

application materials—what preparation and experience candidates had in the following skills and areas:

- written and oral communication skills
- MIS or PC skills
- interpersonal skills, as demonstrated by the ability to work as a member of a team
- self-reliance and initiative, as demonstrated by the ability to work alone
- a sense of what the world of work demands in terms of professionalism and deadlines
- specific skills in at least one business or technical area supplemented by secondary skills in a variety of related areas
- a sense of business and personal ethics
- the ability to manage time, set priorities, and work under stress.

While recruiting managers do not expect job candidates to excel in all these areas or possess all these skills from the start, the list does provide some general guidelines for communicating with recruiting managers by resumes and cover letters—or, for that matter, in person during an interview.

This section of *Strategies* begins with John L. Munschauer's detailed discussion of how to write a resume and cover letter. Based on his many years of experience working at the Cornell University Career Center, Munschauer places the writing of resumes and cover letters within the context of how they are read by busy recruiting managers. Steven Graber follows with a no nonsense discussion of the basics of the cover letter. Richard H. Beatty then discusses the advantages and disadvantages of using a functional resume rather than a more traditional chronological resume in applying for a job, and Burton Jay Nadler concludes this section of *Strategies* with some suggestions about composing and sending electronic resumes.

John L. Munschauer

Writing Resumes and Letters in the Language of Employers

The late John L. Munschauer was Director of the Cornell University Career Center.

"I am sorry, Father O'Mega, I can't let you in."

"But, St. Peter, I did everything I was supposed to. I changed the Mass from Latin to English. I had the communicants hold their hands the new way when they took communion. Everyone, so far as I knew, genuflected properly, and even Mrs. O'Reilly's Protestant husband stood when I read the gospel. I can't think of a thing I did that was wrong."

"The message, Father O'Mega, what about the message?"

"The message? What message?"

"The message of the Lord, Father. Don't you remember? The Ten Commandments? The Beatitudes? The Golden Rule? It's the *message* that gets people in here, not the ritual. The ritual was supposed to help deliver the message, but you made the ritual the message and the meaning got lost."

Meanwhile, back on earth . . . in Tucuman, New Mexico, and all over the United States, job hunters are at their typewriters and computers pushing words around to make their resumes look like the ones they have seen in books. Whether to have it professionally printed or not, that is the question. Does it have enough action verbs?

In Peoria, Illinois, and elsewhere, employers are scanning resumes. Some are beautiful to look at; a few are even printed commercially on expensive paper. But the resumes are laid aside. Employers are reading them with one thought in mind: What can the candidates do for us? The message they are looking for isn't there.

WHY USE A RESUME?

The purpose of a resume is to convey a message, a purpose easily forgotten in the ritual of preparing it. At every turn, you will get conflicting advice about how to conduct the ritual:

- You must have a resume to get a job.
- The purpose of a resume is to get an interview.
- Every resume must have a job objective.
- A resume should never, ever be longer than one page.
- On a resume, list experience chronologically.

On the other hand, others advise:

- Don't use a resume if you are looking for an executive position or merely seeking information.
- Resumes typecast you and narrow your options.
- Interview for information first, determine what an employer wants, and then decide whether offering a resume will suit your purposes.
- Two or more pages present no problem if your resume follows a logical, easy-to-read outline.
- List your experience by function, not chronologically.

The more opinions you get, the more confused you become, but you finally work up something. You send it out. You get little or no response. You change your resume from one page to two pages—or from two pages to one. The results are no better. Somebody says to try pink paper; *that* will get attention. You decide you should have used blue. You fiddle and fiddle with your resume, trying to find the magic formula that will get you what you want. You are caught up in the ritual, forgetting that the purpose of a resume is to send a message.

It is hard not to be distracted from the message. You concentrate on developing a format, forgetting the message, instead of concentrating on the message and *then* working on a format that will convey it best. But what is your message? To find the answer, use your imagination to step out of yourself and become an employer. Think about what the employer is trying to accomplish and the talent required to get it done. Now, from your imaginary employer's chair, look back at yourself and ponder the answer. If you can't come up with one, you will have difficulty writing a resume that will say to the employer, "I have something to offer you."

Resumes are not tickets to a job. They are just one of several ways to court employers. And, as in any courtship, sometimes it's just as well not to put everything in print so the other party can't draw the wrong conclusion. Take the case of Cheryl Fender, an alto who learned that the Springfield Opera Company was auditioning for an alto to sing *Carmen*. Cheryl was well-qualified, and her voice teacher was well-known as a coach of only the most gifted singers. On the other hand, her resume, incomplete and with gaps in her history, showed extensive experience as a secretary. Wisely, she did not send the resume, which might have

established her as a secretary who wanted to sing rather than as a singer who had supported herself by being a secretary. Instead, she asked herself what was important to the director of an opera company. Voice, of course, so she outlined her training in a letter. But dramatic ability also mattered, so she included pictures of herself on stage in roles that beautifully illustrated her dramatic ability. She got an audition. Cheryl followed a good marketing rule: Don't confuse customers by flaunting things that don't speak to their needs.

GIVING YOUR MESSAGE

While the language of employment for you is "I want" and for employers it is "I need," you can create resumes and letters in your language that will be read by employers in theirs. I don't mean statements such as "I have analyzed my qualifications and feel confident that they fit your needs." If you were one of thousands of employers who read this kind of thing, would you ask what qualifications and what needs? If the answer isn't clear—and it rarely is—there won't be a message.

It isn't all that difficult to create a statement that is effective. Start with the written word, with prose. Even if you are going to be approaching employers in person, go through the exercise of writing letters. Otherwise, like most people, you can get caught up in the resume ritual and neglect to develop the words that can be more effective in telling your story. People sweat over resumes, then dash off letters without much thought. Perfect resumes arriving in the mail won't even be read if the cover letters don't impress and engage employers.

I recall being asked to review a proposed application letter for a job on the staff of a yachting magazine. The letter was beautifully written, but it left the impression of being all "I": "I want to write so very much, and I am sure I can learn if you give me a chance. . . . I got straight A's in English. . . . I love boats. . . . I am a sailor. . . . I was captain of the sailing team in college. . . ."

What do you say to a person who has written a letter like that? He had obviously spent hours composing it. In its appearance and use of language, it met the highest standards. I could not squelch the young man's hopes, so I had him read *Book Publishing*, a pamphlet Daniel Melcher wrote when he was president of R. R. Bowker Company. Although the pamphlet is concerned only with book publishing, I thought its message would be useful for someone interested in magazines as well.

Let me paraphrase a portion of Melcher's pamphlet:

I like publishing and you might like it too. It is only fair to warn you, however, that publishing attracts a great many more people than the industry can possibly absorb. Sometimes it seems as though half of the English majors in the country besiege publishing offices for jobs each year. While we hope that you will have something to offer us, you might as well face it. Publishers are experts in the art of the gentle brush-off.

The interviewer hopes that you have what he needs, but it turns out that you have never looked into any of the industry's trade journals nor read any books about the industry. You haven't even acquainted yourself with the work of your university press. You tell

the interviewer that you are willing to start anywhere, but it develops that a file clerk's job would not interest you, you do not want to type, you don't think you can sell, and you know nothing about printing.

The fact is, all you have thought about is what you want, but it is his needs that create jobs, and you must address yourself to needs.

Your problem, therefore, is to learn as much as possible about the industry before you go looking for a job. Only in this way will you be able to put yourself in the publisher's place and talk to him about his needs rather than about your wants.

