

FAST TRACK
YOUR JOB SEARCH
(AND CAREER!)

How to get paid what you're worth.

by
Richard Kirby

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Fast Track Your Job Search (and Career!)

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The situations in this book are based on actual occurrences, but names and other identifying characteristics of individuals have been changed or omitted in order to protect their privacy.

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Chapter 6 – Résumé Formats and Content
Myth: A great résumé is critical to career success.

In the 20th century, when people changed jobs infrequently and the Internet was not yet available, job searches were focused on mailing out résumés and “cold calling” employers. Résumé distribution services flourished because there were shortages of experienced workers in many professions and industries. In the waning years of the century, Internet web sites sparked a frenzy of job and résumé postings. The Internet became a useful tool for many job seekers who were not very discriminating.

Then, the world changed. At the end of the century, job seeker activity volume flipped from snail mail to Internet email blasts and job board applications. Billions of résumés began clogging hiring process arteries. More frequent job changes convinced many job seekers to adopt a functional résumé format in order to downplay out-of-work intervals, lack of recent accomplishment, inconsistent career progressions, etc. Résumé reviewers began to yearn for quantified, concrete accomplishments. Recruiters replaced résumé shredders with screening software and electronic databases.

Summary:

What you need to consider: Placing too much emphasis on revising or distributing résumés can be a roadblock to your career progress. A great résumé is desirable, but its strategic importance has decreased greatly. A résumé is not normally sufficient to gain interviews with desirable new organizations. For better quality jobs, *the face-to-face meeting (in advance of a formal job interview) has become a far more effective career tool than résumé mailings, mass distributions, and job board applications.*

FAST TRACK strategies: Avoid sending your résumé to anyone unless there is a critical need for it. Read *How to Land Your Dream Job* (Fox, 2007) by Jeffrey J. Fox, except for Chapters 12-15 and 40. Strengthen your résumé by using the best format, gaining reader attention early, and emphasizing your quantified career results.

Résumé Formats and Content



The traditional Iron Age job search for a new job was only conducted when unemployed and was pretty simple:

1. Check the phone book for employers of interest in your area.
2. Update your résumé to add your last or current job.
3. Compose a great cover letter and mail it with your résumé.
4. If you receive no callbacks, get on the phone and call the companies.
5. If no success, get a new list of employers and repeat the preceding steps.

Today, no one uses the phone book, few people mail résumés, no one reads cover letters, less than 1% of résumés get read, and most companies don't return unsolicited job seeker calls. The Iron Age process outlined above might work for getting a shift job at McDonald's, but its success rate for professionals and executives is extremely low. Extending this process onto the internet and onto email systems is *even less* successful.

Hiring authorities have preferences for receiving job candidates. For the 5-10% of jobs that are posted online, a war of résumés may be pre-ordained. For most of their hiring needs, however, employers find it undesirable to screen hundreds of résumés and interview anonymous job applicants.

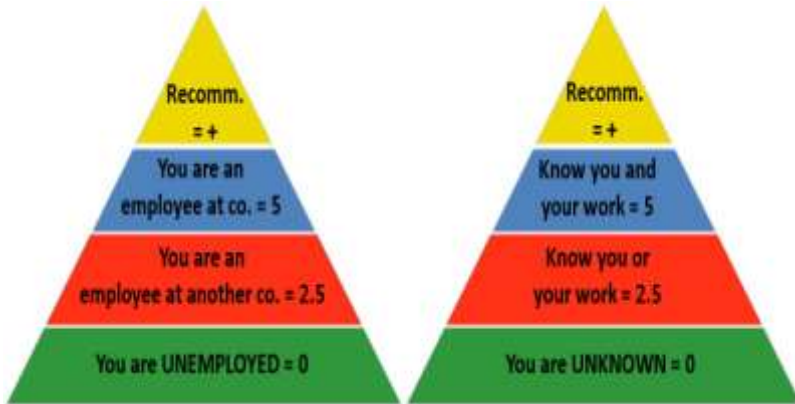


Figure 6-1
Typical Hiring Authority Preferences

Some clarification of the wording used in Figure 6 - 1 may be helpful. “Know you and your work” means the hiring authority knows you well enough to like you and has a high regard for your work. “Know you or know your work” means they know one, but not both.

