**Module 17: Resume Strategies**

**Transcript**

**Intro (video clip 1)**

While finding and applying – competitively – for job opportunities these days is more about building your network and getting referred for positions, you will still need to have the skills to write strong resumes that clearly show an employer how you meet the requirements of the position. Whether you’ve been writing resumes for years or have never written a resume, this module will ensure you know the basics, and teach you advanced strategies for creating the perfect resume.

**What is a Resume? (video clip 2)**

Contrary to popular belief, a resume is NOT your professional biography! It IS a marketing tool used in selling yourself to a potential employer. An effective resume will show the employer how your qualifications match what they’re looking for. Therefore, to be effective, resumes you send out must be targeted to the specific position you’re applying for. This means each resume you send out should be different! You will learn more about how to target your resume a little later.

In this module, we’ll generally talk about resumes in the context of applying for jobs, but you may also use a resume for other things, such as graduate school or scholarship applications. Be aware that although we’ll use the terms “jobs” and “employers,” the same information still applies for these other uses. If you have questions about how to apply any of the information to your specific situation, contact the Career Center.

**What Goes on a Resume? (video clip 3)**

Remember, what you put on your resume will depend on what’s relevant to the job you’re applying for, but there are some things that will always go on your resume, and it’s also important for us to cover what COULD go on your resume, so you know what pieces of information to pick from when you’re considering what’s relevant to the job you’re applying for. On the following pages, test your knowledge and see if you can pick out which items would typically go on a resume.

**Video Slide 1**

*Angie Fisher, Ada County:* “If maybe you don’t have direct experience in that area, maybe there are some volunteer-type opportunities or internships or things, you need to make sure that information is on your resume. And even though a job you may think isn’t important, it may show other skills you have that are applicable to that job. So, like a customer service position or fast food, those positions can bring those customers service skills that people are looking for.”

**Targeting Your Resume (video clip 4)**

Suppose you are creating a flyer to promote a product. Would you just list every feature, spec, and other piece of info available? No! You would start by figuring out who your target audience is, and you would then ask yourself, “What needs do those people have, and how does this product help them meet those needs?” You would focus on only the information you think would be important to your target audience, making sure to convey not JUST what your product does, but HOW it will meet their needs. You would also be strategic about how and where you put the information on the page, making sure you’re highlighting the most important pieces of information.

If you haven’t already guessed, your resume is the flyer, and YOU are the product. Targeting simply means focusing your resume on the job you’re applying for. It affects your format, layout, and content, and we’ll talk about how to go about targeting each of those things.

But first, how do you know what the employer’s needs are? If there is a posted job description, you are in luck, because that employer has essentially given you the answers to the test! That job description will tell you what they need somebody to do, and what skills, experiences, and characteristics their ideal candidate will have. Therefore, your job is to make your resume match that job description as closely as possible.

But what if there isn’t a job description? Don’t forget, if you’re following the steps outlined in the Job Search Process module, you will have conducted informational interviews with people who work at the company. Conducting informational interviews will give you invaluable insight into what the employer is looking for. Also use the company’s website to learn about their needs, what you might be doing in this role, their culture, and the language they use. View other, similar job postings you can find online to look for themes, and use O\*NET to access a generic job description for your occupation.

What about if you’re not applying for a specific job and working on more of a networking resume instead? This is not an excuse to hand out a general resume! Networking resumes should still be targeted to the TYPES of jobs you are pursuing. Use a variety of job descriptions, O\*NET, and what you’ve learned from informational interviews with professionals in your field to put these together.

**Video Slide 2**

*Liz Taylor, Bodybuilding.com Corporate Recruiter:* “I think this is probably one of the most important things when you’re looking for a job, to have your resume tailored to that position. Any employer wants to find a candidate that is really interested and passionate about the role they’re applying for. If it’s a super generic resume that could fit to any position in the company, it’s not going to stand out as much. We want to know that you’re interested in this job, that you’re passionate about it, that you’re going to be a good fit. And then also it’s good to have your experienced tailored, so that there aren’t as many hovering question marks over your experience and what you’ve been able to accomplish.”

**Video Slide 3**

*Angie Wolthuis, Scentsy, Inc.:* “You know, it’s very tiring to have to have to tailor your resume to every single job, but make sure that you’re not just sending out a very basic, generic resume, because then you’re doing all of that work for nothing anyway because you’re not going to get a call back. Make sure those skills are transferable into that job, and if that job is asking for asking for something in particular, make sure you highlight that again in your resume, and again in your cover letter, so that we really know that you’re not just applying for everything out there, because sometimes that’s how it feels – ‘Oh, this person’s just applying for anything and everything,” when really, they might be a great fit, we just don’t know it from their resume.”

