

Hired! A Guide to Reemployment for the Rest of Us

By Gary K. Evans

Available at Amazon at <http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00A59OMT6> (Kindle and paperback) and Barnes and Noble at <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/hired-a-guide-to-reemployment-for-the-rest-of-us-gary-evans/1113839837?ean=2940015770827> (iPad)

The Resumé

Spraying a thousand resumé's onto job boards is the single, least effective way to find a job.

And this is only one of many misunderstandings that are common about the role of a resumé. Here are some ideas we have to make clear before going into detail about *your* resumé.

1. The single purpose of a resumé is to create interest about you (that's *marketing*), interest that will lead to an interview.
2. Your resumé is *about* you, but it is *for* the person reading and evaluating your resumé. So craft every word on your resume to be totally understandable by the potential employer reading it.
3. Your resumé cannot do your job search for you, so don't hide behind how many resumé's you have sent out. Your resumé is only one factor in your job hunt. Don't let it displace all the other activities this book discusses about building your job relationship.
4. The format of your resumé can make or break your chance of success. If you are thinking about writing your resumé as you—or your father—did even 10 years ago, it will be wrong for today's market.

Entry-level, minimum wage jobs hardly ever require that a resume should accompany a job application. But for jobs not in this narrow category, submitting a resumé normally will be a requirement. This section is about writing a resume that will improve, not diminish, your chance for getting that job interview.

The Good Resumé

A good resumé is: concise; readable; in a format and with content expected by the reader; accurate with no spelling or grammar errors; interesting; a plainly offered list of skills and accomplishments the reader is looking for; and hopefully a tool that will lead to a phone call and interview. On the other hand, a poor resumé is: too long or too short; in a format that surprises the reader; boring or difficult to understand; replete with buzzwords and "turn-off" phrases; a poor match for the skills the reader is looking for; and a passport to the discard heap.

In other words, just because you have a piece of paper or a digital file with the word "Resumé" at the top, this does not mean it is an effective tool for marketing yourself to a prospective employer.

The Reality of Resumés

Every job seeker assumes that a submitted resume will be read carefully by a qualified person and given due consideration. It is a common perception that you should include information about your family or hobbies, so the reader will learn about the real "you." Many job seekers, guided by people writing books on "guaranteed results," have chosen stunningly unorthodox approaches in format, color, fonts, and so forth. And it has become "cool" today for the YouTube generation to dabble in nontraditional packaging such as video resumés.

This is fantasy.

The reality is startlingly different. Tony Beshara is a job placement professional who obtained over 3,000 responses to a survey his company conducted with CEOs, HR managers, and other recruiters about resumés. He published the survey results in his excellent *Unbeatable Résumés*. If you are looking for only one resource on resumé content and form, I cannot recommend a better one. Here is a small sample of the responses to this survey:

- 56% will spend less than one minute reading your resumé.
- 77% will spend less than two minutes reading your resumé.
- 98% want the resumé to be in reverse chronological format (most recent job first, ending with least recent job), not functional format (jobs you have held or achievements you have attained, but with no connection to time frames).
- 95% expect the resumé length to be two pages or less.
- 95% do not want to see either Summary or Objectives sections.

- 90% do not want to see your personal information (church affiliation, number of children, hobbies).
- 0% use video resumé.

These results exactly align with my own experience as a hiring manager for many years.

These statistics are stunning, and you should carefully bear them in mind. Expectations about form and content of a resumé are not what they were 20 or even 10 years ago. The CEOs, HR managers and recruiters in Beshara's survey are the potential consumers of your resumé. If you do not provide these consumers what they want, in the form they expect it, do not be surprised that you get zero responses to your resumé.

One Resumé is Not Enough

If you are a young person looking for your first job, one well-written resumé is sufficient. However, for a job seeker with even a moderate job history it is not efficient or effective to have only one resumé. A truly experienced worker should have two or three resúmes, each emphasizing different skills and experience because a one-size-fits-all resumé may not satisfy a potential employer looking for specific capabilities.