Figure 6 - 1 indicates the typical preferences for obtaining job candidates. For illustration, I have assigned arbitrary values of 0, 2.5, and 5 points within each category. Let’s say the hiring authority would like to hire a candidate who is a current employee (internal vs. external). Also, she would prefer this person be someone whom she knows and whose work quality she knows. These two factors would make this candidate appear to be a less risky choice than one who does not have these characteristics. The known candidate gets 10 points (5+5) out of 10. If this job candidate were also given one or more recommendations from other employees, this would be ideal because this candidate would appear to offer virtually no risk. Most humans, including hiring managers, are risk averse.

Contrast this “10” candidate who has everything going for them with the other end of the spectrum. Job seekers who apply online for jobs and who transmit résumés to unknown hiring authorities are approaching opportunities with no situational leverage. Such seekers are unknown and are represented solely

by their résumés. These unemployed job seekers, who amount to 99% of all online job applicants, have the least leverage and score 0 out of 10 points in my simple example.

The two previous examples help explain why, in more competitive job markets, **highly qualified external unemployed job seekers have a low probability of landing advertised positions** and they frequently lose to internal candidates. It is possible for an unknown, unemployed candidate to land a job. But, it is not likely when the job is published and there is significant competition. *Unpublished (hidden) jobs* offer unemployed candidates far greater odds of success.

What about recommendations to hiring authorities? In general, recommendations from external sources are not as highly valued as are recommendations from internal sources.

You can debate the exact values I should use in Figure 6-1, but the fundamentals are hard to deny. Here is a summary:

- ❑ Hiring decision makers want to minimize their risk because bad hiring decisions can affect their group's performance, their perceived professionalism with their peers, etc. Each job candidate has a relative perceived risk factor and most hiring decision makers are risk averse. Reducing your perceived risk, in whatever way possible, will increase your odds of getting hired. This is why **your shortest path to a job in a new employer** is most predictably through a warm internal referral to a hiring manager who knows you and your work.
- ❑ Hiring managers prefer to interview and hire employed candidates rather than unemployed ones. Recruiters are frequently told this by those employers who feel they could go out and get all the qualified unemployed job seekers they desire. (This may not be true, but it is how many feel.) It is not illegal to discriminate against the unemployed as a group. For employers open to interviewing unemployed workers, job seekers out of work more than six months can be a concern because the unemployed "age" over time. *Note:* Most career books soft-peddle or ignore this fact, but I believe you need to understand this reality.

- ❑ Other global factors may override the typical preferences indicated in Figure 6-1. One such factor is geography. If the hiring manager is dying to hire you (know you, know your work, and you come highly recommended) but the company will not pay for your required relocation, then this is a serious roadblock. Restraints such as this may greatly affect hiring choices. In these instances, you must get creative to reduce or eliminate any such factors working against you.

If you have a well written résumé but you have decided that applying online and through mailings are a relative waste of time (hooray!), what do you do with your résumé? My advice is you memorize the aspects of it that you need in order to verbally explain your value during networking and job interviews. Practice out loud what you want to say in certain situations until you can deliver your messages smoothly. Then, don't remove your résumé from your folio during networking meetings or interviews unless it is absolutely necessary.

Delaying the presentation of your résumé is a smart strategy to consider during your personal communications. This is especially true for one on one networking meetings. Whenever your résumé surfaces, you risk interrogation by the résumé Gestapo. Any small detail may then be pondered and discussed ad nauseum. You may get unrequested amateur résumé writing advice that will wonder whether to revise it for the 17th time or not. You may lose control of the conversation. Delaying the presentation of your résumé on a consistent basis will help avoid turning relaxed conversations into work history inquisitions.