**How to Target Your Resume - Format (video clip 5)**

Even though it may seem like resumes have a lot of rules, they also have a lot of flexibility to be creatively designed to best showcase your qualifications for the position you’re applying for. There is no one right way to design your resume. Use this section to learn about options and get ideas for how YOUR qualifications could best be presented.

There are two basic resume formats – chronological and functional, and an infinite number of ways to combine elements of each to create your own, perfect “combination” format. The resume format you use affects how your qualifications are organized and presented.

**Chronological Format (video clip 6)**

The chronological format is the traditional resume format, and will probably look familiar to you. In this format, work history is typically the main focus, with all of your employment grouped together in a single category, listed in chronological order. Underneath each job is a description, and in this format, your relevant experience is described through your work history.

This can be a good format to use when your work history is related to the job you’re applying for, usually in the case of alumni who are already advanced in their careers. However, as a current student, it’s likely that not all of your jobs are relevant to your career goal, and you probably also have relevant experience that comes from other types of experiences, so you would need to modify this format to make it work for you.

Employers tend to like the basic idea behind this format – organizing the details of your qualifications by where you did each thing – because it gives context to your experience.

**Functional Format (video clip 7)**

In the functional format, also referred to as a skills-based format, relevant skills and experiences are the main focus of the resume, but they are presented out of the context of where you did each thing. Instead of bullet points going under jobs, they are listed under the type of skill or experience.

This format is sometimes used by people who have little to no work or other structured types of experiences that can be listed on a resume, and career changers or people without any directly relevant experience for the job they’re applying for, because it focuses on transferable skills and deemphasizes things like job titles.

Some employers do not care for this format, because they have a difficult time understanding exactly what experience and skills you have without having the “where” and “when” to go with it; however, using the format that best shows your qualifications should be your priority. If you use this format, it is important to be as detailed and specific as possible in your bullet points in order to help alleviate those concerns.

**Combination Formats (video clip 8)**

The vast majority of resumes actually end up being combination resumes, which combine characteristics of the chronological and functional formats in different ways. This allows you to create the ideal resume format that best showcases your unique qualifications for the position you’re applying for.

For example, the format used by a lot of college students and recent graduates is a modified chronological format, in which relevant experiences are grouped together regardless of whether those relevant experiences are jobs, internships, extracurricular activities, research, etc. Less relevant jobs and other experiences are often still included, but are not mixed up with your more relevant experiences, and are not a main focus.

If you need assistance designing your ideal resume format, see a career counselor or job search advisor at the Career Center.

**Video Slide 4**

*Richard Gines, Hewlett-Packard:* “The other thing that really stands out is when the resume focuses on what their applicable experience is. And sometimes on resumes you’re listing ‘Ok, here’s my work history, here’s my educational history, and here’s some classes I took,’ and for me, the experience that they have that prepared them for the job is what really matters. And that could be quantified within a work experience, it could be quantified within classes they took, but it has got to be on that page. And if they just listed, ‘Ok, I’m a computer science major, and then is when I graduate,’ that doesn’t really tell me, well, how much about computer science do they know? Even if they haven’t had a job in computer science, what projects have they done, what are some of the things they’ve done that apply to what I’m looking for?”

**Video Slide 5**

*Tracey Stone, MassMutual Idaho Recruiting Director:* “You know, whether it’s your volunteer activities, whether it’s your leadership activities, whether it’s your internship activities, you know, you don’t have to have extensive work experience to have a resume that stands out. You just have to show those characteristics that I want to bring on as a team leader in my agency, so I want those kind of people that are out there.”

**How to Target Your Resume - Layout (video clip 9)**

Students often ask what visual layout employers most prefer. While individuals hiring managers may have their own personal preferences, there isn’t one standard ideal layout. Rather, the best layout is the one that, again, best showcases your qualifications for the job you’re applying for. For that reason, among others, using a resume template is not recommended.

Your resume may only initially get a 5-10 second glance, so it’s important to strategically design your layout so that it’s easy to see your most important qualifications in only a few seconds. Consider the “5-second rule” for designing your resume (not the 5-second rule that has to do with dropping food on the floor!) when you make choices about things like placement of information and spacing. Stand back and quickly skim your resume for about 5 seconds – is it immediately obvious why you’re a good fit for the job?

Placement of information is especially important when designing a targeted resume. Consider not only the order of the sections on your resume, but where you place pieces of information within each section. Keep in mind there are no rules about where things like the places you’ve worked, your titles, or dates have to go on your resume. Figure out what pieces of information you want to stand out and design your layout accordingly.

Another consideration is Applicant Tracking Systems, or ATS, which are computer programs used by some companies to help employers manage the hiring process. Many of these programs automatically “read” uploaded resumes and assign them a score or ranking based on matching keywords. Some of these programs have difficulty reading resumes with complex formatting like tables, and some have trouble with even simple formatting like underlining. Therefore, if you’re uploading your resume to a company’s website, as opposed to say, emailing it to someone, you may be better off creating a simplified version of that resume; however, make sure you still make good use of placement and spacing so it’s easy for a real person to read as well.