I assisted a young man who found himself unexpectedly out of his career path in church ministry. We talked about skills and job titles and I read his resumé. It was pretty well-written and organized in the preferred reverse chronological format. That was a good start, but he had only this one resumé, with an objective of finding another church staff position. From his resumé, and through talking with him, I learned he has a college degree in accounting, and he is fluent in Spanish! What's not to like here? So I urged him to produce three resúmes, each with its own career goal, while also offering his other skills as "sweeteners": one resumé for a staff ministry position, another for teaching Spanish, and another related to a financial area to leverage his accounting degree. He's now working for a bank and doing very well.

I recently assisted a close friend and colleague to clean-up his resumé, and we had a discussion very similar to that of the minister above. My friend is a very technical person and his resumé was an alphabet soup of product acronyms, computer languages, and software development activities. However, it also listed a few responsibilities and accomplishments that stood out in stark contrast to his deep technical development skills: writing and delivering software training, and informally managing other software developers. He had casually listed these non-technical achievements without seeing the thread they formed in his professional life over the past 10 years. He is now slimming down his resumé as a software developer, and writing a second resumé to highlight his training and supervisory capabilities so he can apply for positions in those areas as well.

Why is one resumé not enough? If you prepare one resumé and you are exploring new opportunities in multiple industries, how well will that one resumé communicate to hiring managers in those different industries? Won't your single resumé have to be very generic so it can apply across any industry? Most managers can see through this generic approach right away. In their minds "generic equals nothing to offer" or "generic equals desperate." Hiring managers do not want to deal with your desperation. It's a turn-off, and they will turn-off you by trashing the generic resumé that you thought would work anywhere. In reality, it works almost nowhere.

Consider my young friend above in church ministry. Would one resumé for accounting, Spanish teacher, and ministry positions even have been readable or coherent? In my former role as a technical manager I regarded generic, unfocused, kitchen-sink resúmes as reflections of the author's own lack of specific goals. I invariably felt the candidates were asking me to figure out what they wanted.

Remember to design the content of your resumé for the reader—not for yourself, the writer.

I have three versions of my resumé. After 30 years in the computer industry I have worked in bleeding-edge, highly technical areas. I have also been the Process Evangelist on many of my consulting projects, and spoken at over a dozen conferences on process topics. I have written and delivered technical training courses for most of the topics and roles on software projects. And for 17 years I was an independent computer consultant providing all of these services to clients in many different industries.

So I have one resumé that emphasizes my project management and process skills and how these skills allowed me to adapt the right process to a given software project in order to save money and deliver higher-quality software products.

My second resumé focuses on my training and course development skills, the thousands of technical and business people I have trained, and the benefits this training offered these companies.

And for consulting opportunities I have a third resumé that covers the breadth of technical areas that I have worked in, including selected accomplishments and skills discussed in my two other resúmes.

My point is the same one that every successful writer of resúmes or anything else must learn: *know your audience, and tailor your narrative to them.* If you want to appeal to multiple audiences, you need to have multiple narratives. It's pretty simple.

Resumé Success Criteria

Less is More

It's always tempting to think that you should include in your resumé as much detail as possible so the reader is duly impressed. Unfortunately, this does not align to reality.

As the results above indicate from Tony Beshara's survey, your resumé might not get even 60 seconds of reading. You won't have enough of the reader's time to dazzle them with every little detail of what you have done for the past 5, or 35, years. Always be accurate, but dispense with the over-precision. Never make your resumé reader have to work to figure out the value you bring. With an attention span of 30-60 seconds, they won't work that hard.

When I was in my late teens and entering the professional music field, I visited lots of radio stations. In those days record companies sent vinyl 45-RPM records to the stations to get the disk jockeys (DJs) to play the records. The DJs were unanimous about how little time they invested reviewing the new records they received from the recording companies. The typical summary was: "Each song has 10 seconds to grab me. That's all. I preview hundreds of songs a week. I don't have time to give every record more than that unless it immediately catches my interest."

I speak from experience as a manager and resumé reader: if you make me work to understand your resumé, I won't read more than 10 lines and then I move onto the next resumé while yours goes into the trash can. And that same fate awaits it at the first spelling mistake. There is no reason for spelling or grammar mistakes—that is what word processors and spell checkers are for.