After reading Melcher's advice, the fellow said he got the point, thanked me, and left, returning about three weeks later to show me his revised letter. It began in much the same way as his earlier effort—with "I's"—"I majored in English. . . . I have done considerable sailing. . . ."—but after a few short sentences, he suddenly changed his tack. A new three-sentence paragraph began like this: "With my interests, naturally I want to work for you. But more to the point is not what I want but what you need." He followed this with three words that many women refuse to use and that men almost never think to use: "I can type." Right away, he showed that he knew he must be useful.

So much for the easy part of the letter. Next came the difficult part. Although he had had no experience and had never submitted an article to a magazine or even written for a student newspaper, he still had to come up with something that would interest the editor. He found the solution. The letter continued in this manner:

. . . In looking into the field of journalism, I visited the editor of our alumni magazine, and I talked to magazine space salesmen and to executives responsible for placing ads in magazines. I also visited a printer who has contracts with magazines. In addition, I have been reading trade journals and several books on the industry. As I looked into publishing, it occurred to me that, of all the things I have done, the one I could most closely relate to the field was, strangely enough, an experience I had as a babysitter.

Immediately, he had the editor's full attention. How could babysitting fit in with publishing? During the summer of his junior year in college, he had taken a job as a sailing instructor, tutor, and companion to the children of a wealthy family that summered on the coast of Maine. The parents often went away for a week or more at a time, leaving a governess in charge, with a cook, chauffeur, maid, and gardener to do the chores and the student to keep the children busy. While the parents were on a cruise, the governess suffered a stroke, sending the cook into a tizzy, the maid into tears, and the chauffeur and gardener to the local bar. Only the student could cope, and he took charge and managed the estate for the rest of the summer.

In his letter of application, he described the crisis and its subsequent problems and told how he had met them. Then he related those experiences to the problems that he had learned editors, advertisers, printers, and others encounter in the publishing industry. Reading his letter, you could picture the student working for a publisher. There would be no slipups with the printers. Advertisers and authors would be handled with tact, yet he would get them to their

copy on time. He came through as someone with ingenuity, energy, and reliability, and the letter itself testified to his writing ability.

Did he get the job? Yes and no. He got an offer, but because of the publisher's urgent need, the job had to be filled immediately, and he could not accept it. He was teaching school at the time and felt that in fairness to his pupils he should finish the school year. However, a while later, the letter surfaced again when a group of editors at a meeting chatted during lunch. The subject of good editorial help came up. It followed the usual theme: "They don't make 'em like they used to." The editor of another sailing magazine complained that he had been looking for an assistant, but despite hundreds of applicants he had found no one suitable. At this point, the editor of the yachting magazine described the young man's letter and agreed to share it. The upshot was, again, a job offer. This time the timing was right, and the young man took the job. There is nothing quite like the staying power of a well-written letter. It is remembered.

Later, I complimented the young man, telling him I had never read a better letter. "It was easy," he said. "The first letter was the tough one. I didn't have anything to say other than 'I have a good record. Please give me a chance,' but I knew everyone else was saying the same thing, so I would have to say it better. I struggled with every word, trying to make an ordinary message extraordinary, but even elegant words can't make something out of fluff. I didn't know anything about publishing, so I didn't have anything to say to publishers; nor could I be really convincing without knowing enough about the work to decide whether I wanted that kind of job or not. But publishing sounded exciting, so I thought I would give it a fling."

The Importance of Knowing What the Job Is All About

"When I looked into the field in depth," the young man continued, "I became confident that I had something to offer. Thanks to a few good high school teachers and college professors, I knew where to place a comma and a colon, so I had a technical skill to offer publishers. And I knew sailing. But the big need I saw was one I discovered when I was teaching school and again when I was an assistant manager at a McDonald's—a need for people who can get things done. Such a quality is hard to describe without an analogy. I could have alluded to any number of jobs I had held, but I chose the baby-sitting job because I thought it would be different and would introduce an element of surprise. Apparently, the analogy worked. I got the job. More important, I wanted it. If I had received a job offer after sending the first letter, before I had really investigated publishing, I would have taken the job with an attitude of 'teach me.' That's a passive role, an observer's role, and observers tend to be critical. The chances are fifty-fifty that I would not have known how or where to contribute and would have quit after a while. Instead of offering my employer solutions to his problems, I would have become one of his problems."

I asked the young man if he had used any other supporting documents, such as a resume, to help him get the job. "I had a resume," he replied, "but I held it

back, because my task was to transfer the qualities I had demonstrated as a babysitter to the needs of a publisher, and I couldn't seem to do that in a resume. A resume is a good way to outline facts, but I had to use prose to develop the analogy.

"I did think about including a writing sample, but when I studied the magazine I realized that most of the articles were written by contributors rather than staff. Their job was to select and edit articles. If I presented myself as a writer, I wouldn't have received an offer; the magazine didn't hire authors. When a friend of mine saw an advertisement for an editing job, he made a list of the required qualifications, then presented his case point by point, right on target. Then the dope attached a resume that said loud and clear, 'I want to be a writer.' He either should have skipped the resume or prepared a new one."

Are these examples intended to be good arguments for not using resumes? No. They simply emphasize that it is important to determine the best way to get a message across. There are times when there is no substitute for a resume. When employers advertise and list the qualifications they seek, there is no better way to respond than to send a resume outlining qualifications.

LETTERS OF APPLICATION

Sometimes, however, it is hard to figure out how to make the letter of application you send with your resume more effective than those of the hundreds of other people who are responding to the ad. Imagine being on the receiving end of applications at General Motors or Exxon.

To find out about the effectiveness of letters and resumes, I visited corporations and asked employment managers for their comments. "Here," said one employment manager, as he picked up an 18-inch stack of letters and handed it to me. "This is my morning's mail. Read these letters and you'll have your answer."

"I can't," I protested. "I have only 2 hours, and there's a day's reading here."

"Yes, you can," he replied. "Unfortunately, you'll get through the pack in half an hour, because a glance will tell you that most are not worth reading."

It was hard to believe that the letters could be that bad, but he was right. The typical letter was an insult. Among the letters that I did not finish reading was one that was obviously a copy—the machine must have run out of toner thirty copies back. It began:

Dear Sir:

I am writing to the top companies in each industry and yours is certainly that. I want to turn my outstanding qualities of leadership and my can-do abilities to. . . .

Enough of that. Also, the applicant hadn't even bothered to type in the employment manager's name, which he could easily have found in reference books such as the CPC Annual, published by the College Placement Council, and Peterson's Job Opportunities, published by Peterson's Guides.

The next letter was written in pencil on notepaper. There may have been an Einstein behind that one, but I can't imagine anyone taking the time to find it out. Many other letters were smudged and messy. Some applicants tried to attract attention with stunts, such as putting cute cartoons on their letters. One piece of mail contained a walnut and a note that read, "Every business has a tough nut to crack. If you have a tough nut to crack and need someone to do it, crack this nut." Inside the nut, all wadded up, was a resume. Cute tricks and cleverness don't work at the General Mammoth Corporation.

At the same time, the good letters stood out like gold. Five letters, only five letters in that pile of hundreds, were worth reading. They had this in common:

- They looked like business letters. Their paragraphing, their neatness, and their crisp white 8 1/2" X 11" stationery attracted attention like good-looking clothing and good grooming.
- They were succinct.
- There were no misspellings or grammatical errors.

As I read them, I heard a voice—the voice of a fussy old high school English teacher—commanding out of the past:

- If you can't spell a word, look it up in a dictionary.
- Use a typewriter. Pen and ink are for love letters.
- Clean your typewriter. Avoid fuzzy type. You wouldn't interview in a dirty shirt, so don't send a dirty resume or letter.
- For format, use a secretarial manual. If you don't have one, borrow one from the library. What do you think libraries are for?

