Resume building

Your resume is made up of a select group of facts that tell a focused story. Just the facts, please. Regardless of your background when entering the nonprofit sector, you need to focus your resume writing efforts on three key activities:

- **Reframing your skills and experience** to convince an employer of your potential value to their organization. Your keywords here are *transferability* and *relevance*—in other words, **Can you do the job?**

- **Answering** the second of the three questions: **Will you do the job?** For nonprofit work, a successful answer to this question will address your *passion for the mission.*

- **Dispelling preconceived notions** that others may have about you based on your past experiences: if you have a military background, you need rigidity and order; if you have a corporate background, you won't be comfortable if you aren't assigned an assistant or wearing a suit; if you are an athlete, you are more of a doer than a thinker… the list goes on—in other words, **Will you fit in?**

Your resume is obviously one of the most important components of your job search. It speaks both for and of you. It is your introduction and your personal marketing tool. With so much to do in so little space, it is vitally important that your resume is focused, concise, and compelling.

It is likely that employers will typically only glance at your resume for 10-15 seconds, so as you write your resume, bear in mind the perspective of an overworked and overwhelmed employer who wants to be impressed, but who can't be expected to decipher why you might be a possible fit for the position.

Elements of your resume

Your resume should always include:

- Name and contact information
- *Relevant* education and experience
- Volunteering and other forms of community involvement
- Information that indicates your viability as a candidate for a specific position: professional associations, languages, technical skills, awards, publications, etc.

Length of your resume

If you are entering the nonprofit sector for the first time, make your resume one page. That's right. One page. A one-page resume is much more likely to be concise and specific, so setting such a stringent limit on yourself will help you narrow the focus of your content appropriately. A one-page resume will help you spotlight

your skills and experience for a nonprofit position without having to fill space with irrelevant information.

Focus of your resume

Focus your resume elements (education, experience, professional affiliations, etc.) to show relevance and clearly defined transferability to the specific position, organization, and field of interest/issue area. While membership in organizations or volunteer experience can be important to highlight (because they answer "Will you do the job?"), your membership in the International Ventriloquists Association is not relevant to a development director position at a nonprofit. Membership in the Financial Planning Association, however, demonstrates your commitment to and understanding of long-term financial planning, which transfers well to the role at hand.

The following two focuses are ways to think about **your background** in order to give relevant structure and framing to your resume:

Examples of a focus on job function are: program management, personnel management, policy analysis, administration, or fundraising. In a resume, this can be illustrated by:

- Work and/or volunteer experience associated with a particular kind of job function. For example:
    * Served on a board of directors: demonstrates governance and financial oversight.
    * Very committed to a public affairs career: gained related work experience and talked to a variety of professionals in the field.
    * Enjoy speaking before groups: provided campus tours and information sessions to prospective students and parents, presented to department managers at Sears, and offered teaching assistantship in public speaking course.
- Relevant academic degrees, specializations, and course work. For example:
    * Soon to complete B.A./M.A.
    * Have liberal arts background with courses in writing, communication, and business.
- Previous job titles and skill sets used to perform duties. For example:
    * Related experience in marketing and public relations.
    * Worked in sales and marketing last summer.
    * Served as public relations and marketing intern—skills are very transferable to public affairs.
- Appropriate managerial responsibilities for either entry-, mid-, or senior-level positions
- Relevant foreign language and computer skills
- Competent in handling market data. For example:
    * Completed courses in Statistics and Survey Research.

MOVING FROM "THE PERFECT RESUME" TO "THE PERFECT RESUME FOR THIS POSITION"

As you craft the focus, content, and language of your resume, refer back to your "perfect resume" and begin to think about how much your resume for a particular position reflects what you said about yourself in your "perfect resume." It is easy to lose your ability to express your passion for the work as you get mired in content and language. You can express your personality and commitment through experiences and examples that you choose to highlight, while also crafting a resume with a particular reader in mind.

HOW LONG SHOULD YOUR RESUME BE?

the **GREAT DEBATE**

There are various opinions on appropriate resume lengths. Here are a few to consider:

- Your resume should be no more than two pages unless you are applying for a senior-level position and have decades of experience.

- Your resume should be one page per degree that you hold.

- Your resume should be one page for every ten years of experience.

- Your resume should only be one page. No exceptions.