Create interest with what you have accomplished for others and can accomplish for your future employer. Don't turn off your reader with a tedious list of mundane activities (for example, that you generated reports, or called meetings) that are not compelling reasons to interview you.

Avoid uncommon terms and acronyms in your resumé because the person reading it might not be a hiring manager who is familiar with the job titles or jargon you use. The reader could be a junior-level worker in a human resources group who is just scanning for buzzwords on a list they were given. Tony Beshara shares a stunning story that the CEO from a \$40 million company let his daughter do the initial review of resúmes for a high-level financial position while she was home on Christmas break!

So don't indulge in listing job titles, process names, or any other description that may be specific or unique to a company you used to work for. The company where your resumé is being considered will not necessarily have these same job titles or process names. Write your descriptions for your new reader so you will be understood.

Being concise and economical in your resumé is not something any of us does naturally. In 1657 the French mathematician and philosopher, Blaise Pascal, wrote in a letter apologizing that, "The present letter is a very long one, simply because I had no leisure to make it shorter." In other words, he did not have time to expend the effort required to be brief. Do not fall into this dilemma: spend the time—and it will take time—to be concise.

60 seconds. One or two pages. Accomplishments. Results. Create interest in *you*, and how you can meet *their* needs. It's about you, but it's for *them*.

Dispense with the Buzzwords

It is understandable that one would want to help the resumé reader by including self-promoting adjectives such as "energetic" or "creative." Don't. These are just "happy talk," emotive words with no substance. Using these will only make your resumé blend-in, not stand out.

In December 2011 the LinkedIn social media site released its annual review (<http://press.linkedin.com/node/1051>) of the most overused buzzwords in its 135 million member profiles and resúés. The 10 most overused words in 2011 were:

1. Creative
2. Organizational
3. Effective
4. Extensive experience
5. Track record
6. Motivated
7. Innovative
8. Problem solving
9. Communication skills
10. Dynamic

The problem with these words is that in themselves they are unconvincing. If you have "extensive experience" your resumé should show actual experience that is extensive. Heed the direction of Nicole Williams, LinkedIn's Connection Director: "Even though this year's list of overused terms differs from last year's, your objectives remain the same: banish buzzwords from your profile. Use language that illustrates your unique professional accomplishments and experiences. Give concrete examples of results you've achieved whenever possible and reference attributes that are specific to you."

Do the Do's, and Don't Do the Don'ts

- **Do** remember to put your contact information (telephone, surface mail, e-mail) on your resumé. (Yes, some people do forget these!)

- **Do** run a spelling check, and a grammar check. (Errors are just not acceptable.)
 - **Do** list both your job responsibilities and your job accomplishments in your previous positions. (Focus only on the major ones, those that create interest.)
 - **Do** list even unfinished educational pursuits. (For example, if you attended college but did not obtain a degree, indicate "Completed 6 semesters in Liberal Arts degree program.")
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- **Don't** put "Objectives" or "Summary" sections in your resumé. (Let your experience speak for you.)
 - **Don't** list references, and don't say "References available upon request." (That is always assumed to be true.)
 - **Don't** start your sentences with "I." (This personal pronoun will distract attention from the resumé content.)
 - **Don't** make any claim you cannot backup, or that will not be supported by a reference. (This may shock you, but some people lie! Hiring managers are always on the look-out for this.)
 - **Don't** list your age, religious affiliation, nationality, or other personal details. (See the "30 Questions" link in the **Error! Reference source not found.** section.)
 - **Don't** list your hobbies. (You can talk about these if you get the interview question "Tell me about yourself.")
 - **Don't** use meaningless words like "self-starter," "dynamic," or "energetic." (Let your accomplishments speak for you.)
 - **Don't** include your LinkedIn, Twitter, or Facebook information. (And clean up all of your social media content. Potential employers today make a regular practice of searching your on-line persona to see if the way you conduct your non-work life is something they would rather not gamble on having in their company.)
 - **Don't** list anything that a reader might be offended by or consider grounds for suspicion about your moral character. (Like strong perfume, what you think is acceptable may totally turn-off your reader.)

