

# **So How Is Your Résumé?**

By: Gene S. Bartlow, MPA, MS, CAE<sup>1</sup>  
Colonel, USAF-Retired  
Springfield, Virginia

So how many résumés have you read lately? You ought to see the résumés that come into my office. It is truly a sad situation. I am constantly amazed at the poor quality of résumés that I receive. Most of the résumés that I receive are a smorgasbord of how not to write a résumé.

I am convinced that the résumé is the most difficult two pages most people are ever going to write. However, I cannot understand why people spend so little time in writing and revising their résumés. At least it appears some people don't spend much time, because from my experience there are simply too many errors and too many résumés not targeted to the job at hand.

Your résumé is defiantly a "work in progress." It will never really be done! You must continually rewrite it—improve it.

In today's tight job market, most employers will get anywhere from 50 to 150 résumés for every job advertised. Considering that most executives will interview only five to seven candidates (or even fewer), and as a result, the odds of being one of the interview candidates are very low, probably in the 5-10% range. So, for every ten jobs you apply your chances of getting an interview are probably less than one in ten. Normally, if you get the interview, your odds of getting the job are still only around 20%. You can calculate for yourself how many applications you will need to submit and how many face-to-face interviews you will have to get before you will be hired, excluding your networking contacts. However, luck counts and these odds can be significantly improved, if you have a quality résumé (and know the protocol for an effective interview).

In just 18 months when I was the chief staff officer of a trade association in the Washington, DC metropolitan area, I had seven job openings, and I received anywhere from 85 to 165 résumés for each new job opening. In the last 10 years, I have read in detail over 1,500 résumés, plus another 60 or so in a graduate-level university class I taught on "Organizational Communications" and a second course on "Workforce Productivity".

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With 50-plus résumés to read, the reviewer is looking for reasons to eliminate as many as possible. When I review résumés, I usually have three stacks, one for “not qualified”, one for “maybe”, and a “yes” stack. After separating the résumés, I then go through the “maybe” stack again to see if there are any that I want to move to the “yes” stack. When I have five to seven in the “yes” stack, and I have read them twice, I am ready to call people in for the initial interviews. Personally, I also always have a second round of interviews with two-to-three candidates and finally hire one of those after checking their references.

So, how do you know if your résumé is a quality product? There is no perfect or universal format or style for résumés, nor is that very important. There are a lot of ways to ensure yours is a high quality résumé. I will give you four simple suggestions to start with (in priority sequence).

**First, “target” your résumé to the job as advertised.** Modify your résumé to the specific requirements of each job; don't use a “canned” résumé for all job applications. Read the job ad in detail and pick out the three-to-five key requirements of the job, e.g., “team-player”, “communications skills”, “technically qualified”, etc. By “target” I mean you must specifically mention those key job requirements within your résumé and also in your cover letter, and relate them to your qualifications; tailor your résumé to their job specifications. Employers want to see that you have read the ad carefully and that you are specifically qualified in those key areas that they emphasized.

**Second, weigh your choice of words carefully.** Select strong action verbs, concrete nouns, and positive modifiers for emphasis, e.g., managed, orchestrated, developed, designed, structured, created, etc. Use concise phrasing rather than complete sentences. Most importantly, quantify your accomplishments. Detail specifically how you improved things and saved time, resources, and money (\$, #, or %) in your various jobs. Don't become too verbose, limit the résumé to two pages; the plus-three page résumé and *curriculum vitae* is normally reserved for the academic community or executive-level positions. Develop a three-or-four page résumé and use the last pages as a source for picking out modular elements to move into a specifically designed and tailored two-page résumé. Use word-processing software with spell-checker and grammar-checker software for both your cover letter and your résumé. Test your résumé and your cover letter for relevancy. Do not use acronyms that are not in the public domain or may not be in the vernacular of the intended audience. The information included in your résumé should either support the specific job or support your character in general. If you don't have a definite purpose for including something, leave it out. If you are over 40 years old, leave the date of your college graduation blank because they will attempt to estimate your age before the interview. Also, don't tell them what your hobbies are, what church you attend, your race or creed, your political affiliations, or what special interest group(s) you may have joined, unless it is directly related to the applicable organization. Unfortunately, discrimination still exists.

**Third, seek out advice on your résumé.** Let your friends and families read your résumé and ask them for suggestions. Find someone who is a good editor of English to read your résumé. Burn the “pride-of-authorship” bridge. If someone criticizes your résumé or gives you a good idea, honestly try to adopt it. Don't reject it out of hand simply because you didn't think of it. Good communications skills are essential in all jobs especially those in the management arena; so if your résumé is poorly written, how could you be expected to be successful on the job?

**Fourth, submit your résumé on paper the reader will remember.** You must use a PC and a laser or high quality ink-jet printer and print both the cover letter and the résumé on 24 lb. parchment-deed 100% cotton-fiber paper (white or ivory only). Send them a true original copy of your résumé. Use a PC to print out an envelope with the full zip-code-plus-four address (which can be researched at: [http://www.usps.com/ncsc/lookups/lookup\\_zip+4.html](http://www.usps.com/ncsc/lookups/lookup_zip+4.html)). Many of the résumés sent to me were poorly reproduced copies, printed on ordinary copy paper, printed by a dot-matrix printer that needed a new ribbon, or printed on pastel paper. Yes, I am aware that some résumés are being sent in *via* email. However, if there is time, it is still a very good idea to follow up and mail in a paper copy as outlined above.

The best time to look for a job is when you already have one. In many organizations today, promotion from within is infrequent and most major salary increases are achieved by changing jobs for a “step up the ladder” in another company. Always respond to any job opening quickly, but certainly within three days; often employers need to fill jobs ASAP. A delay might leave you out of contention. Granted, some people are hired without first submitting a résumé, because certain key people knew of that individual's special talents and skills, but again, that is infrequent. Eventually, everyone in the job market needs a good résumé even those with an inside track to the job. Most jobs are still filled the “hard way,” by getting your résumé to the right person and going on an interview.

Remember your résumé is only a door opener. A personal interview is what you want. Oh, and there are also the problems of how to find the job openings, preparations for the interview, what to wear, and what not to say; but that is for another article on another day.

So how is your résumé? When was the last time you reviewed and revised it? Is it ready now? Are you sure you will not need it shortly? You never know when that special job will surface and someone will call and ask for your résumé, or you will read the “perfect” ad that describes you to a tee, or when “down sizing” will hit your company. So get to work on your résumé, it really does need to be revised! Hum, I think I'd better take another look at my own résumé. Oh yes, good luck and remember that success comes to those who persevere.