These opinions often take for granted that you are staying within your field of expertise when creating a resume. While there is no hard and fast rule, professionals entering a new sector should always err on the side of brevity.

Examples of a focus on field of interest are: access to education, public health care, the environment, prison reform, urban planning, and advocacy for an underrepresented group. In your resume, field of interest focus can be demonstrated through:

- Work and internship experience in organizations within your field of interest
- Volunteer work and community service with organizations in your field of interest. In many professional resumes, people neglect to address their volunteerism, even though volunteering is especially relevant for nonprofit work as it shows your personal commitment to and passion for an issue, implying "Not only will I do the job, but I used to do it well without getting paid. Imagine how committed I'll be with a paycheck attached."
- Relevant academic degrees, specializations, and course work
- Relevant group memberships and/or professional organizations
- Published articles (even if you didn't get paid to write them) related to the field of interest

As you focus your resume, regularly ask yourself if your information answers either or both of the "can you do the job?/will you do the job?" questions. Also, keep in mind the lenses of the "Four Lens Framework" (Issue, Organization, Role, System; see Chapter Three) that speak to you. Are you entering the field because of a belief in an issue or is there a specific role you wish to fill? Does your resume demonstrate this?

Content and language of your resume

Deciding what to include in your resume, as well as how you say it, should be dictated by the job for which you are applying. Highlight experiences that will be of value (including relevant volunteerism), and know that it is okay to de-emphasize or omit experiences that are not relevant. Where appropriate to the experience you are detailing, be sure to utilize the specific vocabulary of the nonprofit sector (see pages 132-133 and Appendix One). Remember that employers want to see:

Experience in the field (note: this doesn't say "paid experience in the field")

Doing an endurance event with Team in Training that raises money for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society is a relevant example of fundraising experience. It also demonstrates your commitment to a cause.

Management level

Do you supervise others? Are you responsible for budget and finance? Do you set policy? Are you responsible for operations and oversight? Remember that your title may not fully express your managerial roles and responsibilities.

THE MASTER RESUME

If you create a "Master Resume" with all the responsibilities, skills, and accomplishments for every job you list, you can quickly draft a resume specific to each position you apply for. Simply delete irrelevant bullet points and then reorder your remaining points to align with the job qualifications essential to the position.

MAKING SURE IT IS ALL RELEVANT

After you draft a resume for a position, look back over your resume and put a "+" next to any elements that clearly align with the job description (these are elements in your resume that are absolutely, positively relevant to this specific employer's hiring needs), an "N" for elements that neither align nor are irrelevant to the description (these are elements that, while you would like them to be positively relevant to the employer, are at this stage not 100 percent related), and a "–" for any points that are clearly irrelevant and distracting to this specific employer. After a second draft, you want to have as many "+" elements as possible; see if you can reframe any "N" points so they become "+", and see if you can neutralize, de-emphasize, or delete the "–" elements. See the "Resume Worksheet" on page 146 for a way to dissect the position description and help shape the relevancy of your resume.

Skill sets

These are associated with a kind of job or a field (e.g., supervising, analyzing, budgeting, strategic planning, public speaking, motivating, researching, writing, fundraising, regional/demographic understanding, strong local network, fluency in languages).

Note: The above list of skill set examples consists of action verbs. Always use action verbs when communicating your skills (you can consult a glossary of action verbs on pages 144-145). While composing your skill sets, think about the kinds of universal skills that apply in any sector (i.e., transferable skills):

- **Multitasking**: the ability to do several tasks at once, switch gears quickly, manage several long-term projects simultaneously
- **Showing initiative**: starting a new program, solving a longstanding problem, asking for new responsibilities
- **Influence**: getting people to work with you despite not having direct supervision or control over them
- **Managing diversity**: working with people who have varying levels of qualifications and education within your organization. This also includes managing multicultural or multigenerational groups.
- **Working under constraints**: limited time, limited finances, limited staff (all of which are common in nonprofit work)
- **Flexibility**: changing project direction midcourse based on user feedback
- **"Pleasing the masses"**: making sure that everyone is happy, not just the people on your team… also known as stakeholder management

Quantifiable accomplishments and outcomes

These specify the result or impact on the organization and illustrate your contributions to the agency. Consider an activity to be an accomplishment if any of the following were satisfied:

- Planned or designed a program/training process to improve, reduce, or change outcomes (example: Designed and constructed a website that the organization immediately used)
- Improved quality, productivity, teamwork, etc. (example: Awarded a fellowship for excellence in service, work, and leadership.)
- Created an office environment through innovative management that made your team/division/section's work easier to accomplish or more efficient (example: Managed a team of seven colleagues located in three cities across the United States through biannual team retreats and telecommuting.)
- Achieved equal results with fewer resources. Nonprofits love when you can be successful on a limited budget. (example: Developed a promotional brochure which the organization is still using.)
- Achieved a measurable or specific goal or result for the first time (ex-

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INADVERTENTLY REVEALING YOUR AGE ON A RESUME

On a resume, any information or format that reveals your age may not advisable, particularly if you are on the younger or older end of the spectrum. First, it can give an employer a reason not to hire you if you're outside of their preferred age range. There are a multitude of reasons why age can cause an employer to not consider you or your resume: lack or excess of experience, salary requirements, preconceived notions about your age group, etc. Second, even if age isn't a factor when an employer considers you for an interview, technically it can create a sticky position for the employer. For example, if you are not chosen for an interview, it could be perceived that it is due to your age, not any of the other factors that may have led to the decision.

While dates are often necessary to include on a resume, be aware of which ones might be possible to omit, particularly if you are either an older or younger job seeker. Keep in mind that for some employers, omitting dates can be as much of a red flag as if you included them. This may sound like a no-win situation, so just be sure you are deliberate about, and comfortable with, the approach you choose.

ample: Improved client return rate to over 75 percent for the first time in the organization's history.)

- Increased funding, revenues, resources, outreach, support, etc. Nonprofits love this, too. (example: Created alternative revenue streams through "Friends of the Opera" gift packages sold during intermission.)
- Reduced costs, turnover, problems, etc. (example: Helped decrease assembly line turnover rates by employing a job-sharing schedule and flex hours to accommodate line workers' requests for three-day weekends.)

Whenever possible, **present your accomplishments in numerical terms**, using percentages, monetary amounts, and numbers of clients served. Numbers jump off the page and help an overwhelmed potential hirer see your worth quickly and quantifiably. Examples include:

- Co-wrote a media campaign that increased sales by 37 percent
- Honored as "Top Salesperson of the Year" from 2002-2007 for bringing in an annual average of $3.5 million in new contracts
- Initiated winter series of workshops, which increased programmatic income 25 percent and helped solve organizational cash flow problems
- Increased revenues 15 percent by reviewing third-party payments for irregularities

Reread the job description again to identify key phrases and jargon. Incorporating some of this vocabulary into your resume is a quick and easy way to show employers that you have the education, experience, and qualifications they are seeking. However, do not directly copy and paste language from the job description or organizational mission statement and description; this makes it look like you are pandering and/or lazy. Use your thesaurus instead.

Formatting your resume: The chronological vs. functional debate

There is an ongoing debate about the merits of chronological versus functional resume formats. Resumes that are not in the traditional chronological order tend to raise suspicion since this is the format that most employers expect, but the chronological approach has its limitations. For mid-career professionals, a combination of chronology and functionality often works best. For a link to samples of each format, see the "Learn More" sidebar on the next page.

Chronological resumes are straightforward and easy to scan. However, chronological resumes can give away your age and expose questionable gaps or other deficiencies in your work history. If you would like to stick with the chronological format to avoid suspicion, consider whether your education or your experience (including, as always, volunteer experience) is stronger. Place the stronger section first.

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GAPS IN EMPLOYMENT

There is simply no way around the fact that gaps in employment or experience can catch an employer's attention, and typically not in a good way. It is impossible to know if someone looking at your resume will be more impressed with a steady employment record or the fact that you took some time away from your career to explore, travel, learn, etc. As such, it is generally a good idea to either avoid resume gaps or explain them clearly in your cover letter.

One way to avoid resume gaps is to omit months when listing employment history. For example, if you quit a job in February of 2006 and did not work again until November of 2006, you can smooth over the gap by simply listing the years worked: "Job X 2004-2006, "Job Y 2006-present." If you are going to omit months for one position, be sure to do so consistently throughout your resume.

