

# How to Write an Effective Resume

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by Gwen Hughes, RHIA

You're ready to move to a different organization or position where you can take on new challenges and responsibilities. You've identified a vacant position that piques your interest. How can you ensure that your resume not only reflects your skills, education, and experience, but also tells any potential employer that he or she would be crazy not to hire you?

## Do Your Homework

Begin by obtaining background information about the particular position you seek. Copy the vacant job posting or advertisement and contact the recruitment firm or hiring organization's human resource department to request a copy of the job description. Then, contact colleagues employed by the hiring organization and ask them about the reason for the vacancy, the position itself, and the organization. Ask colleagues who occupy positions similar to the one you seek about the skill set required. This information will help you tailor your resume and cover letter so that they highlight the skills, education, and experience sought by the hiring organization.

In the past few years, I've helped several organizations select HIM directors. I was always surprised when my colleagues submitted resumes and cover letters that revealed they clearly hadn't obtained enough information about the position. In one case, an applicant for a HIM system director position at a multisite ambulatory care organization emphasized his experience with DRGs and utilization review. Had the applicant done his homework, he would have known that DRGs and utilization review were not relevant to this particular position. He would have instead emphasized any experience reducing transcription turnaround time; improving chart availability; installing bar coding, electronic messaging, transcription, or electronic record systems. As it was, this applicant's resume and cover letter led me to believe he was unfamiliar with ambulatory care, and consequently he was not interviewed for the position.

## Tailor Your Resume

Use the information you've collected to tailor your resume and cover letter to emphasize the characteristics, skills, education and experience sought by the hiring organization. The two basic types of resumes—traditional and functional—can be individualized or tailored to a potential job or employer.

Every resume should include the following information:

- name, address, and daytime phone
- experience, including dates of employment, name and address of employer, job title, and duties
- any special certifications held
- education, including the name of the school, city and state, years attended, any diploma or certificate earned, or the type of studies
- special skills such as familiarity with various computer equipment and software
- publications
- presentations
- scholarships, honors, or awards received
- professional activities relevant to the position sought, and any leadership positions held
- references or a comment that they will be provided on request

Both traditional and functional resumes address the qualifications the potential employer seeks. However, the traditional resume lists the individual's former positions and employers chronologically, beginning with the most recent position, whereas the functional (or skills-oriented) resume highlights the skills and experience sought by a potential employer. The advantage of the traditional resume is its ability to provide a clear history of past employment. The disadvantage is the ease in which gaps in

work history can be identified when employment was not continuous, whereas the functional resume can focus the reader's attention on the particular skills or functions desired and disguise any gaps in work history.

## Choose Your Focus

The experience section from the sample [traditional](#) and [functional](#) resume were created for an HIM system director vacancy at a large healthcare organization. According to the advertisement, this individual oversees HIM operations at four hospitals and numerous physician offices. The advertisement indicated that the successful candidate will have:

- managerial experience in a variety of healthcare settings
- managerial experience encompassing transcription as well as traditional medical record services
- demonstrated leadership skills
- familiarity with computer systems and system implementation

Review the resumes as if you were a potential employer. Does this applicant have HIM managerial experience? Does she have transcription managerial experience? Is there any indication that she is an outstanding leader? Has she implemented any computerized systems? Would you interview her for the HIM system director position described above?

When I review resumes, I create a spreadsheet and then score and rank resumes based on the degree to which each applicant's education and experience match those sought by the employer. In the case of the HIM system director position, I might award:

- one point for every year of HIM managerial experience
- one point for every year of transcription managerial experience
- one point for any objective indicators of outstanding leadership skills
- one point for every relevant system implementation

After ranking the candidates, I interview the top three to five applicants.

When developing your own resume, review the draft as a potential employer might. If you haven't clearly communicated how you meet or exceed the qualifications sought by the employer, rework your resume.

## Another Opportunity to Introduce Yourself

When you send a resume, include a cover letter. A well-written cover letter, like the resume, should be tailored to the particular employer and position you seek. The cover letter provides a second opportunity to focus the potential employer's attention on how your skill set meets or exceeds the qualifications the employer seeks. At the same time, it allows you to demonstrate your professionalism, writing skills, and shed a little light on your personality.

Address the letter to the person for whom you will be working. Express your interest in the position, explain what you've enclosed, and indicate how you are suited to the position or what you offer the company. Close with a request for an interview and express gratitude for the person's time and interest. Include your name and daytime telephone number.

A successful resume and cover letter takes time: time to obtain the background information on the position sought, time to construct a tailored resume, and time to write a personable, focused, and professional cover letter. The time you spend, however, may help convince a potential employer that he or she would be crazy not to hire you.

## Reference

Maggio, Rosalie. *How to Say It*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990.

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