How that English teacher would have loved the following advice given by the late Malcolm Forbes when he was editor-in-chief of *Forbes* magazine:

Edit ruthlessly. Somebody ~~has~~ said that words are ~~a lot~~ like inflated money—the more ~~of them~~ that you use, the less each one ~~of them~~ is worth. ~~Right on.~~ Go through your entire letter ~~just~~ as many times as it takes. ~~Search out and~~ Annihilate all unnecessary words ~~and~~ sentences—even ~~entire~~ paragraphs.

The following letter is typical of those I saw that day. Give it the Forbes treatment, and see what you can do with it. You may need a scissors as well as a pencil.

Dear Mr. Employer:

I am writing to you because I am going to be looking for employment after I graduate which will be from Michigan where I studied Chemical Engineering and I will be getting a Bachelor of Science degree in June. The field in which I am interested and hope to pursue is process design and that is why I am writing your company to see if you have openings like that. I think I have excellent qualifications and you will find them described in the resume which I have attached to this letter.

The five letters that stood out favorably were characterized by their simplicity. Here is a letter, fictitious of course, but enough like the letter I remember to give you an idea of the ones that created a favorable impression:

February 1, 1991

Mr. Paul Boynton
Manager of Employment
The United States Oil Company
1 Chicago Plaza
Chicago, Illinois 60607

Dear Mr. Boynton:

This June I will receive a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering from the University of Michigan, and I hope to work in process design or instrumentation. I saw your description in *Peterson's Job Opportunities for Engineering, Science, and Computer Graduates* soliciting applicants with my interests. Enclosed is a resume to help you evaluate my qualifications.

While I find all aspects of refining interesting, my special interest in process design and instrumentation developed while working as a laboratory assistant to Professor Juiliard Smith, who teaches process design. I wrote my senior thesis on the subject of instrumentation under him, and part of what I wrote will be used in a textbook he is writing and editing.

Would it be possible to have an interview with you in Chicago during the week of March 1? To be even more specific, could it be arranged for 10 A.M. on Tuesday, March 3? I am going to be in Chicago that week, and this time and date would be best for me, but of course I would work out another time more convenient for you. In any event, I will call your office the week before to determine whether an interview is possible.

Sincerely yours,

Charles C. Thompson

Thompson's effective letter, and three of the four others, followed a similar pattern:

1. The first paragraph stated who the writer was and what he wanted.
2. The second paragraph, sometimes the third, and in one case a fourth paragraph, indicated why the writer wrote to the employer and mentioned areas of mutual interest, special talents that might be of interest to employers, or other factors relating to qualifications that could be better described in a letter than in a resume.
3. A final paragraph suggested a course of action.

The fifth letter covered the same points in a different order. I remember it because it complemented the good but not outstanding resume shown in Figure 1. In that resume, a perceptive employer could see a person he might like, someone who was energetic and personable. Yet it didn't quite hang together, because the work history and activities didn't seem to support what the writer wanted to do. But look at the letter that "made" the resume:

LANCE ZAROTE			
Campus Address	101 Morril Hall	Permanent Address	25 The Byway
	University of Puget Sound		Provincetown, Massachusetts 05840
	Tacoma, Washington 95840		(617) 555-6026
	(206) 555-6206		
GOAL:	A SALES CAREER		
EDUCATION:	UNIVERSITY OF PUGET SOUND		
	Bachelor of Arts 1991		
	Philosophy Major		
	Business-Related Courses		
	Statistics	Introduction to Computers	
	Economics	Calculus	
	Accounting	English	
EMPLOYMENT:	UNIVERSITY OF PUGET SOUND (Work-Study Program)		
	Dining hall supervisor		1990-91
	Kitchen helper		1987-89
	OTHER WORK while in college		
	Ma and Pa Motel, Tacoma—night clerk		1990
	Joe's Bar and Grill—weekend waiter		
	& bartender		1989-1991
	Baby-sitting, gardening, house cleaning		1985-1991
	WATCHEE OUTLET SUMMER CAMP, Nome, Alaska		1990
	Sailing coach and waterfront director		1986-1989
	Counselor		
ACTIVITIES:	CAMPUS		
	Chair, Campus Chest Drive		
	Intramural hockey, tennis, and volleyball		
	LIVING UNIT		
	House Manager, \$25,000 budget		
	Secretary		
	Membership Committee		
	CIVIC		
	Reader-companion in nursing home		
	Big Brother-Sister Program, Southside Youth Center		
	CHURCH		
	Choir		
	Youth leader		
	Sunday school teacher		
INTERESTS:	Skiing		
	Chess		
	Music		
	Dancing		

FIGURE 1 An ordinary resume can become effective when attached to a powerful letter.

Mr. Paul Boynton, Manager of Employment
The United States Oil Company
1 Chicago Plaza
Chicago, Illinois 60607

March 10, 1991

Dear Mr. Boynton:

This June, following my graduation from the University of Puget Sound, I want to pursue a career in sales. Between April 10 and 23, I plan to call on leading companies whose products I would like to sell. The purpose of this letter is to determine whether you would like to have me include you in my itinerary.

Let me tell you why I believe I can sell. It seems to me that I am always selling. As a camp counselor, I persuaded the director to buy a fleet of small sailboats so I could start a sailing program. When our college housing co-op needed painting, I persuaded the members to give up a vacation to do the job. In thinking about how I enjoyed selling these and other projects, I decided to look into a sales career. I persuaded several sales representatives to let me spend a day or more traveling with them to see what it was like.

While with them I realized something more about myself that further convinced me I belong in sales. The best sales representatives were well organized, had high energy levels, and used their time efficiently, qualities I feel I have. As evidence, I have enclosed a resume that outlines my accomplishments in college and during vacations.

I hope to hear from you. United States Oil is in the top group of employers on my list.

Sincerely,

Lance Zarote

Encl: Resume

Hard Work and Attention to Detail Make for a Good Letter

While only the five letters I have mentioned were effective, the rest of the correspondents could have done as well. The point is they didn't. Most people won't. Therein lies your opportunity, because, like Thompson and Zarote, you can write letters that set you apart. You don't have to create a literary masterpiece; just don't knock off a letter hastily with thoughts that wander all over the page. Write it and rewrite it, following Forbes's advice. Unless you are an exceptional typist, you are not good enough to type it yourself. Hire a professional or use a word processor, but be sure the print is letter quality. Also, get an English teacher or someone in the word business to check your spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

Don't Delegate the Job of Letter Writing

More important than style, however, is the thought process used in preparing letters and resumes. Don't shortchange yourself by delegating your thinking to someone else. Be sure it is *your* letter. Somehow, a ghost-written letter always has a phony ring to it. When you write to employers, think about their needs; then

think about yourself and what you offer, and relate this to what you would like to do. Putting your thoughts on paper—thoughtfully—will make you sort out your ideas and interrelate them. When you see them on paper they will talk back to you, at times to suggest better ideas, at other times to tell you that you are off the mark. To organize your ideas, create an outline. In other words, prepare a resume even if you decide not to use it. *The value of a resume is frequently more in its preparation than in its use.*

RESUME PREPARATION

When you do give an employer your resume, make it a testimony to your ability to organize your thoughts. Remember, too, it must look sufficiently attractive to get an employer to read it. Unfortunately, most of the resumes I have seen on employers' desks were just as unattractive as the letters; they had sloppy, crowded margins, were poorly organized, and were badly reproduced. At least 30 percent of the resumes had been put aside with hardly a glance because their physical appearance was so awful. The rest got a 20-second scan to see if they were worth studying.

Following are two resumes that pass the appearance test with flying colors. Let's see how they fare during a 20-second scan and beyond.

