Resume writing

Ruth Dolenga

A solid resume is the first step toward getting the job of your dreams

Job wanted: Exciting, well-paying position.... The dream job you envision while sitting through those boring classes. Depending on how realistic your dreams are, that job might be out there, or at least a reasonable facsimile of it. The only catch is making yourself the 'dream person' for that position. And that is where your resume, which summarizes you and why you are the person the company wants, comes in.

If you only pursue companies that recruit on your campus, you can avoid a great deal of the preparatory work involved in resume writing. You will still have to write a resume, but the format — what to leave out, what to put down, and how to organize it on paper — is provided to you in the shape of the school's or the recruiting company's standard job form. You just have to make sure you fully complete the form.

But anyone desiring to explore the career opportunities available at other companies, large and small, will need a resume. Resumes are needed to answer classified advertisements, to hand out at job fairs and career open houses, and to submit to companies that appeal to you. Whether your job campaign is done through the mail or through personal contacts, a written resume will most likely be required at some stage.

Steps to a good resume

Most importantly, a good resume takes time. Time to research the company's criteria so that the resume can show a good match between the employer and the would-be employee; time to gather all the pertinent information about yourself. The information should include dates and the attended institutions' names, honors, a complete chronological record of every job you have held, with a list of professors, job supervisors, and personal acquaintances whose references will hold weight. Your school data should also include extracurricular activities. The more details you write down at this information-gathering stage, the better.

Next consider what exactly your career objectives are in relationship to the job you are seeking. If you are exploring several fields, have several career objectives written down on paper. (You may want to state these in your cover letters, rather than in several resumes.)

Richard J. Backe, program director for Sperry Systems Management and reviewer of hundreds of resumes each month, offers these four general rules for composing a resume:

1) All data supplied in a resume should be relevant to and support your credentials for a specific job (if you are replying to an ad) or for the specific type of position you've selected for your next career step (if you are broadcasting your resume).

2) The Realism Rule: Be realistic, specific and honest in stating your goals in the resume, or leave them out entirely.

3) Hobbies Hurt or Help (H3) rule: Include personal data if it meshes with a known bias or need of the employer. But when in doubt, leave it out.

4) The KISSIR rule: Keep it simple, spell it right.

Three format styles which can be used in a resume are chronological, functional, and synopsis/amplification. A chronological resume is designed to provide a comprehensive summary of all educational employment experience, ordered with the most recent activities first. A functional resume is designed to emphasize work experiences, placing the most valuable experiences and training for the position being sought first. A synopsis/amplification format provides a skeleton resume on the first page, which allows the employer to decide at a glance if he or she wants to know more; more detailed information in each of the given areas should be provided on the second page.

Resumes are generally organized in the following manner:

A) Identification. List name, ad-

Company opinions about resumes

IBM, Motorola and RCA have been among the company "favorites" of graduating students in recent years, according to polls by Deutsch, Shea & Evans Inc. (an employment research firm) and *Graduating Engineer* magazine. Here is what recruiting representatives from these companies had to say in response to questions concerning resumes.

Question: *At a campus interview, would you recommend a student bring his or her own resume in addition to the college's or the company's standard form?*

IBM: A student's own resume is not necessary. A school's resume, which lists the grade point average (GPA) and extracurricular activities is plenty, since a total assessment of the person will be made before arriving at any conclusions.

Motorola: A student's own resume is not only recommended but expected at the campus interview. The resume gives the recruiter a good indication of the student's professionalism, maturity and a better picture of the student's ability.

RCA: A student's own resume is not important at the initial campus interview. A student chosen to interview with RCA should make sure the company application sent to the school is complete prior to the interview.

Question: *What are the job possibilities for students at schools where your company does not recruit on campus?*

IBM: These students stand a good chance of being hired.

Motorola: Students have a good chance of receiving a job by sending a cover letter, a resume, and a transcript of grades. If important information is missing, it will not even get past the secretary's desk. Instead, the student is automatically sent a letter saying their skills are not needed at this time.

RCA: The hiring possibilities are good for students who submit a cover letter, resume and college transcripts (only if the student's GPA and citizenship is not on the resume or not mentioned in the cover letter).

Question: *What do you look for in a resume to decide if a person is a possible job candidate (general resume turn-ons and turn-offs)?*

IBM: Generally, an impressive GPA, co-op experience, leadership displayed in school—such as IEEE Branch Chairman—and any experience related to the student's education is sought. If information on any of these areas is missing, IBM recruiters usually do not ask for it unless something else in the resume makes the applicant a possibility for an open position. (In other words, failure to include the above information usually leads to disqualification.)