Fast track tip: Your résumé can derail productive conversations with corporate hiring decision makers. It can also consume many revision hours that would be more productively invested in other activities. Having coached hundreds of job seekers and discussed the subject with many hundreds more, re-writing résumés based upon untrained advice appears to be an epidemic. (Exception: When talking to a recruiter or other résumé screener who is part of a

formal hiring process in which you are participating, you must fork over the résumé to keep the process moving forward and you should consider editing it to please them.)

Some seekers jump back and forth between résumé formats and revise their content as they speak with unknowledgeable advisors who tell them they need to change it one more time. Be careful. Many people who give you free advice on your résumé do not know what they are talking about. This includes many job seekers, recruiters, HR people and hiring managers. Everyone seems to think that HR people are résumé experts and many job seekers, to their detriment, believe them.

What about customizing résumés to apply for jobs online? For the target audience of this book (professionals and executives), I recommend you minimize your time spent applying for such jobs. This will eliminate loads of time you would otherwise spend revising your résumé, filling out employer nonsensical questionnaires, completing online applications, sprucing up your cover letters, developing T-letters that match your qualifications to the job posting requirements, etc. Since less than 5-10% of all jobs are found this way, why bother spending more than 5-10% of your time doing this? The subject of online job searches will be discussed in depth in a subsequent chapter.

Whenever you have an urge between 8:00am and 5:00pm M-F to bang out a large volume of online job applications, simply push yourself away from your computer, get dressed, and go do more one-on-one networking (or other productive work). The same goes for urges you may have to revise your résumé one more time per the latest inputs of a random “expert”.

Two last points before discussing résumé formats.

First, do not write your résumé as if a reader will actually sit still long enough to read the whole thing. This human behavior seldom occurs. Your résumé will be most effective if you write your résumé based upon the assumption that “readers” will spend no more than 30 to 60 seconds skimming your résumé for key points of interest to them.

Second, do not write your résumé in a manner that is most pleasing to you. It is important that you write your résumé in a manner that will be **most pleasing to the people who will be reading your résumé**.

Keeping these two global perspectives in mind will help you generate a better final product.

Résumé formats

Given that the résumé should not consume a lot of your job search time, doing it right the first time will help you achieve this goal. Choosing a fundamentally sound résumé format and sticking with it will avoid much wasted time. The following information will help you select the right format for you.

The following information addresses résumés to be read by *human beings*. If you know your résumé will be scanned or used for keyword searches by software systems, please read online articles on this subject to avoid confusing the computers.

The balance of this chapter describes résumés for corporate professionals and executives. If you are less of a traditional corporate type, such as a “creative” or artist, then there are many variations you may consider. Don’t stop with this chapter. Read other materials that address the unique differences your résumé or CV may require due to your unique situation.



Fast track tip: If you are an academic, in certain professions, or working internationally, you will likely be required to provide a curriculum vitae (CV) rather than a résumé. If you are applying for federal government jobs, they will require a unique résumé format not discussed here. Consult general résumé books for such specialized examples.

The three most popular résumé formats for private sector corporate hiring of professionals and executives are reverse chronological, functional, and combined. Let’s review each of these formats . . .

The reverse chronological format

Reverse chronological résumés are generally regarded as the most acceptable and popular. Roughly 90% of the résumés employers see today follow this format and this is their preference. It emphasizes your Professional Experience (employers and associated positions) and below each position heading are bulleted responsibilities and accomplishments.

This type of résumé begins with the most recent position and works backward to the oldest position. Work experience is many times preceded by a brief Objective and a Summary or Profile. The Professional Experience section is normally followed by Education and, on some occasions, a Personal section. Ending your résumé with a list of references or “References Available on Request” is out of date and such statements should be omitted.

Since employers and recruiters see this type of résumé routinely and are comfortable with it, the reverse chronological format is recommended for the majority of job seekers wanting to play things by the book. Here is a recap:

REVERSE CHRONOLOGICAL FORMAT

Name and Contact Info

Objective (optional)

Summary or Profile

Professional Experience

Education

Personal (optional)

The functional format

The second major format is the **functional résumé**. Functional résumés have been generally out of favor with professional readers for quite some time. Increasing volumes of résumés during the past decade has caused this to become even more undesired by recipients.