Nancy Jones—A Good Resume Made Better

Nancy Jones's resume has arrived at the desk of a laboratory director who needs an assistant to help run a quality-control laboratory in a pharmaceutical company (Figure 2). With candidates far outnumbering openings in biology, the advertisement for the job has brought in hundreds of applications, and the director is wearily scanning them one by one to find the few that will be of interest to him. Conditions are not favorable for Nancy. She has to catch his eye with impressive qualifications, or she is not going to get anywhere.

The director picks up Nancy's resume. Immediately, he is impressed, because it looks attractive. He thinks the resume reflects an orderly mind. Most resumes he has looked at just do not put it all together.

He begins to read. The job objective annoys him; it strikes him as being long-winded. Why couldn't she simply say she is interested in applied biology? What is this business about working with people? Is that there because she has doubts about biology?

If resumes are supposed to say only what needs to be said, what about this line?

Born January 6, 1969 5'7" 135 lbs. Single Excellent health

Does it say anything about her ability to do the job? The biologist doesn't think so.

His eyes move down the page:

NANCY O. JONES			
<u>Present Address</u>	105 Belleville Place Ames, Iowa 50011 Phone: 515-555-6674	After June 1, 1991 1212 Centerline Road Old Westbury, New York 11568 Phone: 516-555-7664	
	Born January 6, 1969	5'7" 135 lbs.	Single Excellent health
<u>Career Objective</u>	Research and development in most areas of applied biology, with an opportunity to work with people as well		
<u>Education</u>	Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa Bachelor of Science, June 1991 Major: Biology Concentration: Physiology GPA: 3.3 on a 4.0 scale		
	Major Subjects Mammalian Physiology Vertebrate Anatomy Histology Genetics	Minor Subjects Qualitative Analysis Quantitative Analysis Organic Chemistry Biochemistry	
<u>Scholarships and Honors</u>	University Scholarship: \$2850/year Iowa State Science and Research Award Dean's List two semesters		
<u>Activities</u>	Volunteer Probation Officer, 1988-89 Probation Department, Ames, Iowa Tutor, Chemistry and Math, 1988-91 Central High School, Ames, Iowa Member, Kappa Zeta social sorority Women's Intercollegiate Hockey Team		
	Familiarity with Spanish; PL/C and FORTRAN computer languages; typing		
<u>Special Skills</u>			
<u>Work Experience</u>	Teaching Assistant and Laboratory Instructor Freshman Biology School year, 1990-91 Waitress, Four Seasons Restaurant Catalina Island Summers, 1989-90		

FIGURE 2 The resume of Nancy O. Jones does not communicate her career-related experience.

Education

Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa
Bachelor of Science, June 1991
Major: Biology Concentration: Physiology
GPA: 3.3 on a 4.0 scale

Major Subjects
Mammalian Physiology
Vertebrate Anatomy
Histology
Genetics

Minor Subjects
Qualitative Analysis
Quantitative Analysis
Organic Chemistry
Biochemistry

She has used the outline form well, so he is able to take in a great deal of information in one look. Her education impresses him.

Double spacing above and below her grade point average makes it stand out. However, if her average had not been quite as good, and if she had not wanted to feature it, she could have used single spacing to make it less conspicuous, like this:

Education

Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa
Bachelor of Science, June 1991
Major: Biology Concentration: Physiology
GPA: 2.7 on a 4.0 scale

Now that she has told him about her grades and her courses she wants to drive home the point that she was no ordinary student. She flags him down with the headline "Scholarships and Honors," and he sees her financial aid and science awards, which make a favorable impression. Two times on the dean's list may not be important enough to set apart by double spacing, but it makes a modest impression. Up until now, Nancy has made a favorable impression overall. The director is ready to take in the next batch of information:

Activities

Volunteer Probation Officer, 1988-89
Probation Department, Ames, Iowa

Tutor, Chemistry and Math, 1988-91
Central High School, Ames, Iowa

Member, Kappa Zeta social sorority
Women's Intercollegiate Hockey Team

She almost loses him by featuring her work as a probation officer. That is not of primary interest to him, but through good spacing and placement, she draws his eye to the next item, which states that she has tutored chemistry and math. Unfortunately, Nancy now loses him permanently by ranking tutoring along with the sorority and the hockey team. He guesses she has made her major statement about biology, and so he turns to the next resume.

Good as it is, Nancy Jones's resume could be improved by reorganization. Her tutoring chemistry and her two years as a teaching assistant and laboratory instructor in biology reveal a more-than-academic interest in biology. They should be featured. Everything related to biology and any other information of possible use to the employer should be put under a new marginal headline and statement, as follows:

Career-Related Experience

Biology Lab Instructor and Teaching Assistant
Freshman Biology (1990-91)

Chemistry and Mathematics Tutor
Central High School, Ames, Iowa (1988-91)

Skills and Interests

Microscopy	Computer Languages:
Electron Microscopy	FORTRAN, PL/1,
Histology	COBOL
Spectrum Analysis	Statistics
Small-Animal Surgery	

Now, the director is able to see the things she can do. "Good," he says to himself, "she can use an electron microscope. We need someone with that skill."

By no means should Nancy eliminate mention of the hockey team, but since she is applying for a professional job, the first bait to throw out is credentials; they testify to her ability to do the work. After that, what may sink the hook is how the employer sees her as a person. He may have picked out bits here and there that testify to her diligence, but the picking out depends on chance reading; it would be best not to leave anything to chance. With a slightly different presentation, she might ensure that he receives an impression of her diligence.

There are other areas she could strengthen, things she has underplayed or totally neglected to mention. Sticking the waitress job in down at the bottom of the page is almost an apology for it. She may also have had other jobs, such as baby-sitting, household work, or door-to-door sales, that she belittles in her mind and has not even mentioned. Mention of such things might make a good impression on an employer looking for somebody who is not afraid to work and who is mature for her years.

If we quizzed Nancy, we might find that she could put something like this on her resume:

Scholarshipsand FinancialSupport

90% self-supporting through college as follows:

University Scholarship: \$2850/year

Iowa State Science and Research Award

Waitress, Four Seasons Restaurant

Catalina Island (Summers, 1989-90)

Teaching and instructing, baby-sitting, home maintenance, selling

And this, because her activities tell something about her as a person:

Activities

Volunteer Probation Officer (1988-89)

Kappa Zeta social sorority

Women's Intercollegiate Hockey Team

Skiing, sailing, singing, tennis

Double spacing has been cut down so as not to overemphasize the less important items, yet a string of other things not terribly important in themselves has been inserted to support the impression of an active, interesting person. Sometimes you want to leave an impression at other times you want to emphasize a quality.

cation. For example, Nancy wanted to feature her studies, and the way she brought them out by listing them in a column was good. If she had listed them like this, they would not have stood out:

Major Subjects: Mammalian Physiology, Vertebrate
Anatomy, Histology, Genetics
Minor Subjects: Quantitative Analysis, Qualitative
Analysis, Organic Chemistry, Biochemistry

In Figure 3, you will see the Nancy Jones resume as she might have revised it to emphasize the strong points that would have been of interest to that director who was looking for a resourceful assistant. The added emphasis might have made the difference that would have landed the job for her.

Nancy's revised resume is pure outline, devoid of prose. It works well for her. When she states that she has studied quantitative and qualitative analysis and knows PL/1 and FORTRAN, a scientist reading her resume knows what this means.