Motorola: Engineering and/or business experience while attending school is very important. Co-ops are highly regarded. Grades are also important, but work experience receives more weight. A sloppily prepared resume or cover letter is a turn-off.

RCA: An eye-catching resume contains an impressive GPA in a major and degree currently needed by RCA. Stating a U.S. citizenship helps, since RCA does a great deal of government work. (Note: Even if a resume states "willing to relocate," hiring chances are not as good if the person lives in California and the position they are applying for is located in New Jersey.) A turn-off is a letter that tells virtually nothing about the individual, providing few credentials to merit interest on RCA's part.

—MKC

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dress and phone—usually on top of the page and centered.

B) Job objective.

C) Education. Be sure to include your degree, discipline, date and institution, concentration or related course work, grade point averages, class rank (if good), number of times on the Dean's list, a special senior project (if any), publications for thesis if you are a graduate student, and academic honors—state the award's purpose—and scholarships.

D) Work experience. Place your work experience in chronological order, categorized according to career importance; highlight the career related jobs, such as co-op work in the field desired, a related summer internship, or supervising others in running the high school general supply store. State your position or title—avoid company lingo—the name of your department, the organization and its location, dates of employment (month/year to month/year), and give a brief job description. Clump together routine jobs, giving only generic job titles such as "cashier" so the company knows you can find and hold onto a job.

E) Research interests and publications. This is most important for graduate students.

F) Extracurricular activities and skills. This section may include professional society memberships, offices held, awards won, community service, school organizations (explain their functions if not readily apparent from the title), military service, and activities leadership or teamwork ability.

G) Personal data. Give your age, sex, health (always good to excellent; otherwise leave it out) willingness to relocate, willingness to travel, marital status, and citizenship. The last item is important to state if you are seeking a government job or a job in a company that does contract work for the government.

H) References. Simply write "available upon request," but be sure to line-up three or four individuals who can comment on your work-related qualifications. For positions requiring security clearance, you will also need references concerning your character and family background. Get permission before giving these individuals' names, and give them each a copy of your resume as well as telling them the specific type of information you would like them to provide.

Readability and professional appearance should be your ultimate goals when laying out your resume. Clear headings, wide margins, brief phrases (usually), on white or off-white 8½″ × 11″ bond paper will help obtain these results. Correct spelling, good punctuation, and incorporating suggestions made by the knowledgeable person you ask to critique the resume, should also prove beneficial. The resume may be typewritten, professionally typeset, or done on a word processor with a letter quality printer. Do not, as a final touch, place your resume and any attachments, such as school transcripts, in a folder or between vinyl covers. They cause the resume not to fit in the prospective employer's letter files, which can cause irritation and possible filing elsewhere.

Cover letter

When mailing resumes, a cover letter should accompany each one. A cover letter provides the job seeker the opportunity to explain why he or she wants a particular job in a particular corporation; to highlight special attributes or skills the company hopefully will find desirable; and to control further communication with the company by stating that the applicant will write or call for an answer, or to arrange for an interview. The cover letter should be addressed to a specific person (do the extra research, if need be), and should be around 200 words or three paragraphs long (fairly brief, but meaty in content).

Cover letters should be individually typed or printed on a letter quality printer. Let the letter reflect your personality, but avoid being too familiar or cute. Observe Mr. Backe's Keep It Simple, Spell It Right (KISSIR) rule. Remember to refer the reader to the resume; do not expect the cover letter

PEER—for recent graduates, too

The Professional Engineering Employment Registry (PEER) is a resume data bank provided by IEEE, in conjunction with other professional engineering and scientific societies, to assist members in locating jobs. It is intended for serious job seekers, not for those just testing the water. Graduating students are invited to participate in PEER. Although the majority of employment openings available through PEER require work experience, an increasing number of employers have expressed interest in using PEER for entry level positions. In particular, younger companies with no formal college recruiting programs plan to utilize PEER in their search for new talent.

An employer searches the data base for individuals with a particular technical and educational background. If your resume matches the employer's criteria, this person will review your entire resume; however, your name and address will not appear on the resume. If the employer is interested, this person can submit a job description to PEER. This may be in the form of a letter, position description, advertisement, etc., accompanied by the name, telephone number and address of the contact person. You need not reply. PEER includes a no-interest option with the employer contact mailing. If you have a personal computer (or terminal) and a modem, you can review many of the priority jobs on-line. Call PEER's On-Line Career Network at (617) 275-4112 any time.

Simply press your RETURN key and enter the password "PEER" to log on.

A year from your application date, your resume is automatically purged. The resume may be removed from the files before then, especially if you have found a job.