**Video Slide 6**

*Don Slater, Swire Coca-Cola:* “It really works out to about 20 seconds or so that I’ll get a sense of ‘yes,’ ‘no,’ ‘yes,’ no.’ If you know that secret going in then I guess you can tailor it.”

**How to Target Your Resume - Content (video clip 10)**

Of course, there is more to a resume than just listing your basic qualifications; you also need to describe your relevant experiences and skills. When you’re describing your qualifications, use this basic 3-step process to target your content to the job you’re applying for. (Remember, if you’re not applying for one specific position, use the tips you heard about earlier in the Targeting Your Resume video.)

Step 1: Address everything in the job description that you can honestly say you have done, can do, or know about, and HOW you did it, learned about it, or developed the skills to do it.

Step 2: Remove details that are unrelated to the job you’re applying for. You want to make it easy for employers to find the information they’re looking for by minimizing distractions. For example, if you used to work as a mechanic, and the job you’re applying for has nothing to do with cars, you might talk about providing customer service and working autonomously, but you wouldn’t need to include the specific types of repairs you did.

Step 3: Use the language the job description uses. In other words, describe your experience in a way that relates it to how that company talks about that job – using their keywords.

If you find you’re struggling with trying to modify the descriptions you currently have on your working resume, try starting with a blank slate and writing your descriptions from the job description. You’ll learn more about how to do this next.

**Video Slide 7**

*Angie Fisher, Ada County:* “I think again, it depends on what type of job they’re looking for, what type of industry, and what that industry is looking for. So kind of understanding terminology in that industry and what they’re kind of expecting to see on that resume.”

**Working through a Job Description (video clip 11)**

Most of what’s on that job description needs to go on your resume, so let’s figure out how to get it there.

First, be aware that you need to address the WHOLE job description, not just the qualifications section. Make sure you are also using the tasks and responsibilities sections, even if the job description doesn’t say you must have experience in each of these things.

Now, go through the job description and mark all keywords and phrases that you think are important. You will want to use as many of these as possible. You can print the job description to do this, or copy it into a word processing program. You might want to consider marking key verbs differently than nouns, because these will be the action verbs you’ll want to begin your statements with.

Next, go through the job responsibilities line by line or task by task, and ask yourself the following questions for each:

Have I done this before? If yes, write a statement describing what you did, using the keywords THEY used to describe that task. If not…

Have I done something similar to this before? If yes, again, use their keywords as you can to describe the task using their language. In not…

Have I done something that required me to use the same skills this task would require? You may not be able to use as many of the keywords here, but it’s still important to address your ability to do this part of the job.

Alternatively, ask yourself if you have learned about it, and if so, consider listing it under the class, project, or other experience you learned about it from. It’s preferable to focus on what you’ve DONE, but it’s better to address each item in some way than not at all!

**Video Slide 8**

*Tracey Stone, MassMutual Idaho Recruiting Director:* “A resume, to me, that’s going to stand out that comes across my desk is one that shows leadership, it shows the ability to transition between different jobs or different duties, it’s translatable to MY industry, because a lot of times you might have experience, and even though that experience isn’t directly related to the job you’re applying for, how DOES it relate? So really make it translatable.”

**Addressing Skills (video clip 12)**

What about skills the job description asks for? Can you just list them?

No! Most employers are not going to believe that you really have a skill just because you listed it on your resume. They want to know how you’ve USED that skill. Therefore, you can talk about your skills in the same place you are describing your experience, and you don’t need to have a separate skills category. If you DO choose to have a skills category that just lists your skills, such as you might do for something specific like listing required software you can use, make sure to also back this up with descriptions of how you’ve used each skill elsewhere on your resume.

**Video Slide 9**

*Jessica Bretón, Enterprise Holdings Talent Acquisition Specialist:* “I definitely prefer that students say how they have gained that skill through experience. As an employer, when I’m looking at a resume, it’s a lot more meaningful when a student is able to say ‘You know, I did this marketing internship, and these were the results I was able to achieve,’ and I’m able to see that and see, ok, they’ve gained some skills in marketing, achieving results and setting goals, whereas if they were just to put a skills section that says ‘achieved results,’ ‘marketing experience,’ it’s a little less believable, or I guess there’s not as much depth of information as if they included it the experience section on their resume. So, I definitely would prefer to see it incorporated in the experience section and how they have really demonstrated those skills in the workplace. ”

**Closing (video clip 13)**

Remember that the Career Center is here to help! Visit our website and access the Resume handout to take a closer look at some samples, and come see us if you need assistance. We offer individual resume appointments, workshops, and 15-minute walk-in resume checks on certain days. See our website for information.

To maximize your future employability, connect with us early in your time here at Boise State. Come see us, connect with us on social media, visit our website, and let us help you Make College Count!