

Resume Format: Your FIRST Step

We received this question from Mary Brooks, who, like many others, don't know where or how to begin the challenge of developing an effective resume. Here's what concerns Mary (bet she's not the only one):

“When I Google resume formats, I see thousands to choose from. Do I simply follow a template or should I make a resume from scratch? Where do I begin and what do I look for?”

Here's what I envision happened to Mary and thousands out there: You open Microsoft Word and stare blankly at the screen trying to figure out how to start. You start to type a few words and realize you have no idea what you're doing. In a panic, you open your Internet browser and make the same mistake Mary and others make: **you look at a template.**

Think you should know: To professional resume writers, the term “*template*” is as obscene as any four-letter word!

We'll begin tackling this question by getting to the root of the problem. Resume templates are bad because they tell you what a resume should look like, **not** how to make an eye-opening, attention-getting resume that will encourage the reader to want to learn more about the author.

Cold hard fact: Hiring manager and employers often have to sift through hundreds of resumes in a single day. What makes you think they'll notice your resume if it looks like everybody else's... unless, of course, you are just like everyone else and you do not offer anything unique that a company would find beneficial.

Many people justify lazy behavior by stating they only use templates as a guideline, and that they don't intend to copy it word-for-word. Unfortunately for most, reality kicks in and we both know it's much easier to keep the template and pretend to tweak a few lines... this approach is NOT effective and NOT in your best interest.

Take note, even if your intentions are good, following a template (or copying it) **will get your resume ignored.** In fact, hiring managers have seen all the popular templates out there. Yours simply may be ignored for that reason alone as it shows you don't really care enough about the job to make it your own.

Throw in the fact: In less than 15 seconds, hiring managers review cover letters and resumes and determine if there is a fit... mostly based upon how quickly you present value.

What should people in Mary's situation do? Here's more than a clue: **Create a resume from scratch.**

The advantages of a hand-crafted resume far outweigh the amount of time it takes to make one. Don't believe me? Let's look at a few reasons why creating your resume from scratch will give you an advantage over the vast majority of job seekers:

- **Hand-crafted resumes are one-of-a-kind.** If you take the time to make your own resume, the chances your document will look like anyone else's is slim-to-none. This helps it stand out in a large stack of papers. In fact, it may even make a hiring manager read it longer than they usually do.
- **Hand-crafted resumes show creativity.** Instead of staring blankly at the computer screen, you took initiative and figured out how to make one on your own. Employers love to see this in any potential candidate because it shows that person has a drive to succeed and can think on their own without the need of a dot-by-dot map.

- **Hand-crafted resumes show effort.** Even for the most seasoned career document writers, a unique, eye-catching resume takes a lot of time and effort. From the employer's perspective, this shows a candidate is really interested in the job and not just applying to anything that sounds good.

There are, of course, more advantages than this, but it's time to answer the other part of Mary's question... where should you start? What should you look for?

There are many places to start, but keep in mind this is a learning process. You won't pick up this skill in just one afternoon. Don't get discouraged or consider giving up the fight as many of our professional writers take up to six months before they are allowed to tackle complicated clients. Additionally, for those with specific questions, you have a tool at your disposal... our partnership.

Warning: There's a great deal of misguided information out there. As a result, I suggest consulting with a certified professional writer. Two career management associations sponsoring able writers are the Professional Resume Writers Association (PRWA) and the National Resume Writers Association (NRWA). Both associations have a listing of certified writers willing to help.

I also recommend researching and reading quality material which may guide you along the career success path. Again, be cautious at what and who you work with and make sure they are a recognized professional in the field.

If neither are an option, you can always order a professional career management book or focused career guide.

Education Career Services does offer several resume and cover letter guide books as well as material covering varying aspects of career management. You can find them at <http://www.edu-cs.com> or at Google (search Danny at ECS).

For more career management tips and articles such as these, visit Education Career Services at <http://www.edu-cs.com> or follow us on twitter @Dannyatecs.

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