Creative Ways to Improve Your Resume
Stuck in a resume rut? Here's how to review and revise with fresh eyes.
by Charles Purdy, Monster+HotJobs senior editor

Career experts are unanimous on the importance of customizing our resumes for each new job we apply for. But for many of us, when it comes to revising our resumes, the first question is "How?"

It's easy to get stuck in rut when you're working with material you know so well. So here are some ways to take a fresh look at revising your resume.

1. Analyze the job post's wording.
An easy way to make sure your resume gets you in the door for an interview is to echo the language in the job post. Look for ways to use the words in the post; a resume reader--human or software--may be screening for them. (If there is no job post, check the company's website--especially the About Us page and any corporate mission statements--for language you might adopt.)

If your resume says "supervise," but the job post says "manage," change it. If your last job title was "Social Media Ninja," and you're applying for a "Social Media Marketing Specialist" position, include the term "Marketing Specialist" in parentheses after your Ninja title (as long as you feel that this term could describe your past role).

Of course, don't stretch the truth!

2. Weed out fibs.
It's all too easy for little fibs to make their way into a resume. Several years ago, you added an unearned certification to your resume, just to get your foot in the door at a new company. Or you claimed competence in a software program you figured you could learn on-the-fly.

Then, as the years went on, those temporary resume fibs somehow became set in stone. Now's the time to chisel them out. Any lie--even a seemingly inconsequential one--can put your job search and your future job security in jeopardy.

Replace lies with truths--or set about making them true. It could be as simple as putting the word "pursuing" before that imaginary degree on your resume.

3. Get rid of the "objective statement."
Beginning a resume with an objective statement (a phrase that starts with something like "Seeking a challenging position ...") is out. As Lauren Milligan, resume expert at ResuMAYDAY.com, says, "Employers already know that your objective is to get a job, after all." She suggests, instead, creating a personal summary statement that "illustrates how you are better than other candidates for the job." She adds, "Identify a few areas in your profession that you excel at ... and that you really enjoy doing."

Tell the hiring manager who you are and how you can solve her or his company's problems, not what you want.

4. Get rid of redundancies.
Don't waste time telling hiring managers what they already know. Many people do this in their descriptions of past jobs. For instance, if your last job was as a copywriter for an online rug retailer, saying something like "wrote marketing copy for a wide variety of rugs" is unnecessary. Instead of taking up space with definitions no one needs, describe specific achievements. Did your work improve sales, get praise from management, or improve SEO rankings? Use job highlights, not job descriptions.

5. Cut unnecessary resume "stories."
Work Coach Cafe's Ronnie Ann advises removing things that are not directly related to the story you're telling about yourself and the job you're applying for. She says, "I have an abundantly varied job history-- better than 'job hopper,' huh?--and remember back to resumes where I just wanted to make each job so full-bodied and rich that I was sure the employer would want to meet me. But as interesting as we may be as human beings, employers just want to know if we're right for their company--and specifically the job in question."

For instance, if you're both a professional accountant and a certified dog groomer, you might want to play down your dog-grooming experience when you apply for jobs in finance.

6. Look for ways to use exciting language.
Check your resume's verbs, and use strong verbs to make your resume more vibrant. For instance, "responsible for daily bank deposits" (no verb) could easily be "oversaw daily bank deposits" (strong verb). And as you find each verb, look at its subject--is it you? If not, should it be? For instance, in "duties included writing press releases," the subject is "duties." It'd be much better to say something like "Wrote all company press releases."

7. Turn your resume upside-down.
I'm serious. Turn your resume upside-down and look at it from a distance. This will help you analyze its appearance separately from its content. Does it look too dense? Is it heavier on the top or bottom? Emily Bennington, a coauthor of "Effective Immediately: How to Fit In, Stand Out, and Move Up at Your First Real Job," says, "Sometimes a resume will catch my eye simply because it's formatted beautifully. I know the most important component is the content on the page, but you should also pay attention to the packaging. Trust me, hiring managers notice!"

8. Write a draft in a different format.
In his book "The Overnight Resume: The Fastest Way to Your Next Job," career expert Donald Asher suggests writing a letter to a family member about your job accomplishments as a way to rethink your resume. (Go ahead, brag a little.) Then he says you can start turning this into a resume draft by removing most personal pronouns ("I" and "we"), taking out articles ("a," "an," and "the"), and cutting transition words like "and" (unless doing so would distort meaning).

Thinking of your resume as a letter or a story (in which you're the hero), or some other medium, is a great way to start making it fresher, more personal, and more effective.