The service is free to all paid-up members of the IEEE or another participating society. IEEE does not make a profit from PEER, but it does recover some of the expense of advertising and maintaining the system from user fees. The operating and marketing of the data base is contracted out to JobNet. Employers who use the system are charged a fee which covers all costs and earns a profit for JobNet. These employers range from new start-ups to Fortune 500 companies.

For a PEER information and application packet, write to: IEEE, PEER Services, 1111 19th Street, N. W., Washington, D.C. 20036. Upon receiving the packet, complete the registration form, which requests data, including relocation preferences, and send it with a copy of your resume to: PEER Service Center, JobNet, Incorporated, 10 DeAngelo Drive, Bedford, MA 01730.

—Joseph Stacey, President, Job Net, Inc.

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CHRONOLOGICAL JOB LISTING

Peter W. Chen
31416 Farad Court
College Park, MD 20770
(301) 160-9350

OBJECTIVE: Electronics engineering position involving digital design, manufacturing or test. Particular interest in VLSI.

EDUCATION: BSEE June 1984
University of Maryland, College Park
Plus three additional IEEE/AIAA Courses in Spacecraft
Propulsion, Telemetry and Guidance Systems

EXPERIENCE:
(Related Experience)
Sept. 83-June 84 - University of Maryland EE Dept. - Lab. Assist in Microelectronics Lab - Supervisor Dr. Lo Chin. Assisted undergraduates in setting up curve tracers, probes, etc. to characterize microprocessors, memories and other chips. Assisted Dr. Chin with experiment on SEM-Voltage Contrast analysis of gate arrays fabricated in lab. Programmed PDP-8 computer to control oven bake cycles as well as to put all department records into data base.

(Non Technical)
Sept. 82-June 83 - Brook Farm Inn of Magic - Waiter and Busboy
Sept. 81-June 82 - Hillandale Swim Club - Lifeguard
Sept. 80-Sept. 81 - Self-employed housepainter, minor maintenance

HONORS/PUBLICATIONS:
[handwritten: Good entry; important to show grades that are this good.]
Grade Point Average (GPA) 3.64/4.0
Deans List all but one Semester
Best Paper Award - Washington Area Consortium of Colleges 1983
Student-of-the-Year (1984) IEEE Region 2
Tau Beta Phi Honor Fraternity
High School Science Award - First Prize - for developing electro-optic garden sprinkler control; IEEE Washington DC Section 1979
[handwritten: might have been good to list programming languages used] Article - Potentials Magazine; "Improving Your Lab Work", Spring 1984
Taught familiarization Course on Osborne PC Computer at DC-Area Users Club
Personal Computer Club - Own Osborne II computer

COLLEGE ACTIVITIES:
Chairman - IEEE Student Chapter, University of Maryland, 1983-84 (Note: 5th largest chapter in United States with over 500 members)
Vice Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary 1980-83
Intramural Soccer - 1981-84; Team Co-Captain 1984

PERSONAL:
Permanent Address - 63 Sherwood Avenue, Ossining, New York 62137
(914) 453-5901
Interested in swimming, soccer; personal computer buff; licensed ham radio operator, and member ARRL.
Born November 20, 1963, Silver Spring, MD - U.S. Citizen

[handwritten note, left: NOTE: Sports interests are not an essential item to most resume reviewers. No harm in including a few to convey a sense of energy and team work skills.]

[handwritten note, right: An important item. Any name that suggests foreign extraction might be mistaken for a non-citizen.]

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to do the resume's job. If two people in one company are potential employers, send your resume to both people.

It is your responsibility to make your resume complete and accurate—tailored to the specific job sought, focused on your career objectives, and presented in a manner which clearly highlights those unique qualities that make you stand above your competitors. Sound like a difficult job? It is. But the effort you expend to accomplish these objectives will be worth it when the pay off comes and you interview for and receive that 'dream job' meeting your career goals.

Read more about it

Books and articles abound on writing resumes and finding jobs. One good reference book for IEEE students is: *Employment Guide for Engineers and Scientists* (Student Edition), published by IEEE. This book contains a collection of articles and pieces of information on all aspects of career planning and is available from IEEE Publication Sales, 445 Hoes Lane, Piscataway, NJ 08854 (201) 981-1393. Another useful book is *Peterson's Annual Guides/Careers—Engineering, Science, and Computer Jobs 1985*, which provides information about some 1200 organizations hiring technical graduates. It's available at libraries or you may be able to borrow it from your university's EE department.

About the author

Ruth Dolenga, the past Student Editor of *Potentials*, is a senior Electrical Engineering student at GMI Engineering & Management Institute. She is now embarking on a job search of her own, to be completed by June in 1986. □