The first page or so of a functional résumé is dominated by Functional Headings such as Marketing, Sales Leadership,

Financial Management, HR Benefits Administration, Executive Leadership, or other descriptors which categorize chunks of functional job experience. Under each such heading are Details of your responsibilities and/or accomplishments.

The next section normally contains your Professional Experience. It is much briefer than in the reverse chronological format because much or all of your responsibilities and accomplishments have been relocated into the Functional area. The functional résumé normally ends with Education.

Some professional résumé writers recommend the functional format in order to de-emphasize gaps in employment, an inconsistent pattern of professions, lack of career growth in title or responsibilities, etc. *Most readers know this* and immediately begin to analyze why the writer chose this format. Since this raises negative questions in the minds of employers and especially in the minds of recruiters, I don't recommend the functional format unless you know that the reader will prefer it. Here is a recap of the typical functional résumé flow:

FUNCTIONAL FORMAT
Name and Contact Info
Summary or Profile
Functional Headings and Details
Professional Experience (abbreviated info)
Education
Personal (optional)

The combined format

The third major format is the **combined (or hybrid) résumé**. It attempts to marry the best aspects of the two previous formats. While there is room for debate as to the precise configuration of a combined/hybrid résumé, this format typically contains all the elements of the functional résumé – with the Functional Headings and their associated details condensed. Alternatively, it may contain some Functional Details as a single grouping of information with no Functional Headings. In either case, the net

result is that you retain more of your responsibilities and accomplishments under your individual job positions rather than removing them from the Professional Experience section.

Let's face it. The combined format is a compromise résumé style that looks like it was designed by a committee. For those who believe that a functional résumé would be best for them (which is normally not true) but are concerned about the downsides of a functional résumé, the combined format represents a third option of value in certain specific situations.

Additional ideas for improving your "human" résumé

There you have it. The three standard résumé formats. Virtually every résumé book in existence will provide endless reverse chronological examples and a few of the other two types. So, is that all there is? My answer is a resounding "no".

If you are bold enough to get creative, there are many worthwhile variations to consider. Enhancements give you an opportunity to differentiate yourself positively and demonstrate your innovative spirit. A distinctive résumé can help you stand out from the herd of résumé clones—especially the cookbook versions pouring out of MS Office™ template users, outplacement firms, and low-end résumé writing sweat shops.

There are no formal rules for writing a résumé. There are norms and expectations, but you have the freedom to choose the format and content you desire. Here are some variations off the traditional *reverse chronological format* that you may want to consider. I have found them to be useful in certain situations.

1. If you have a particularly noteworthy education, consider moving it ahead of your Professional Experience. This could be accomplished by either noting your most relevant education in a bulleted area preceding your Professional Experience or by moving the entire Education section there. Here are some situations that may warrant this action:
 - You hold a degree from an exclusive university such as Harvard or Princeton.

- Your degree is not from an exclusive university, but you know that the hiring manager and/or hiring organization is biased in favor of graduates from your school.
 - You hold an advanced degree in your specialty from a perennial Top 10 school, such as an MBA from Kellogg, Wharton, or Sloan.
 - You have a relatively unique degree that is desired by the hiring manager or organization, such as medical illustration (vs. a standard fine arts degree).
 - You have a one page résumé and little or no post-graduation work experience.
 - You worked your way through school and you know the hiring manager will admire this. You can note your work/jobs in association with your Education. (This is only applicable for younger workers who have a one page résumé. By the time you are experienced enough to develop a two page résumé, this and other college information such as your GPA is typically considered too outdated to justify inclusion.)
2. If you know precisely what you want, include a clear and concise Objective such as “Chief Financial Officer” or “VP - Marketing.” While many will argue against this as being too restrictive (I’ve heard this objection over and over again), leaving your desired role to the imagination of the résumé reader is usually riskier. It is likely you will not be called for interviews if readers do not know what you want. A variation from this theme would be an Objective that is more a personal branding statement than a job title. An example of such a personal branding statement would be “Harvard-Educated Consumer Packaged Goods Marketer.”
 3. If you want your résumé to be easier to skim or believe most people will not fully read it (which is the norm), consider deleting the Summary/Profile section. This section can be omitted when the reader understands what you want (Objective) and your Professional Experience and Education sections are well matched to present a coherent view of your

relevancy. It is particularly unnecessary if you choose to follow item #4 that follows.



