

Answers to 5 Common Resume Questions

by Mandy Minor, J Allan Resume Studios

In working with my resume clients I get asked five questions often. Getting these five areas right can mean the difference between being called for an interview or not, so be sure to use these tips in your own job search.

How long can my resume be?

This is the most common question I get, and the easiest to answer.

Two pages, max. I know, I know: That's not enough space! But if Senator John McCain's and Senator Barack Obama's resumes can be well-presented on two pages, yours can too.

Actionable tip: Leave "References available upon request" off of your resume and gain at least two more lines. It's now common knowledge that if they ask for references you will provide them.

How can I clearly convey the type of position I want?

The type of position you want is 100% your responsibility, not your potential employers'. To make sure you get the type of position you want, apply only to those openings that you think will challenge you, utilize your skills, and make you happy. Your resume is not the place for stating what kind of job you are looking for.

Your resume is, however, the place to show the folks at the job you want just what you can do for them. An objective statement can't do this, and I never include one in my clients' resumes. What I do include, and what can convey your worth as a new hire, are the Career Summary and Core Competencies sections. These highlight a few of the functional areas you have had great success in and outline how you are different from other applicants.

Actionable tip: Customize the Career Summary and Core Competencies sections for each job you apply for. The best way to do this is to create long versions of both that contain all of your pertinent information. Then edit each according to the posted job description to highlight how you are a great fit for the position.

What can I put in the header and footer?

It's tempting to use the header and footer as places to put content like your name, phone number, and e-mail address. It saves space and frees up room on the page for job descriptions. Some people even put their Summary or Core Competencies statements in the header.

But it's a bad idea, and here's why: A lot of companies are using ATS (applicant tracking software) in the initial pass through the mountain of resumes they receive. Many of the ATS programs don't read headers and footers, so whatever is in these areas is missed. Ouch!

Actionable tip: Don't use the header at all, and only put "continued..." in the footer of the first page. That way nothing critical is missed. To free up more space on the page set your margins to 0.7" on all sides and use a sans-serif font, like Arial, in 10-point or 11-point.

Which e-mail address should I use on my resume?

You use your e-mail address all the time so don't think about it anymore. But if you were reviewing applicants for a job at your firm and could choose between one with the e-mail address MichelleBanks@gmail.com or WorkSux@gmail.com, who would you call for the interview?



Using a neutral e-mail address in your job search is imperative. Since e-mail addresses are free and take just moments to set up, create a new one if you need to. Make sure it's not only neutral, but easy to read, and add it to your resume in a way that makes it easy to understand. For example, georgegershwin@hotmail.com is a bit hard to make out at first glance; GeorgeGershwin@hotmail.com is very clear.

Actionable tip: Create a new e-mail address that you use exclusively for your job search. Having an e-mail address dedicated to your job search will help you to track your activities more efficiently.

How can I get my entire work history into my resume?

The short answer is, you can't. But that's okay – because you don't want to. Recruiters and hiring managers can only work with your relevant work history, or the skills that you possess that are relevant to today's market. Normally that's the last ten to 15 years, so focus on this time period in your resume. When you interview you can go back a bit further if the opportunity presents itself.

Actionable tip: If you have experience that's perfect for a job but not your most recent work use the functional resume format, rather than the chronological. While the chronological format starts with your most recent job and goes backwards in time, the functional format places your relevant experience first under the heading "Relevant Experience" and lists other experience as space permits.

Use the answers to these five questions to make your resume stronger and more effective. And spend some time online getting up to speed on all the websites and online tools available to today's job seekers. Good luck!

Mandy Minor is J Allan Resume Studios' senior resume writer. She uses her ten-plus years of resume and career coaching experience to help professionals find jobs they love.

Are you job hunting or thinking about making a career change? Contact J Allan Resume Studios for a fun chat about strategies and tips, or to get a no-pressure evaluation of your current resume.