The Digital Resumé

This is the 21st century so it is very probable that you will transmit your resumé to a potential employer by e-mail rather than by the U.S. Postal Service. You need to be aware that digital viewing places new requirements on your resumé presentation.

Font Selection and Size

The simplest improvement you can make to improve the presentation of your resumé is to review the font you use. The font, or type face, determines how each character looks. One font is sufficient for almost all resúés. Do not ever use more than two fonts in your resumé. Using three or more will make your resumé look cluttered and amateurish.

On-screen readability is enhanced with a *serif* font. Serif fonts have little embellishments above, below, and at the ends of the characters. Sans-serif fonts do not have these embellishments. Here are some examples to understand the difference:

Characters in a Serif font

v, b, t, s, V, B, T, S

Characters in a Sans-serif font

v, b, t, s, V, B, T, S

Consider using a serif font in your resumé if for no other reason than because serif fonts are less tiring to a reader than sans-serif fonts. Open almost any published book and it will be printed in a serif font, because those tiny embellishments on each character allow the eye and brain to recognize the character with less effort.



Be cautious about the font size you choose. Font sizes are measured in *points*, and there are 72 points in one inch. Although the reader can easily resize your resumé on a computer display, don't use a font size smaller than 10 points. A 12 point font size is even better but, as you can see in the examples below, different fonts have different actual widths and heights, even when they all have the same nominal point size. Print your resumé to see how readable the smallest characters look on paper, because printed copies may be circulated for people to review. Perhaps you can read microscopic print, but your resumé readers may be more visually challenged.

Readable Fonts and Pages

Here are some sample renderings in some common fonts, all in the same 12 point size, so you can see the subtle differences that do, indeed, make a difference to a reader.

Serif Typefaces

Times New Roman is a serif font available on Microsoft Windows, Apple Macintosh, and Linux computers, but it is not the best font for on-screen display.

Palatino Linotype is available on both Windows and Macintosh. Linux computers have Palladio, a similar typeface. Palatino is a beautiful serif font that has more horizontal width than Times New Roman.

Georgia is a serif font found on Windows, Macintosh, and Linux. It is both taller and wider than Times New Roman.

Garamond is a serif font with a lighter, more delicate presentation. It is available on Microsoft Windows, Macintosh (as Apple Garamond), and Linux. Linux users may have to install this font from a third party font package.

Sans-serif Typefaces

Arial is available on Windows, Macintosh and Linux. It is the most common sans-serif font. It is a narrow font, but not a pleasantly readable font. For example, capital "eye" and lower case "ells" look nearly identical in Arial: for example, Illinois.

Verdana is a sans-serif font on Windows, Macintosh and Linux. It has a broader horizontal spacing than Arial and presents a stronger impression.

Calibri is a sans-serif font on Windows. It is copyrighted by Microsoft but it can be purchased and installed on Macintosh and Linux. It has a more "square-ish" presentation than Arial.

The font you choose is important, but think carefully about the total presentation of your resumé. You should prudently limit the length of your resumé to two pages or less. Do not be tempted to fill each page with dense text. Set your page margins, and the space between lines and paragraphs, to leave white space. This space enhances the readability of your resumé. Providing this white space also constrains you to include in your resumé only the most relevant responsibilities and accomplishments of your job history. Tony Beshara's *Unbeatable Résumés* has numerous examples of alternate layouts and formats you can evaluate and use for your resumé.

Digital Document Exchange

You may be a user of Microsoft Word, but the people who read your electronic resumé may be using a Macintosh or Linux computer. On their machines your carefully crafted resumé may look either just a bit different, or it may look like crap.

The best approach for you is to convert your resumé to a digital format specifically created for document interchange across different computer environments. The one choice that will work across all environments is Adobe PDF (Portable Document Format). Once you convert your resumé to PDF format, you can safely send it to any recipient. As long as they have a PDF viewer software product (there are many and most are free) they will be able to see your resumé exactly as you created it.

To find both free and commercial software to convert your resumé to PDF format, visit Wikipedia's List of PDF software (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_PDF_software) page.