Fast track tip: Virtually no one reads an entire résumé from start to the finish. It is estimated that 50% of interviewers have not read your résumé before you enter the job interview room. For these reasons, it is important that you format your résumé to gain attention when skimmed.

4. If you have notable accomplishments in your area of expertise, try **replacing the Summary/Profile section with a Summary of Qualifications section**. This is similar to one option for combined résumés discussed earlier, except the less desirable Functional Heading and/or Details are replaced with significantly abbreviated and hard-hitting relevant qualifications. *This is a personal favorite* that I have found to be highly effective for many. The choices of what to include and how to position them takes some strategic thought, but when done well I have found it to yield a strong positive response from readers. It gets attention quickly and encourages them to read further.
5. If you are capable in more than one functional area, such as marketing and sales, decide if your goal is a position that includes all your functional capabilities. If you want a VP of Sales and Marketing position, then you need both areas highlighted in your résumé. If you are seeking a position in *either* sales or marketing, then your presentation will be more effective if you have one résumé with a marketing objective and one with a sales objective. To make the two résumés more effective, edit your contents to stress your marketing responsibilities and accomplishments in one and your sales responsibilities and accomplishments in the other.
6. One important point: There are résumés that require an additional section listing job-specific skills. Some examples would be software languages and development systems for a software developer, technologies for a technical sales

engineer, etc. If your profession requires that your technical knowledge be listed in detail, then by all means add a section covering these important details. Place this section at a place in your résumé that provides the proper emphasis. This typically means just before or after your Education section.

7. Last but not least, it is important for you to consider the first impression your résumé is likely to have on readers. This applies to all résumés, regardless of the format chosen. Your résumé may only get a 10-15 second scan the first time a recruiter, HR person, or hiring manager reviews it. The objective in this situation is to be placed into the “short pile” of résumés so that the reader will take another look and perhaps be generous enough to give the résumé 45-60 seconds the second time around.

After screening tons of résumés, reviewers begin to form strong opinions as to what they like and don't like. Here is a helpful checklist of general recommendations based upon my review of thousands of résumés and conversations with many recruiter friends:

- ❑ For undergraduate degree holders out of school for under five years, limit the résumé to one page unless you have significant work experience and accomplishments. As noted before, move your Education ahead of your professional Experience unless you have notable Experience.
- ❑ For those out of school for over five to eight years and those out a shorter period who have considerable intern/job experience worth including, limit the résumé to two pages.
- ❑ Use one inch (or minimum $\frac{3}{4}$ inch) margins on all four sides.

- ❑ Provide reasonable amounts of white space within the printed area. Avoid filling every line and cramming lines together.
- ❑ Try a font such as Verdana or Calibri as an alternative to the more overused Arial and Times New Roman. Font choice can vary by occupation somewhat, so check with decision hiring makers if you are unsure which to use.
- ❑ Use a size between 10 and 11 for most fonts. Make it large enough for those of us who are beyond our 20's to read, but not so large that it looks clunky. Section headers should be two to four points larger.
- ❑ Limit each bulleted item to one or two lines. Use phrases rather than full sentences. Be consistent in style, including indentations.
- ❑ Use bolding, capitalization, and underlining sparingly to draw readers' eyes to key words, phrases, and numbers.

Résumé contents

Let's assume that you have now formatted your résumé into an attractive document that (1) creates a great first impression, (2) conveys key points with a 30 second skim, and (3) is inviting to read when the reader has more time to digest it. Now it is important to review your *contents* in detail to improve them as much as possible. Here is a helpful checklist that you can use to ensure the contents of your résumé are first rate:

- ❑ First, decide how many résumés you will produce. Select the position you most desire (if you will be pursuing diverse roles requiring multiple résumés) and keep this role in mind as you work through the steps that follow for the first version of your résumé.

