started on writing your chronological resume, online resume, and one-page biography.

A Brief Guide to Interviewing

While resumes open doors, interviews get offers. You must demonstrate that your skills, attitude, and personality make you the right person for the job. In this guide, we'll get you started on preparing for a winning interview.

A Brief Guide to Job Offer Negotiation

Negotiating is both an art and a science. People who are uncomfortable about negotiating need more confidence because they need experience. In this guide, we'll start you on how to best prepare and practice for a win-win job offer negotiation.

A Brief Guide to Executive Onboarding

Getting the job is excellent, but succeeding in it is what matters. Whether or not your new organization has a formal onboarding program, consider yourself in charge of the process. In this guide, we'll get you started on several critical onboarding activities to set you up for success.

Start Mandrake's FREE! Career Transition Program by [clicking here](#).