If you plan to address the gaps in your employment, make sure to do so in the context of the position for which you are applying. For example, include any unpaid experiences during your employment gaps if they're relevant to the work you wish to do. Remember, relevant volunteer experience can be as valuable as paid work experience to most nonprofit hiring managers. You can also talk about how the experiences during your employment gap broadened your perspective on a certain issue or energized you to make a difference in a given community, or mention other tangible ways that what you did during your gap time relates to the passion and purpose that you hope to bring to an organization.

Functional resumes are organized by thematic skill areas or job functions and give you greater control over the organization and flow of your resume since you are not restricted by chronology. If you are looking to make a career transition, it may make more sense to organize your resume thematically in order to highlight your relevant skills and experiences as they apply to the particular position you are seeking. This also de-emphasizes recent irrelevant experiences. However, no matter how well you craft your functional resume, an underlying question for this format could be, "What are they trying to hide?"

A combination or hybrid resume can be a great solution for career shifters. This format begins with a functional overview of skills and follows with a chronological list of experiences. But beware: these resumes can be repetitious or too long if not carefully crafted.

Experience

This section covers both paid and unpaid experiences. Remember, when applying for a nonprofit job, relevant unpaid volunteer experience can be as highly valued as paid experience. As you format your experience section, consider how to best frame your work and volunteer experiences in order to make them as applicable and transferable as possible to the specific job you are seeking.

If your work experience is a greater match with a particular job description than your volunteer experience, list your work first. You can also divide your work and volunteer experience into separate sections and then give priority to whichever experience is more relevant. Thus, it is possible to highlight your volunteer experience first, your education second, and your work experience third.

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NOT DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN PAID AND VOLUNTEER WORK

While it is acceptable to not overemphasize unpaid work (for example, by removing the title "Volunteer" from a job description heading), you do not want to mislead employers. The goal of incorporating unpaid work with paid work is to give these experiences–and the skills gained during the work–equal visual weight. Be clear within a job description when the work was undertaken as a volunteer. Failure to do so may come back to haunt you if a reference check is done and the potential employer learns that you were not wholly forthcoming in your work history. This does not, however, prevent you from emphasizing the personal and professional benefits you gained from all of your experience, volunteer and paid.

What if you don't have volunteer experience?

If you've racked your brain and cannot think of any times in your life that you've volunteered in any capacity, then it is time to start… slowly. While you may not have thought you had time in the past to volunteer, you should realize the old concept of setting aside several hours a week to do some sort of volunteering is now largely outdated. You can find an abundance of volunteer opportunities that you can do on your own time (and often from home). You can also find nonprofits near your home or workplace that you can help for short periods of time (a "lunch hour" during the day, an hour on your way home from work, a Saturday morning once a month). Yet another option is to make volunteering a social activity by volunteering where your friends volunteer, organizing a volunteer opportunity for yourself and your coworkers, or volunteering with your family.

Within both your Work and Volunteer Experience sections, use a reverse chronological format to list positions and, within each position, use bullet points to highlight the most relevant and substantial elements first. Look over the job description again to decide the order of relevance—the employer tells you what they consider most important based on the order of the job description bullet points.

Accomplishments

A key focus of your experience section should be on your accomplishments in each position. Use action verbs that highlight results to describe your accomplishments: implemented, created, tripled in size, transformed, invented, designed… Results speak more accurately to your skills as a professional and are often eye-catching to the reader (especially if the results have numeric values: "tripled the revenue stream from $250K to $750K").

Education

As with all other aspects of your resume, make sure to only include focused and relevant information in your educational background. Some points to keep in mind when writing the education section include:

- When listing educational experience, include **specialized trainings** and any **certifications** (military, professional, correspondence) that are relevant for the position for which you are applying.

- Make sure to explain **acronyms** and **program titles** for all your training so that employers unfamiliar with jargon from other sectors can clearly understand the relevance of your training and education. For example, if you talk about your experience with the Southeast Alaska Guidance Association (SAGA), define SAGA the first time you use it and then use just the acronym SAGA everywhere else.

- **Educational institutions:** List the full name of your graduate (if applicable) and undergraduate institutions in reverse chronological order (most recent first). Include relevant specializations, coursework, leadership positions, academic and social honors, and related research.

- **Dates:** If you don't want to "date yourself," leave the dates you graduated off your resume. This is especially true for older job seekers. In fact, some organizations prefer that you don't include age-revealing dates on your resume so that they cannot be accused of age discrimination. As mentioned in the preceding "Great Debate" sidebar (page 138), the lack of dates can also be a red flag that makes employers wonder what it is that you are hiding.

