

7 Killer Resume Tips That Will Make You Stand Out

1. Identify your key attributes

Emphasize them and incorporate them in your resume and cover letter.

This point is lost on many resume writers: Employers and graduate schools select students for attributes more than for knowledge, skills, and abilities (called KSAs). Attitude is the most important attribute. Optimism, Conscientiousness, Non-defensiveness, Openness, and Extroversion are attributes industrial psychologists have found in well-adjusted work team members. Managers do not want to spend energy on negotiating conflicts or micro-managing poor performers. In your resume and cover letter demonstrate your strengths around key attributes that make you a good match for the job and organization.

2. Tell a story

A very common mistake in resumes and some graduate school applications is providing only general information about your experience and background. This results in a bland and un-interesting resume.

- a. **Give details.** They make you come alive. Story-tellers know this. Provide only a very brief description of the job/experience/organization you worked in, then spend the rest of the space telling a story with details about key events or activities. For example, rather than writing “responsibilities included greeting customers...” you should consider something like “successfully employed the ABC model for engaging new customers (Ask a question, Build rapport, Confirm your intention to help).”
- b. **Show results.** Whenever possible document the results and successes of your job performance. For example, after mentioning the ABC method for greeting customers, you might say “resulted in stronger customer loyalty,” or “received excellent evaluations from management,” or “reduced customer complaints by 5 percent (you can estimate percentages and numbers).”

3. Show the reader W.I.I.F.M.? (What’s In It For Me?)

The employer is selecting you because they want something from you. Sure, it’s nice if the job is a “perfect fit” with your interests and career, but they want results. They have a job to get done, so tell them how you will do it. Here’s how:

- **You will make them money and/or reach their organizational goals**
- **You will save them money by being efficient, effective and creative**
- **You will build on and contribute to their team**

The bullet points in your job description, leadership activities and programs should explain how you helped the employer meet goals. You should show them how you saved time and effort by improving on or re-engineering job processes and procedures. You should show them how you contributed to the team, got along well, and did good work in collaboration with the work group, especially mention promotions both formal and informal. This is what hiring managers want and need, so be sure you talk about these issues in your cover letter and resume bullet points. Emphasize these things rather than only what you are looking for in a job.

4. Address the GPA issue

If your GPA is 3.0 and better, no problem. If your GPA is lower, then find a way to explain it somewhere in the resume or cover letter. Typical explanations include participating on athletic teams, leadership activity, long work hours, etc.). Some students write things like “worked 20 hours per week, held two leadership positions in student clubs, and volunteered as a tutor each week for 10 hours.” Whenever you can, show the actual hours you worked. It impresses employers to know that you were successful while you worked, were active, and involved.

5. Highlight leadership

Whenever possible, claim the highest skills you used in your jobs and activities especially if you managed, led, or trained others, or if you were elected to a position. For example, if you greeted customers with the ABC method, you should include that you trained new staff on customer relations procedures. But you may choose to give more resume/letter space to a volunteer position because it used higher-level skills. For example, you may want to take some space explaining that you were elected as treasurer in a dorm of 250 freshmen and conducted accurate bookkeeping for \$5,000 which resulted in ending the year \$350 in the black the first time in seven years.

6. Send employers a copy of past performance evaluations

(They can actually be better than letters of recommendation). If you don't have one now, get one from your next job or activity (an advisor can create one). Get a "job performance evaluation" on the organization's letterhead, signed by your supervisor. If that's not available get a good letter of recommendation on letterhead and send it in with your resume, cover letter, and any application the employer asks for. You can almost always add extra text in an application form or send/attach additional documents. If the employer doesn't want them, they can toss them out, but it will almost never hurt if you send these extra documents, but it will almost always help your application.

7. Create a complete AND professional LinkedIn profile

You will want this for the rest of your career. Post a professional looking picture (headshot) with a nice smile and nice shirt collar. Then, join the LinkedIn alumni association and interest groups, and start inviting professional contacts you have including faculty, bosses, staff, friends and acquaintances you know in the working or academic world. LinkedIn becomes a permanent professional online resume that you can link anyone to for more information and background about you. Students are using it a lot now for making contacts in organizations and career fields to do informational interviews with alumni and friends. AND create your own webpage through Optimal Resume. It's an opportunity to show pictures, graphs, post written work such as class research projects and a thesis. This will set you apart from the crowd.