Sending Your Resumé



Too many applicants make preventable mistakes that should never happen when submitting their resumes. Here is an important list of things to be sure you do correctly before you hit "Send":

1. Get an innocuous e-mail address from which you will send your electronic resúés. An address of "tootiredtopayattention@hotmail.com" will be an instant turn-off, as will "UFGatorman@yahoo.com." Use an e-mail address with your real name, and don't make it cute. You are looking for a professional position, not rushing a fraternity or sorority.
2. Convert your resumé to PDF format and verify that the PDF version looks correct using a PDF viewer.
3. If you have not done so already, rename the PDF copy to include your name. Never send a resumé with a document name of "Resume." Make it obvious it is yours: "Resumé of John Smith for ABC Company." Your resume is probably one of 50 that the recipient gets each day. If you don't make it easy for them, they won't do you any favors.
4. Attach your resumé to an e-mail containing a salutation to the recipient. Use a specific person's name unless you are e-mailing to a general e-mailbox. Even if it is a general mailbox, call the company and ask for a real person's name to put in the body of your e-mail. The body of your e-mail will serve as your cover letter.

Gaps In Your Work History

All potential employers look for evidence of job stability and progress in a candidate. But not everyone has a continuous job history. In these turbulent times, employment gaps are no longer the stigma they were in earlier, more economically stable times. Since job gaps are impossible to hide in the recommended reverse chronological resumé format, you need to think carefully about how to handle these on your resumé.

I know a woman who made a number of spectacularly bad decisions in her young adult life. As a result she did not have a continual working history. She had some very large gaps between the jobs that she could safely list on her resumé. How did she resolve this so potential employers would not immediately toss her resumé into the trash?

We talked about what was going on in her life during these times, and what her current goals were. She had resolved to get her life back on track even if she had to start in entry-level jobs until she learned new skills. So, we recast her sparse resumé to focus on the jobs she had held successfully and the accomplishments she could honestly talk about in an interview. For the three-year period when she was not working, we simply stated "Out of job market." No explanation of why, no spin to make up some justification—just an honest statement that between date X and date Y she was not working.

Why was this a good decision? Remember that the purposes of the resumé are to create interest in you as a candidate and as a person, and to lead to a face-to-face interview. Stating "Out of the job market" was both accurate and honest. The reader would perceive that she did not try to hide the gap. Now it was guaranteed to be one of the first areas explored during a face-to-face interview, so she needed a way to answer that inevitable question.

I will elaborate on this issue in the next section. For now, if you have gaps in your job history, be honest and list them. Just be prepared to give an explanation when you get your interview.

Interviewing About Resumé Gaps

When you have gaps, you are guaranteed to be asked about them if you get a job interview. I asked the woman in the preceding section to describe in some detail about this gap in her work history. She explained at some length all of the things going on during this undisciplined time in her life. It was a spectacular mess, but all of her ups and downs had a single over-arching context. We fashioned a very simple and totally truthful summary that she could provide as an answer when an interviewer asked: "I was in a bad relationship for those years, and I was not working. But that relationship is over. Now I am supporting myself, and getting my life going in the direction I want it to go, rather than the direction others think I should go."

Powerful but simple; honest and confident.

She did have interviews, she was asked about the gaps, and she did obtain a full-time, entry-level position.

Your gaps may not require as much exploration and wordsmithing. Today it is common for both women and men to take time out of the job market to raise children, to care for a loved one who is ill, or for other reasons. Some gaps are "mental health" breaks: maybe you just needed to get out of a corporate grind, so you spent a year living on a beach.

You don't need to itemize the details of what you were doing during the gap, either in the resume or during the interview. Focus on explaining only the outline, like this:

- That you left the job market to focus on something important in your life, and you regard the sacrifice in career time as an investment, not a liability.
- That what you learned during that employment gap has made you more valuable to them as a potential employer (have one concrete example to share).
- That your current job and career goals are influenced by what you learned during this time.

Keep your explanation brief. Your interviewer only needs to know the outcome of your time out of the market. Don't try to enlist sympathy for the plight you were in—they really don't care. Your job is to convey to the interviewer that

- You have no problems, and
- You bring no problems.