VERB TENSE

You want your verbs to be strong and active and to convey your ability to get results. Use present tense verbs ("designing," "implementing") for jobs or experiences in which you are currently employed/engaged. For all other experiences (work, volunteer, education, etc.), use past tense ("developed," "increased"). Avoid passive voice ("had attended") as it diminishes the strength of your verbs, and thus your impact.

HOBBIES AND INTERESTS

Including hobbies and interests in your resume can be valuable, but can also completely backfire. Employers may see this as unnecessary "filler" that detracts from the professionalism of your resume, or they may view it as a way to determine if you are a good fit for the culture of the organization. Hiring professionals' opinions vary widely about the relevance of hobbies and interests on a resume, so proceed with caution. You can decide if your hobbies and interests are relevant (interest in South American flora for an environmental education position) or likely to be commonly shared (keeping in mind that even broad-reaching categories have a good chance of not connecting you with an employer). For example, mutual athletic participation or favorite literary genres may or may not be a great icebreaker during an interview. Additionally, the likelihood of your interest in "collecting old TV Guides" or "staring contests" getting you an interview is pretty slim. In general, leave mentions of obscure hobbies and interests out of the resume, and keep mentions of common interest hobbies to a minimum.

Sample excerpt from education section of resume

SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY
Master of Business Administration
- **International Venture Capital Investment Competition Champion**
  - * Analyzed real business plans for investment potential by interviewing entrepreneurs and conducting due diligence
  - * Selected company to invest in, determined valuation, and wrote term sheet to mitigate risk
- **MBA Leadership Fellow**
  - * Selected by MBA program to mentor incoming MBA students in leadership and communication skills
- **Center for Entrepreneurship, Business Plan Competition**
  - * Net Impact – President, Marketing Club – VP of Finance
  - * Created financial model of our product's business plan
  - * Qualified for final round of business plan competition from a field of more than 50 entrants
- **Relevant Coursework**
  - * Dr. Henry Jones, Management 416 "Archeological Methodology in Management"
  - * Dr. Stephen Hawkings, Marketing 617 "Quantum Physics and Nonprofit Fundraising"

Additional information

The goal of this section is to provide any further relevant information that will cement your viability. This section can also include certifications or other non-degree training and development, professional associations, languages, technical skills, awards, or publications, if you haven't included these elsewhere in your resume. While this may sound simple on the surface, the additional information section can often be among the most challenging parts of a resume to write. This section, more than any other, can become the catch-all for anything that you couldn't fit into your education and experience sections. Avoid the catch-all tendency at all cost. Be selective!

Reread this section of your resume when you are done and be especially critical when asking, "Is this information relevant to this position?"

What *not* to include in a resume

- **Salary History or Requirements** (unless specifically requested): it is way too early for this (however, make sure to read the discussion of salary negotiation in Chapter Ten).
- **Grade Point Average**: unless you are recently out of school and had a 3.5 or better, leave it out. Even then, GPA is not vital information.
- **Any personal information**: height, weight, photos, or marital or health status. Although this information is commonly included in resumes in many other

countries, the United States has a variety of anti-discrimination regulations that make it best to leave these details out of your resume.

Presentation

Your resume *must* be flawless. No pressure.

A single error in a resume can make employers assume that you are careless in your work. Proofread your resume. **Print it out and proofread it again.** Seeing your words on paper will help you catch small mistakes that you may not notice on screen. Remember that a printed version of your resume is likely what the potential employer will examine.

Now, read it out loud. Have at least two other people proofread your paper resume. Then, proofread your resume at least one more time. Now, read it aloud one final time to help you catch any remaining errors.