Janet Smith—The Proper Use of Headlines

Janet Smith, whose resume is shown in Figure 4, has a different problem in presenting her qualifications. She needs to *describe* what she did in order to tell an employer about their qualifications, so her resume calls for a mixture of key words and prose to get her message across. Yet prose can destroy the effect of an outline. The solution lies in imitating newspaper editors, who use headlines and subheadlines to attract readers. Like a newspaper, a resume should lend itself to skimming so the reader can quickly pick up a good overview of what is important. Then the reader can select specific things of interest and read further. There is an art to using headlines, but Janet Smith hasn't mastered it, at least not in the resume she used to apply for a job with Hermann Langfelder, a hardbitten old hand with thirty years in personnel and labor relations in the machinery business. He picked up her resume and read:

CAREER

OBJECTIVE

A challenging position in personnel administration requiring organizational ability and an understanding of how people function in business and industry.

That was pure baloney, and he choked on it. He thought of the hours he had spent in meetings, listening to a lot of hot air. "Challenging, my foot!" he muttered. Then he read the bit about her organizational ability and her understanding of how people function in business and industry. "I've been at this business for thirty years," he grouched to himself, "and I still can't figure out how people function in industry. But she knows all about it."

Beware of Misleading Headlines

"Well, let's see what she's done," he said to himself, and then his eyes fell on "UNIVERSAL METHODIST CHURCH." That did it! He didn't want to bring any do-gooder into his factory to preach. He rejected her. And the fault was hers in using the headline

NANCY O. JONES	
Present Address 105 Belleville Place Ames, Iowa 50011 Phone: 515-555-6674	After June 1, 1991 1212 Centerline Road Old Westbury, New York 11568 Phone: 516-555-7664
Career Objective	Research and development
Education	Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa Bachelor of Science, June 1991 Major: Biology Concentration: Physiology GPA: 3.3 on a 4.0 scale Major Subjects Mammalian Physiology Vertebrate Anatomy Histology Genetics Minor subjects Qualitative Analysis Quantitative Analysis Organic Chemistry Biochemistry
Career-Related Experience	Biology Lab Instructor and Teaching Assistant Freshman Biology (1990-91) Chemistry and Mathematics Tutor Central High School, Ames, Iowa (1988-91)
Skills and Interests	Microscopy Electron Microscopy Histology Spectrum Analysis Small-Animal Surgery Computer Languages: FORTRAN, PL/1, COBOL Statistics
Scholarships and Financial Support	90% self-supporting through college as follows: University Scholarship: \$2850/year Iowa State Science and Research Award Waitress, Four Seasons Restaurant Catalina Island (Summers, 1989-90) Teaching and instructing, baby-sitting, home maintenance, selling
Activities	Volunteer Probation Officer (1988-89) Kappa Zeta social sorority Women's Intercollegiate Hockey Team Skiing, sailing, singing, tennis

FIGURE 3 The revised resume of Nancy O. Jones effectively features her career-related experience in a separate section.

JANET V. SMITH 111 Main Street North Hero, Vermont 05073 802-555-1234	
CAREER OBJECTIVE	A challenging position in personnel administration requiring organizational ability and an understanding of how people function in business and industry.
EDUCATION	PURDUE UNIVERSITY Hammond, Indiana Master of Industrial Relations June 1991 SMITH COLLEGE Northampton, Massachusetts Bachelor of Arts, magna cum laude June 1986 UNIVERSAL METHODIST CHURCH 1 Central Square New York, New York 10027 Assistant Personnel Officer, 1988-90 Responsible for interviewing applicants for clerical positions within the organization and for placing those who demonstrated appropriate skills, for accepting and dealing with employees' grievances, and for developing programs on career advancement.
WORK EXPERIENCE	CORTEN STEEL COMPANY 10 Lake Street Akron, Ohio 44309 Assistant, Personnel Office, 1986-88 Responsible for all correspondence of Personnel Director and for interviewing some custodial applicants and referring them to appropriate supervisors for further interviewing. BORG-WARNER, INC. Ithaca, New York 14850 Assembly-line worker, Summer 1985 Assembled parts of specialized drive chains in company with thirty other men and women.
COMMUNITY SERVICE	PLANNED PARENTHOOD North Hero, Vermont 05073 Counselor, Summers, 1983-84 Explained various aspects of family planning and provided birth control information to clients of Planned Parenthood. Made referrals to other counselors and physicians where appropriate.
AUXILIARY SKILLS	French: Fluent. Knowledge of office procedures. Experience with mainframe computers and PCs.

FIGURE 4 The resume for Janet V. Smith misleads the reader with irrelevant headings.

Janet's job at the church was administrative, not ministerial, and the church didn't care whether she was Jewish, Catholic, or agnostic. Only in its ministerial work does the Methodist Church need Methodists. But people—Langfelder and the rest of us—respond to symbols and make snap judgments on the basis of symbols. Janet had put the symbol of the church—its name—in a heading, when she could have done something better.

When you lay out your resume, think of symbols. Imagine you are a newspaper editor who wants to put a story across. As an editor planning headlines, you must imagine yourself in the position of the reader. Ask yourself, "What words will catch the reader's eye? What word will put the reader off?"

Use words that fit the job in question, and play down those that can lead an employer to think of you in terms that don't relate to the job. Ask yourself, "Does this say something to the employer?" Janet Smith missed Langfelder, and some of her duties would have yielded key words to send appropriate messages. The following arrangement would have been more effective for her:

WORK
EXPERIENCE

ASSISTANT PERSONNEL OFFICER, 1988-90
Universal Methodist Church
1 Central Square
New York, New York 10027

Interviewing, placement, grievances, and training of applicants and employees in the clerical and support services of the church organization. Developed programs for the career advancement of employees.

ASSISTANT, PERSONNEL OFFICE, 1986-88
Corten Steel Company
10 Lake Street
Akron, Ohio 44309

Interviewing and referring as an assistant to Personnel Director. Responsible for all correspondence and for interviewing some custodial applicants and referring them to supervisors for further interviews.

Let's suppose that Janet has a chance to send Langfelder the revised resume shown in Figure 5. This time, she uses headlines that pinpoint the ideas she most wants to get across, so that he makes it past the Universal Methodist Church and gets down to the assembly line. "Hey, now, look at that!" he thinks. "She's worked out there on the floor. That means she's heard all the language and knows the gripes and the tedium. We have a lot of women in this factory, and it might be a good thing to have a down-to-earth, smart woman on my staff." (His sexism may have been showing, but this kind of employer is alive and kicking somewhere out there, and you may have to deal with him.)

What if Janet Smith wanted a job in the computer industry and had had ten years' experience with IBM? Employers are impressed by "graduates" of companies

<div>JANET V. SMITH 111 Main Street North Hero, Vermont 05073 802-555-1234</div>	
CAREER INTERESTS	Personnel Administration and Labor Relations
EDUCATION	PURDUE UNIVERSITY June 1991 Hammond, Indiana Master of Industrial Relations SMITH COLLEGE June 1986 Northampton, Massachusetts Bachelor of Arts, magna cum laude
WORK EXPERIENCE	ASSISTANT PERSONNEL OFFICER, 1988-90 Universal Methodist Church 1 Central Square New York, New York 10027 <u>Interviewing, placement, grievances, and training</u> of applicants and employees in the clerical and support services of the church organization. Developed programs for the career advancement of employees. ASSISTANT, PERSONNEL OFFICE, 1986-88 Corten Steel Company 10 Lake Street Akron, Ohio 44309 <u>Interviewing and referring</u> as an assistant to Personnel Director. Responsible for all correspondence and for interviewing some custodial applicants and referring them to supervisors for further interviews. ASSEMBLY-LINE WORKER, Summer 1985 Borg-Warner, Inc. Ithaca, New York 14850 Factory work experience on an assembly line. Worked with a team of thirty other men and women.
COMMUNITY SERVICE	COUNSELOR, Summers, 1983-84 Planned Parenthood North Hero, Vermont 05073 Explained various aspects of family planning and provided birth control information to clients of Planned Parenthood. Made referrals to other counselors and physicians where appropriate.
AUXILIARY SKILLS	French: Fluent. Knowledge of office procedures. Experience with mainframe computers and PCs.