- ❑ If you have content that is irrelevant to the role being targeted in this résumé version and you have plenty of content, delete the irrelevant content. This avoids diluting your message.
- ❑ Next, circle all of the numbers on your résumé. Are they impressive? Are they relevant? Are there as many as possible? Do they reflect all of your positive contributions? Do they specify the number of people managed, annual dollar savings, revenues generated versus sales objectives, etc.? If not, **start digging out as many additional numbers as you can** and add them where appropriate.
- ❑ Next, review several expansive online postings for the types of jobs you desire. Identify all key words and relevant acronyms you feel need to be in your résumé. Work them in to your résumé in an appropriate way.
- ❑ Next, review your résumé for action verbs. Ensure you use a wide variety of them and avoid repeating the same verb too many times.
- ❑ Next, review the document to see if you can make it more concise and hard-hitting. Can you remove words or rewrite phrases to trim the word count? Do your best to make all of your résumé as crisp as possible.
- ❑ Next, if you are adding a Summary of Qualifications section, select the items you want to highlight at the top of the first page and add them there. I recommend four to six.
- ❑ Next, verify that the formatting of your résumé is consistent. Are all of the items properly aligned vertically and horizontally? Do all the dates of employment line up? Is the spacing between elements of the résumé consistent throughout the document? Is the font type and font size consistent? (You can use more than one font size, but limit the number of them and maintain paralleling element consistency of sizes.) Is the font size large enough for a

typical older executive to read comfortably and yet small enough to not look clunky?

- Next, review the document by running a spell checker. Then read it word-for-word to check for grammatical errors and any additional spelling errors not identified by the spell checker. Then, get a friend who is good at editing to read it. Many errors are missed by spell checkers because the misspelling of a word may actually spell correctly another word you did not intend.

- For reference purposes, consider saving each version of your résumé with a uniquely identifying file name such as resume_johnjones_operationsmgr_08272012. If you tweak your résumé for a specific job, label it uniquely such as resume_johnjones_operationsdirector_ABC Corp.

Now, provide a hard copy of your résumé to several people and ask them to review it in detail. Ask them to mark up your résumé with changes/edits they would recommend. Ignore the comments regarding the overall format (reverse chronological, etc.) and focus on those that involve your content. Use your own judgment in making changes, remembering that **opinions are like a certain part of the human anatomy – everyone has one.**

If you are seeking diverse roles and have decided you will develop more than one résumé, repeat the previous process for each additional version of your résumé. When you have all your résumés well crafted, promise yourself to maintain self control and resist the urge to constantly be tweaking them.

You have now invested a great deal of thought and effort to produce a well crafted product. Don't drive yourself crazy by trying to please opinionated readers. Thank them for their suggestions and resist making frequent changes.

The next generation résumé – on the web

With the advent of the Internet, people began posting their résumés on résumé/job boards. Some technically motivated careerists took another step beyond this. They reserved a URL, bought web site hosting services, and posted a copy of their résumé online. Only a few people did this because it really didn't buy them much. Recruiters in the Web1.0 realm were not leveraging search engines and, without some type of web search strategy, the odds of a recruiter finding the person's résumé site was tiny.

As the Internet grew and some recruiters became better trained at finding needles in the Internet haystack, the odds of résumé sites being found began to grow. A few more people began to create their own résumé sites.

Some career marketing companies (to be covered in a future chapter) began to offer such job seeker sites as a value-added service. Some embedded client video self-presentations. This was, for the most part, ineffective because the videos were low quality and most candidates presented themselves poorly.

To be effective, personal videos require the expertise to produce a quality video, sufficient writing expertise to compose a good message, and sufficient on-screen performance expertise to deliver your message in a professional manner. If you decide to do a video, do it well.

Cover letters

There will be occasions when you need to submit your résumé in a formal manner. These typically require a cover letter. Approach your cover letter development from the perspective that it is an introduction to your résumé. Unless specifically requested to be longer by the person receiving it, err on the side of brevity. The following cover letter provides an example format which you can vary based upon specific stated requirements and your own intuition.

END OF EXCERPT