- Use **bold** or ALL CAPS (sparingly) to highlight positions and organizations.
- Use a slightly **larger font size for section headings**. For example, if your resume is in 12-point font, use 14-point font for section headings.
- **Use bullets**—employers prefer them. Bullets:
  * Give the eye a chance to rest and an opportunity to focus
  * Are a great way to highlight responsibilities, skill sets, and accomplishments
  * Allow you to easily re-arrange specific items so you can target your resume to a specific employer or sector
- **Use a standard font** like "Times New Roman" or "Arial". **Don't use a font size lower than 10-point**. A small font is especially frustrating to older readers and they will often choose to discard the resume rather than trying to squint and read it.
- **Keep consistent margins**; margins should never be smaller than a half inch. You have a little room to maneuver when it comes to the vertical spacing between lines (decreasing the font size on an empty line to 4-point, for example) but having clean margins makes your resume all the more inviting to read. Also bear in mind that extra-wide margins may result in your resume not printing properly and it is obviously best to avoid this costly mistake.
- Keep lots of white space on the page—remember **it's the quality of what is written that matters, not the quantity**. A jumbled, cluttered resume will quickly end up in the discard pile.
- Use 8 1⁄2" x 11" (**U.S. letter size**) white or off-white, high quality paper if you need to mail in a resume. Use only white paper when faxing your resume. Use **black ink**.

The final look-over

Once you've got everything written out, organized, and proofread several times, print out a fresh copy and take a break. Give yourself at least half an hour away from the resume (though the more time you take, the better). With a fresh eye, come back and quickly scan your resume. Which elements, sections, or words catch your eye? Which elements take up the most space? Do these elements relate to the requirements of the position and how you will best meet those requirements?

Remember, you have control over what the reader will pay the most attention to and you obviously want the reader to spend most of their time on the pieces most relevant to the position. If one job or experience has more bullet points than another, the reader will naturally assume that the job with more bullet points is more important. Remember, the quality of the description matters more than the quantity of bullets.

A cautionary tale: Revenge of the tracked changes

Like most people, you are probably drafting your cover letter and resume using Microsoft Word. In Word, you can choose the "Track Changes" option (which you can find under the "Tools" menu). This editing tool produces little marks that highlight each change you make to your document as you edit. "Track Changes" can be useful if others are helping to edit your work and you would like to track the modifications they make. When you are editing on your own, it is best not to track your changes.

If you have chosen the "Track Changes" option, you must "Accept Change" for each change you make to the document in order for the tracking mark to go away. Why is this relevant? Because your document could go out via email with "Track Changes" on and arrive in the hiring person's inbox with all the changes visible. This is embarrassing and unprofessional.

You can significantly decrease the chance of this happening by clicking the "Accept All Changes in Document" option (risky), accepting suggested changes one by one or making your document "Read Only" (safer), or sending as a PDF file (safest). Before you email a resume to a potential employer, run a test by sending a copy of your resume to another one of your email addresses or to a friend or family member to make sure that it arrives the way you intend.

After you've completed your final version, have a detail-oriented, brutally honest friend look it over and see if they can spot any structural problems (grammar, typos, etc.), as well as identify the kind of skills you are aiming to highlight. A good way to go about this is to not tell your friend the specific qualifications asked for in the job description. See if they can deduce that information from your resume. If this information is apparent, well done. If not, discuss with your friend how you can shift the focus, wording, or content of your resume.

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WHAT TO DO ABOUT BURNED BRIDGES

Hopefully, you've been able to navigate your career to this point without leaving any burned bridges in your wake. Handling a lay-off coolly or submitting your resignation professionally can avoid burning bridges. However, if you've had a negative experience with a former employer, there are a few steps to take to avoid bringing this to light during the application process. If the burned bridge is from a job before your most recent position, don't refer your new potential employer to this organization for a referral. If the burned bridge is your current or most recent employer, or an employer you worked with for a significant part of your professional career, you can either not list them as a potential contact or find another contact at the organization. It's easy to avoid using current employers as references ("They are not fully aware that I am looking for a new opportunity"), while reframing your experience with a burned bridge ("I don't feel that this employer can best speak to the skills and experiences that I bring to this new position") can help you avoid conversations around exactly why you don't want to discuss a former workplace.

Still, if you are pressed into discussing an organization that you've left on less than amiable terms, avoid being negative about the experience at all costs. You can discuss differences of opinions, leadership deficits, restructuring woes, difficult personalities, and other leading causes of burned bridges with a more "outside looking in" perspective ("There were organizational and management issues that left a lot of people feeling dissatisfied") rather than a "them against me" perspective. Answer questions with brevity and look for ways to reframe the conversation around organizations and work that you've enjoyed being a part of.

"Ring, ring"

People making hiring decisions usually have a very limited amount of time with far too many resumes to go through. Typically, they will scan the resumes quickly and pull aside 15-20 resumes to peruse more carefully. Assume this person's perspective when you look over your resume this final time. Pretend the phone is ringing, you have a meeting in 20 minutes followed by a conference call, and you need to present the Executive Director with the eight best resumes after your call. You have all of 15 minutes to weed through 100 resumes. As unfair as this may seem to a candidate, this situation is all too real.