FIGURE 5 The revised resume for Janet V. Smith stresses what she did rather than the less important point of where she did it.

like IBM that are known as leaders in their fields. Ten years with them is significant. It might make sense to present her experience this way:

EXPERIENCE

1981-91

IBM Corporation
Binghamton, New York
Assistant Personnel Officer

Were she an engineer after a technical job that could use her IBM experience, highlighting the name of the company would have been a good idea. Imagine employers giving the resume a 20-second scan. What words should you use and how should they be placed to catch the eye and make employers want to read further?

Mark Meyers—The Functional Resume

Janet Smith and Nancy Jones were lucky. Their training and experience translated into satisfactory headlines to highlight their experience, but that doesn't always work. Mark Meyers, whose resume appears in Figure 6, adopted a different technique to help him get a job in community recreation. He got his message across by creating a resume based on functions.

When he began to write his resume, he tried time and time again to get his message across in a conventional form in which he first listed his education, then his experiences in chronological order, and finally his activities, hobbies, and interests. But writing it conventionally raised all sorts of problems. He wanted to highlight his public relations and promotion experience, some of which he had been paid for and some not. Some of it had also been secondary to a primary assignment. Dividing up this experience and placing bits and pieces of it in various parts of the resume to make it conform to a conventional style diluted its impact. Also, his athletic ability and experience would mean a great deal to an employer in his field, but how could he show it effectively? Some of it had been gained as a participant, some through training, and some as a coach. Could he expect an employer to sift through the various sections of the resume to find out all he had done in athletics? (Remember, you can only count on an employer giving a resume a quick scan before deciding whether or not to study it more fully.)

His solution, as seen in Figure 6, was to feature the functions of the job he wanted and then describe things he had done that pertained to each area. Thus, under each function he developed the equivalent of a mini-resume.

Preparing a Resume for a Specific Job

Mark stated his case well, but you can't get blood from a stone. He found he had to look outside his field, because jobs in it were virtually nonexistent due to cutbacks in government funding. In his search, he ran across the following job listing from the publisher of a magazine for parents:

EDITORIAL SECRETARY

BA. in Liberal Arts
Interested in childhood training. Well organized, outstanding language skills. Typing and clerical skills, potential to use electronic text-editing equipment. Reporting to Coordinating Editor, Happy Days magazine. Assist in all editorial functions. Evidence of creativity essential. Entry-level position with career potential.

Can you put yourself in his shoes, analyze the job, and devise a resume that speaks to the stated needs of this employer? The clue to doing it is to go through the job description and step by step take your cue from the employer. Right off, you will hit a bit of a snag because the employer has specified a B.A., while Mark has a B.S. His drama minor might give him appropriate credentials, however. If he shows his education as in the following example it might reflect the liberal background the employer apparently prefers:

EDUCATION

HOBOKEN UNIVERSITY, B.S., 1987
Major: Recreation Minor: Drama

Humanities courses:

Introduction to Dramatic Literature
British Drama to 1700
History of Theater
Playwriting
Introduction to Poetry
Shakespeare
English History

Next, the job calls for an interest in childhood training, then language skills, and so on. Each specification suggests a headline for a resume. Mark faces another stumbling block when it comes to demonstrating an interest in childhood training, since his experience has been with older youths only. Since a resume makes points by stating facts, he cannot demonstrate an interest in childhood training in his resume because he lacks the appropriate experience. However, he *can* describe his interest in the letter that usually goes hand in glove with a resume. He has a good basis for doing so, because the field of recreation certainly has much to do with the entire range of human development from childhood on. He should be able to point out correlatives in his education and experience with the work being done in childhood training, and he could check a library for information about childhood training to help develop the correlatives. Above all, he should read the magazine and try to tie in as many of his experiences as possible with the purpose of the magazine.

With his interest in childhood training brought out in a letter to complement his resume, he might then proceed to develop his outline as follows:

EXPERIENCE

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Dover Youth Bureau. Planned and implemented programs in drama, photography, athletics, health. Summer 1986

Research Project. Studied recreational needs of a Hoboken neighborhood. Interviewed residents, developed questionnaire. Project provided an insight into the family life and problems of parents in a neighborhood setting. Fall semester 1986

Outdoor Leadership Training. Practical experience in human development through a knowledge of nature and survival skills. Summer 1983.

LANGUAGE SKILLS AND CREATIVITY

Writing. Wrote releases, developed advertising, and prepared radio announcements for Drama Club, men's sports programs, and other events. Wrote report on Hoboken research project. 1984–87

Lecturing. Gave talks and led tours at Atlantic County (Delaware) Park nature trail and visitors' center. Summer 1985

Audiovisual. Prepared slides for audiovisual presentation for visitors' center. 1985.

Promotional. Created innovative techniques—such as costume parade of cast—to arouse interest in avant-garde staging of "Alice in Wonderland," which gained campuswide attention. 1984–85.

Design. Designed posters, fliers, and other graphics for sporting events, plays, and other campus events. 1984–87.

Constructed nature exhibits at nature center. 1985.

CLERICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE

Clerical. Typing and use of office machinery. McGary's Department Store. Summer 1982.

Administration. Responsible for equipment, scheduling of programs, and coordinating of competitions. Hoboken University, 1984–86.

The functional resume allows you to develop a different message for each job or type of job you wish to apply for. Different functions can be highlighted, depending on what the job requires, and your specific experiences rearranged under different headings. It gives you the flexibility you need if your experience has been diverse.

Almost every resume ought to have something of the functional resume about it. With computers making it so easy to change a text, there is no reason why each resume can't be slanted to appeal to the particular employer, even if it's the resume of a generalist like Bruce Gregory Robinson, who hopes to get into a training program.

