

# Writing a Civilian Resume

One of the biggest challenges you'll face when leaving the military is finding a new job. Creating a civilian resume is one of the first steps in your job search. A resume will help you communicate your skill set in terms that a civilian employer can recognize and appreciate.

## Identify your skills

Military members offer skills that are impressive to many corporate recruiters and large companies. But many service members are uncertain what these skills are, which means they don't sell them to potential employers. Before you begin to work on your resume, you'll need to take these steps to identify the skills you have that can be transferred to a civilian position.

- **Get a copy of your Verification of Military Experience and Training (VMET) through the Department of Defense.** Your VMET will give you an overview of the skills you've gained while in the military.
- **Make a list of your technical skills.** Some military jobs are a fast track to a career in the civilian world. Computer technicians, mechanics, and engineers, for example, have skills that can be easily converted to civilian jobs. Even if you're not in a position that readily converts to a civilian position, much of your job training can be converted into civilian terms. Budgeting, for example, is a critical skill for managers in most civilian companies.
- **Make a list of your intangible skills.** Intangible skills such as leadership, discipline, strong work ethic, and teamwork are often cited by employment recruiters as desirable. Many service members have developed these skills to a degree often unmatched by other job seekers. Incorporating these skills into your resume will showcase them to potential employers.

## Select a resume style

After assessing your skills, you probably have a good idea of the type of position you'll be targeting with your civilian resume. Now it's time to write it. First choose a style of resume that highlights your skills and experience and emphasizes your strengths. There are three basic types of resumes:

- **Chronological resumes.** This resume lists your employment history in chronological format, starting with your most recent work experience. This is often a good format for job seekers who have been in one job for a long time. Your skills and accomplishments are included as part of your employment history in the main body of the resume.
- **Functional resumes.** This resume highlights skills, de-emphasizing work history and gaps in employment. The main body includes skills and accomplishments, which may be divided into specific areas of expertise (such as management, security, or sales and marketing). Keep in mind that employers may be wary of this type of resume because it lacks a specific employment record.

- **Combination resumes.** This resume emphasizes skills earned in a variety of jobs, while maintaining the job history format that employers like. These resumes highlight specific skills in the main body of the resume, while including a concise employment history below.

## Outline your resume

Although there are several types of resumes, they all contain the same basic elements. Because your skills and experience are different from those of any other job seeker, your resume will be unique. You can modify or eliminate these sections depending on how relevant they are to your skill set:

- **Contact Information.** This can be in the form of a heading and includes your name, address, phone number, and email address.
- **Objective or Job Target.** First identify what kind of job you're looking for and what makes you uniquely qualified for the job. The description should be no longer than one or two lines. If you know the specific job title, include it here. For example, "A position as Director of Operations for AAA Corporation in which ten years military logistics experience will be an asset."
- **Summary of Qualifications.** Place this bulleted section just below the objective, in the visual center of the resume. It includes five or six lines highlighting the skills that make you uniquely qualified for this job. People sometimes title this section "Highlights of Qualifications," "Summary of Skills," or "Summary of Experience."
- **Employment History.** This section varies depending on the type of resume you choose. You may want to call it "Relevant Experience" or "Professional Experience." You may list your employment history chronologically, including your responsibilities and accomplishments under each separate job. Or you may choose to identify certain areas of responsibility, such as management, security, or budgeting.
- **Education and Training.** The list includes colleges, schools, or military-training schools you attended. List the name of the school and the location, but not necessarily the dates. List any colleges you have attended, as well as any training that is relevant to the job you are seeking.
- **Special skills.** Here you might want to list foreign languages, computer skills, or any other relevant skills that will set you apart from other applicants. This section is useful if you have several skills that don't fit easily into another section.

## Customize your resume

Once you have created a basic format, it's time to showcase your abilities and accomplishments in a way that is concise and easy for the reader to understand.

- **Target your resume.** Ideally, you should tailor each resume to the specific job you are pursuing. For many job seekers, this means creating several resumes, each one customized to a different job. Creating a resume worksheet - including all your employment, skills, accomplishments, volunteer work, and training - will give you something to draw from.
- **Translate your resume into civilian terms.** Instead of "officer in charge of," say, "managed." Take out the acronyms - most recruiters won't know what they mean - and insert terms they can recognize. For example, most civilians won't understand "SNOIC for 2d MarDiv G-3, planning and executing all logistics for operations conducted in our AOR." But they will understand, "Supervised staff of 15 people. Planned and coordinated operations conducted by various subordinate units within our division."

- **Include your accomplishments.** Instead of simply listing job duties, take a look at your accomplishments. If possible, use numbers to legitimize your accomplishments. For example, "Managed budget of \$100K" or "Reduced training time from 26 weeks to 24 weeks."
- **Make your resume concise.** Try to limit your resume to two pages. If you have limited experience, limit it to one. Your resume is a marketing tool that you use to create interest in your abilities - you can talk more about your experience in the interview.
- **Include volunteer experience if it's relevant to the job you're seeking.** Volunteer experience is legitimate work experience and may add credibility to your skills and accomplishments.
- **Leave off details not relevant to the job.** Don't include marital status, height and weight, or religious affiliations (unless they are appropriate for the job). Also, leave off salary information unless you were specifically asked to include it.
- **Check for spelling errors.** After you proofread your resume, ask a friend or family member to read it. Reading your resume backwards can help you catch spelling or typographical errors.

In many cases, you'll need to send your resume electronically. Be sure it's in a format that's easy to read on the screen. If you're pursuing federal employment, get your resume into the federal resume-building websites. More information on federal employment can be found at the federal government's USAJOBS site or through your installation Transition Assistance Program.

### Write a cover letter

Your cover letter or email is almost as important as your resume. It can help sell your skills to the employer as well as highlight their relevance to the job opening. Take the time to create an original cover letter that will interest the reader and is tailored specifically to the job opening.

- **Research the name and title of the person who is doing the hiring and send your email or cover letter to him or her.** Sometimes this isn't possible (with a blind ad, for example). But in many cases you can simply call the company and ask.
- **Focus your cover letter.** Mention the job that you're applying for in the first paragraph. Without repeating your resume, focus on describing how your skills and abilities are suited to the company's needs. Keep it to one page - two or three paragraphs in business-letter format.
- **Follow up.** In the final paragraph, mention that you will call to follow up on your resume - and don't forget to do it.

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