Ask yourself, "Does my resume stand out enough? Can the hiring individual see my value to this position and organization in 10-15 seconds?"

Rework your resume (which usually means editing and shortening) until the answer is a definitive YES.

A glossary of action verbs

The verbs in the gray boxes on this page and the next can help you avoid formulaic "resume speak" and use vocabulary that describes your experience more dynamically. Of course, proceed with a bit of caution—be sure the verbs you choose really suit the activity you are describing!

Assuming responsibility, working, and creating results:

Accepting	Coordinating	Gathering	Preparing
Achieving	Describing	Generating	Presenting
Adopting	Designing	Halting	Problem solving
Arranging	Developing	Handling	Processing
Assembling	Digging	Implementing	Producing
Assuming	Dispensing	Improving	Receiving
Attending	Distributing	Initiating	Reducing
Auditing	Doubling	Installing	Repairing
Building	Enforcing	Integrating	Reviewing
Carrying out	Engaging	Leveraging	Selling
Charting	Establishing	Maintaining	Simplifying
Checking	Evaluating	Making	Transacting
Classifying	Expanding	Networking	Tripling
Collecting	Expediating	Operating	Updating
Compiling	Experiencing	Orchestrating	Using
Conserving	Fixing	Organizing	Utilizing
Consolidating	Fortifying	Overcoming	
Constructing	Garnering	Performing	

Investigating, researching, and creating change:

Adapting	Discovering	Initiating	Researching
Analyzing	Distributing	Inspecting	Reviewing
Assessing	Establishing	Interpreting	Revising
Calculating	Evaluating	Investigating	Rewriting
Changing	Expanding	Monitoring	Searching
Compiling	Explaining	Observing	Solving
Computing	Experimenting	Originating	Studying
Conceiving	Familiarizing	Proving	Transforming
Correlating	Finding	Reading	Verifying
Deciding	Improving	Reinventing	
Devising	Increasing	Reorganizing	

Working with and directing people:

Administering	Deciding	Instructing	Recruiting
Accommodating	Delegating	Joining	Regulating
Advising	Determining	Leading	Resolving
Answering	Directing	Managing	Specifying
Approving	Disciplining	Mediating	Supervising
Authorizing	Engaging	Motivating	Supporting
Brainstorming	Evaluating	Negotiating	Team building
Coaching	Facilitating	Notifying	Training
Compromising	Guiding	Ordering	Tutoring
Conducting	Handling complaints	Overseeing	Working on a team
Controlling	Heading	Prescribing	

Communicating and interacting:

Advising	Counseling	Interpreting	Presenting
Aiding	Critiquing	Interviewing	Promoting
Apprising	Designing	Informing	Proofreading
Building consensus	Displaying	Listening	Public speaking
Clarifying	Editing	Mediating	Reporting
Coaching	Engaging	Moderating	Suggesting
Conferring	Explaining	Negotiating	Summarizing
Consulting	Expressing	Recommending	Synthesizing
Contributing	Facilitating	Representing	Teaching
Cooperating	Helping	Resolving	Translating
Coordinating	Inspiring	Participating	Unifying
Corresponding	Interacting	Persuading	Writing

Resume Worksheet

Use the categories below to dissect the position description and to help shape your resume. The organizations and workplaces that appear in the third column should comprise most, if not all, of the work experience on your resume. The bullets in the fourth column should be the only bullets you include on your resume.

Job detail, skill, or qualification	Have?	Where did I get this experience (including volunteering)?	What bullet points can I use to describe the experience?
Writing and communications	Yes	AmeriCorps/St. Johns Neighborhood Association Internship with Multnomah County Healthy Start	• Wrote six community newsletters and distributed them to 500 neighborhood residents, organizations, and businesses. Distribution list grew to 1,000 within six months. • Developed and implemented marketing plan for fundraiser. Through press releases, radio announcements, and public speaking, I brought in $42,000 and funded the program for one more year.
Database management software	Yes	Internship with Idealist.org	• Using Salesforce, imported and managed 300 contacts; implemented an outreach campaign using mail merge. Enabled manager to reach out to 95% of clients from previous year.