Speak confidently that the gap was a positive force in your life, regardless of how horrific or confidence-shattering it might have been for you at the time. Words are important, so pick the right words before the interview. Never lie, but do think carefully about the words you use to describe yourself and others, and those mysterious gaps when you were "Out of the Job Market."

The Cover Letter

A generation ago a job seeker would write a generic, one-size-fits-all resumé with an "Objectives" paragraph at the top, and then mail it (that's U.S. Postal Service surface mail, not e-mail) to a company's Human Resources department. In the envelope they would enclose a generic cover letter referencing a job ad in a newspaper or other source. The cover letter would be addressed to a human resources person or, more often, to "Sir or Madam."

None of this applies today.

Everything has changed. One-size-fits-all resumé are forbidden in this book. E-mail or web submission is the most frequent channel for sending a resumé. Objectives sections are a sure-fire way to diminish the chances your resumé will be read.

But what about the cover letter today?

Tony Beshara's survey found a surprising result: 86% of respondents said a cover letter is "Not very important," whereas only 14% said a cover letter was "Important."

Even more surprisingly, the typical survey response indicated that the reviewer usually read the cover letter only *after* they read the resumé, and even then only if the resumé

was interesting to them. This does not mean you should not provide a cover letter or equivalent information with your resumé. It does mean that your cover letter information should be brief and specific to the position for which you are submitting the resumé. Today, your cover letter, not your resumé, is where you convey the particular position you are applying for.

Like your resumé, the goal of a cover letter is to obtain a job interview. So the content of your cover letter information should

- Give a brief list of your major accomplishments, or skills if your work history is not lengthy, that would apply to the job you are applying for,
- Tailor your words to align totally with the position so they will see that you are a good fit, and
- Like every good marketing and sales effort, end with a "hook," telling them you will follow up with them to set up a meeting (by phone, or face to face if geography allows).

As an example, here is a sample e-mail cover letter that I would use if applying for a job position leading a software development organization:

Subject: Resumé for Software Development Manager position

From: Gary K. Evans

To: John Q. Smith

Dear Mr. Smith,

I am attaching my resumé on the referral of William Jones, a software developer in your organization. William indicated you are searching for a Software Development Manager to bring new direction to your technical group. As you can see:

- I have spent 30 years in software development in various roles from developer to Engineering Manager and business owner.
- I ran my own consulting business for 17 years, providing software development and process expertise to Fortune 50 and Fortune 100 companies.
- I have successfully guided organizations delivering projects in excess of \$10 million.
- I have personally guided the transformation of traditional development organizations to Agile development methods, increasing their productivity and profitability.

Thank you for considering me for this position. I will call you tomorrow at 9:30 a.m. to make an appointment to meet.

Respectfully,

Gary K Evans

Gary K. Evans

This is brief and focused. Don't fill your cover letter with a rewrite of your resumé. Remember this will be read, or re-read, after they read your resumé.

Note that I "signed" my e-mail with a scanned image of my signature. This is a nice touch if you have access to a scanner.

And don't forget the "hook" to make a follow-up contact to setup an appointment. It's all about moving toward a relationship, not having a one-time, drive-by encounter. If you don't initiate the follow-up, it may never happen.

A Warning About Cursive Typeface



Never use background stationery for the e-mails you send as cover letters. The mix of colors and letters can be very difficult to read. Never use a cursive, handwriting, or calligraphy font in your e-mail, or in any other job document you send. To illustrate my point, compare this example of my cover letter, now presented in a handwriting font:

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To: John Q. Smith

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- I have personally guided the transformation of traditional development organizations to Agile development methods, increasing their productivity and profitability.*

I will call you tomorrow at 9:30 a.m. to make an appointment to meet.

Respectfully,

Gary K Evans

Gary K. Evans

This version requires effort to read! If I got an e-mail like this from a job applicant, I would not read it at all. I refuse to work to decipher what should be plainly expressed. There are hundreds of other job applicants who show more respect for my time.

Hired! has even more information about making your job search effective. Here are the topics in *Hired!* that can help you succeed in your job search.

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