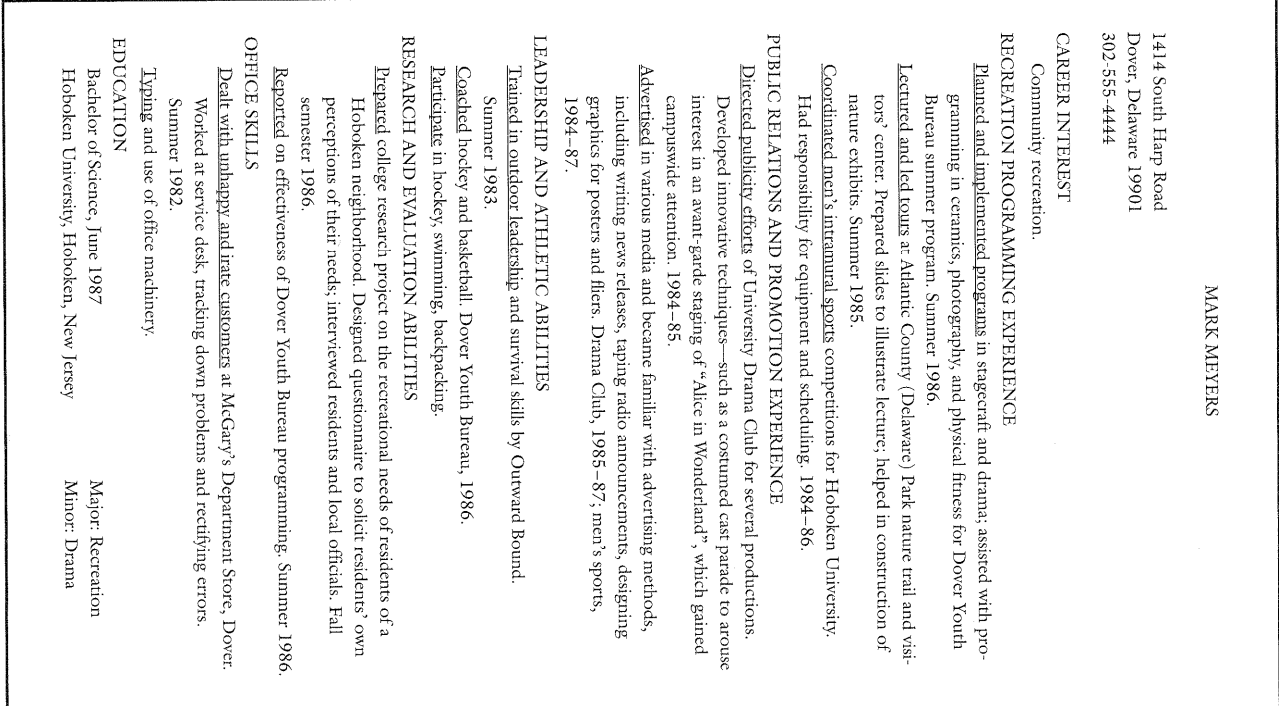


FIGURE 6 The resume of Mark Meyers illustrates the functional style.

Bruce Gregory Robertson—A Resume Reflecting an Active Mind and Body

Put yourself in the chair of a merit employer, someone who is interested in candidates not so much for what they know as for what they can learn. Imagine yourself as a banker, a merchant, or a manufacturer. The position you have to fill can be learned easily on the job. What interests you are candidates' traits—their energy, intelligence, leadership qualities—the things that tell you the candidate can grow in your employ and eventually become an executive in the company. You are looking for a resume that reflects an active person with an active mind. Bruce Robertson is such a person, and his resume shown in Figure 7 has been designed accordingly.

Now make yourself a textbook publisher. Again, you are a merit employer and promote from within. Your company hires people with a good liberal education and little or no postgraduate experience. The men and women you hire will travel from college to college either soliciting manuscripts from professors or showing them texts that might fit their courses. Impressive candidates should have a high energy level and be able to show that they have used time efficiently and worked independently. How does Bruce look to you?

Now change the scenario slightly. This time you are a publisher of texts for primary and secondary school. To get your texts adopted, your representatives will have to make presentations to state regents, school superintendents, and other educational groups. Remember that experience and college major don't matter, but do you think it might help Bruce's cause if he did a bit more to highlight his interest in public speaking and his honors as a debater? He has a computer. It would be a cinch for him to change his resume slightly. Can you think how he might do it?

Next, put yourself in the chair of an employer on Main Street. You need someone in customer relations, a person to follow up on complaints and misunderstandings about credit arrangements or bills. You want to hire someone who has had experience of this kind. Still, the work easily could be learned on the job . . . if the right person came along. In response to your classified advertisement, Bruce's resume arrives accompanied by a routine cover letter. He recounts people problems he has resolved and describes his administrative experience in a way that indicates he is a team worker. What's your decision? What if his letter is more inspired?

Michelle Trio—The Curriculum Vitae

A curriculum vitae (literally, "course of life" in Latin), sometimes called a C.V. or vita, is a resume for academic positions and as such does not need a statement of goals or interest. While there is merit in keeping nonacademic resumes brief by focusing on employers' needs, a faculty tends to select colleagues not just to teach but for the prestige they will bring to the department, especially in the long run. An eminent faculty attracts eminent associates. Publications, research, memberships, and honors all contribute to telling what a candidate is like; hence

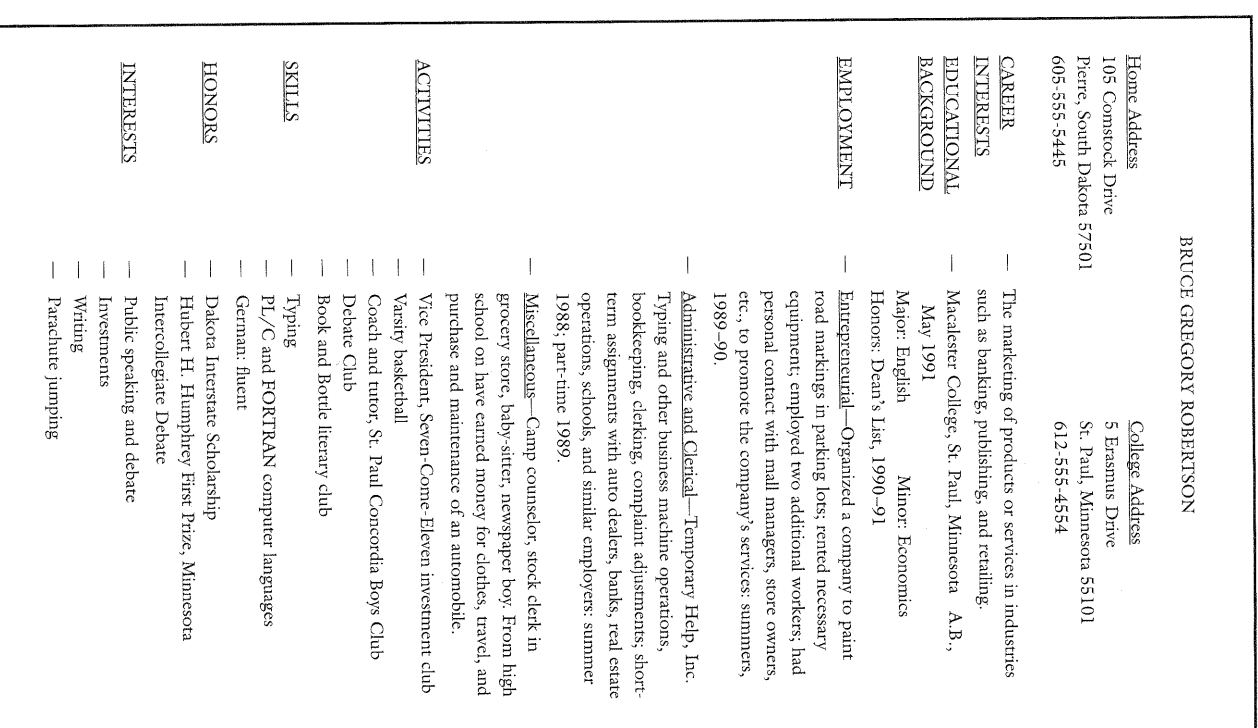


FIGURE 7 A resume designed more to reflect an active, energetic personality than specific experience.

long vitae that reflect many achievements are traditional. The same candidate applying for an industrial position wouldn't list a raft of publications, for example, if those publications didn't relate to the job in question.

The C.V. that is shown in Figure 8 lays out in a logical way all the essentials of a good vita. Note the correct way to list publications. In academia, those who list them incorrectly are jeopardizing their chances of being hired.

The Job Objective

"Do I have to have a job objective?" According to my calculations, as of this writing I have been a career counselor for 2,288 weeks, and I have been asked this question at least six times a week, except for the 132 weeks when I was on vacation. When I answer, "No, I don't like the heading JOB OBJECTIVE," the sigh of relief is audible. The job seekers think I have let them off the hook for one of the most important parts of a resume. I haven't. With rare exceptions, a resume *should* open with an objective—it's the way it is stated that can be changed.

I show them the preceding Robertson, Meyers, and Smith resumes and tell them that I prefer the headline CAREER INTEREST, because it leads to a simple and direct way of stating the purpose of the resume. For example, I suggest they try rewriting the Robertson and revised Smith statements of interest as job objectives to see if they don't find it awkward. After a struggle they come up with the same kind of baloney found in the unrevised Jones and Smith resumes.

