

Quick Look at Résumé Writing

Common Résumé Formats

Chronological:

Work experience and achievements listed in chronological order, starting with the most recent. These are effective for emphasizing relevant recent work experience.

Functional:

This style leads with skills, education, and experience. It is best for college students and graduates with minimal relevant work experience. The functional style also allows one to place more emphasis on non-job experiences, like extracurricular activities.

Combination:

Balances relevant work history with relevant skills learned from that history. This format can be best for handling work experience that does not relate directly to the job to which you are applying.

Categories to Consider

Personal Identification

full name, address, phone number, zip code

Career Objective

Here is where you can take goals from the cover letter and apply them to the job. This may cover position, field, or skills.

Education Background

This should, of course, begin with the most recent level of education and work backward.

Experience

Paid and unpaid work experience with the most recent jobs first. When describing responsibilities and achievements, be sure to use active verbs.

Optional

Skills and interests, areas of knowledge, activities and honors, publications, professional affiliations, volunteer/community involvement.

Should I use "I?"

The conventional wisdom says "no," but the conventional wisdom has been wrong before. A human-voiced résumé can make an applicant stand out and sound like an active person ready for challenges. Applicants should send their human-voiced résumé directly to the hiring managers through the mail and avoid online recruiting portals. This can distinguish an applicant from the rest of the competition and help them come across as a confident leader. Using "I" does break the conventional rules, but it can be a highly effective strategy.

Cover Letter or Pain Letter?

Cover letters can get lost or completely ignored in a search process unless they can make a strong impression. The alternative to a cover letter Liz Ryan of Forbes Magazine suggests is the pain letter. This applicant should start the letter by discussing the problems the company is currently facing and then tell a “dragon-slaying story” about how he/she once tackled a similar problem. Example:

Dear Jack,

I was happy to catch the last half of your talk at the Atlanta Natural Foods Expo, and to become a fan! I couldn't agree more with your observation that kelp is the new hemp.

It's tremendous to see Angry Chocolates making a big splash in the seagrass-infused chocolate arena. I can only imagine that with year-over-year growth of 50% and given your new distribution deal with Wolfgang Puck's organization, your Marketing folks are taxed to the limit. When I was Marketing Director at Melted Candies from 2007 until the acquisition by Nestle in 2012, we had a similar challenge. We had to serve our loyal domestic customers while expanding into South America and Europe. We narrowly pulled it out and grew the company from \$14M to \$85M in sales during that time. Now I'm looking for the next challenge and curious how your team at Angry Chocolates is surmounting the high-growth challenge.

If you have time to chat by phone or start an email conversation, my contact details are on my resume.

Best to you and the team,

Mary Smith

The four components of Ryan's pain letter:

The Hook: This will usually be congratulations on something specific and recent.

The Pain Hypothesis: An assessment that points out a particular source of pain.

Dragon Slaying Story: How the applicant dealt with a similar problem in the past.

Closing: Applicants should say they would be happy to talk about these challenges.

Pain letters are supposed to be short and to the point. Ryan reports from the feedback of her readers that applicants who send pain letters get called back 25% of the time, which is a great improvement over the response from recruiting portals. Pain letters also help make dialogue between hiring managers and applicants more substantive.

For more on Human-Voiced Résumés and Pain Letters, see Liz Ryan's work on Forbes.com