They listen politely. I may have helped them with a minor problem of phrasing, but I know that I really haven't dealt with their question. Then they tell me what I already know: They don't want to state a goal because they don't know what they want to do. I ask them to imagine themselves as the employers reading their resumes. If theirs is like the revised Nancy Jones resume, which is so obviously slanted toward biology, then employers can figure out what the resume is for without a stated objective. However, I wouldn't fool with a resume that didn't tell me at the outset what it was all about. When I have to start studying a resume to guess what the writer wants, I throw it in the wastebasket.

Next I point to the Zarote and Robertson resumes, which wouldn't make any sense without a statement of purpose. And I can't get up much enthusiasm for a letter as a substitute for an objective. A letter stating a purpose accompanied by a resume without purpose is a wasted letter.

I remember a young woman who, on short notice, got a chance to be interviewed by a recruiter from a large department store. Knowing very little about merchandising, she headed for the nearest department store, where several managers were kind enough to give her information and the loan of their trade journals. In three hours of investigation, her eyes were opened to an industry in which people pursued careers in training, employee relations, promotion, credit, public relations, merchandising, and other occupations. Several of these looked interesting, so thanks to word processing, she easily changed a few things on her resume, then listed her objective like this:

CAREER INTERESTS: Training, promotion, and public relations in a retail setting.

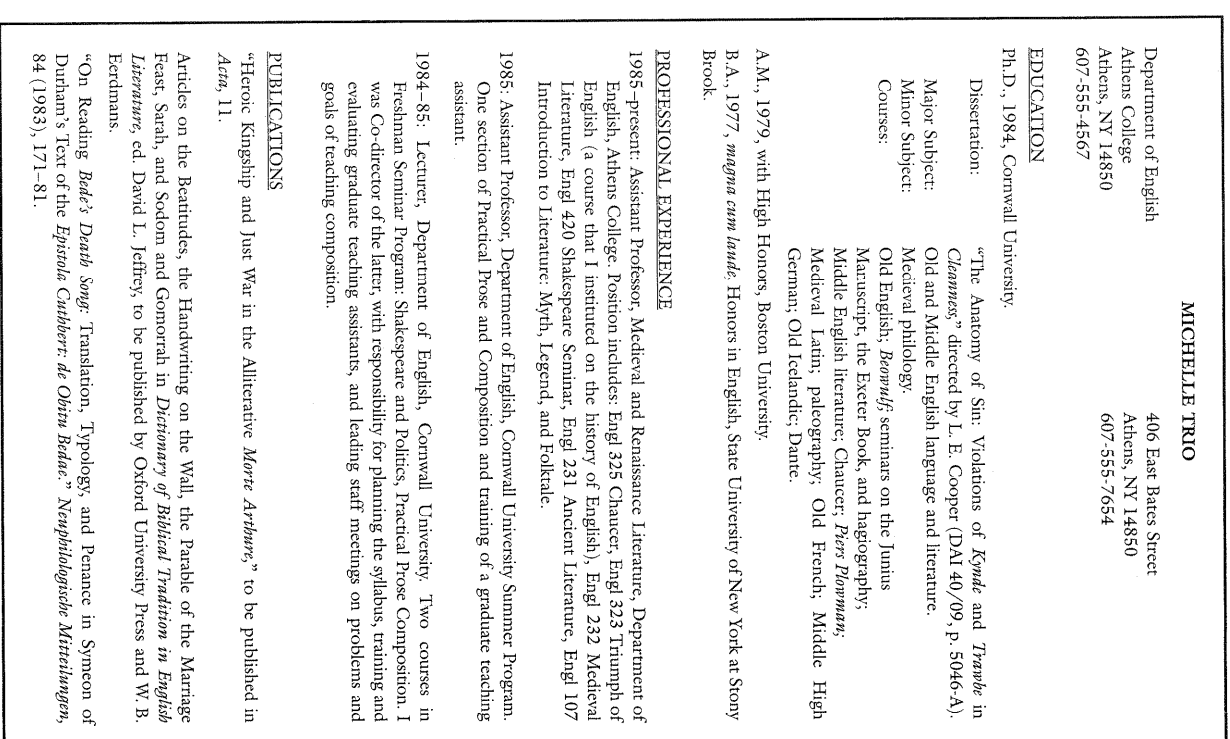


FIGURE 8 A Curriculum Vitae

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE AND ACTIVITIES

1. At Athens College
1989-90: English Department Library Representative.
1989-90: Member, Athens College Faculty Enrichment Committee.
1988-90: English Department Personnel Committee.
1987-89: English Department Committee on the London Center.
2. Elsewhere
1985: Organizer and Chair, Latin Section, Northeast Modern Language Association.
Topic: "Eschatology and Apocalypticism."
1980-82: Organizer and Chair, *Quodlibet*: The Cornwall Medieval Forum.
Memberships in MLA, Medieval Academy of America, International Arthurian Society.

HONORS

- Charles A. Dana Fellowship for Excellence in Teaching, Athens College.
Goethe Prize in German Literature, Cornwall University.
George Lincoln Fellowship in Medieval Studies, Cornwall University.
Teaching Assistantship, Medieval Studies program, Cornwall University ("Medieval Literature in Translation").
Teaching Fellowship, English Department, Boston University ("Freshman Rhetoric and Composition").

LANGUAGES

Reading knowledge of Latin, Old French, Spanish, Italian, Middle High German, and Old Icelandic, in addition to the usual French, German, and Old and Middle English.

CREDENTIALS

Dossier may be obtained from the Educational Placement Bureau, Barnes Hall, Cornwall University, Athens, NY 14853.

Like most of us, her range of aptitudes was wide, so, like a chameleon, she showed the recruiter only those that seemed to match retailing.

One Page or Two?

If a resume can be kept to one page, so much the better. The length depends on the message. In reading resumes in which everything is jammed on one page with none of the white space or headings that can make them attractive and readable, I have wearied of trying to find information and have given up. On the other hand, it has never been the least bit tiring to lift a piece of paper and turn to a second page when scanning an interesting resume. A resume is an outline. It needs a white space. It needs headings that stand out. Don't sacrifice them for some arbitrary notion about a one-page maximum.

Additional Advice About Resumes

No matter how you develop your message, test it before you send it to employers. Get friends to give you a critique of your resume or vita, especially if they are in an occupation in which you hope to find a job. A word of caution, however. Unless you guide them, their critique may relate more to the ritual than to the message. One job hunter had modeled a resume after Janet Smith's. The critic took a red pencil and put all the dates of employment in the left-hand margin. That would have been a good idea if it had indicated long years of experience with a company such as 3M, signifying considerable experience with one of the best-managed companies in the country. But the dates in question referred to short-term summer jobs that were of no consequence to the message and cluttered the margin with information that distracted from the headlines.

One way to get a resume criticized is to hold it up a few feet from the reader and ask for comments on its appearance. Does it look neat? Is the layout pleasing? Does it look easy to read? Is the print good-looking?

Next, give the critics the resume to read. Let them make all the comments they want. You may pick up valuable ideas for improving its style and layout, but be careful you don't get caught up in inconsequentials. What you really want is to have your critics look at the resume as if they didn't know you. You might even show them a resume with an alias, then ask:

- What qualifications does this person have?
- What do you see this person doing with these qualifications?
- What kind of an employer would want to hire this person?
- Does the resume project an image of a certain kind of person? What kind? Aggressive? Thoughtful? Energetic? What?

In other words, ask your critics the most important question about your resume: "What message do you get about me?"

FIGURE 8 (Continued)