

HOW TO CREATE A JOB WINNING RESUME



by Bridget Feery and Christine M. Tierney

A resume is your self-portrait. It outlines your professional achievements, educational background, personal accomplishments, and career goals in one concise format, and is your marketing tool for getting noticed by prospective employers.

Employers, like consumers, shop for the best quality product. In this case, the nurse is the product and the resume is the advertisement. So, too, must your resume stand apart from the others.

A resume is a synopsis of professional accomplishment and should not exceed two pages. Resumes are not to be confused with longer “CVs,” commonly used when applying for admission to graduate school or membership in professional organizations, securing speaking engagements, or pursuing upper management or academic positions. Resumes remain a primary tool in the employment process.

Chronological vs. Functional

Resumes can either be organized chronologically or functionally. Most recruiters prefer the chronological style because it is easy to follow. Listing the most recent experiences first works well for nurses with good, solid work histories seeking positions similar to the jobs they are leaving.

The functional resume shifts from dates of employment to categories of competency, such as managerial ability, technical knowledge, and interpersonal skills. To determine if a functional resume is more appropriate, answer the following questions: Do you wish to highlight certain skills or abilities? Have you changed jobs frequently, or are their gaps in your employment

history? If your answer to any of these questions is yes, consider using the functional format, which highlights your skills more than the time frame in which you held particular positions. Functional resumes can also highlight transferable skills when you are attempting to switch specialties, change your career path, or when your current job doesn't match the position you are seeking.

To develop a functional resume, first identify your skills and strengths. After matching these strengths to the position you seek, group them into specific categories that lay the groundwork for the resume. Then, list your job history on the second page. As you build your experience and skills, you may switch from chronological to functional style and back again, depending upon the job you are seeking. A common strategy is to create a resume in each style, so you will have the format you prefer for any given situation.

Basic Elements

The key elements of any resume are demographic information, education, work experience, professional achievements, and

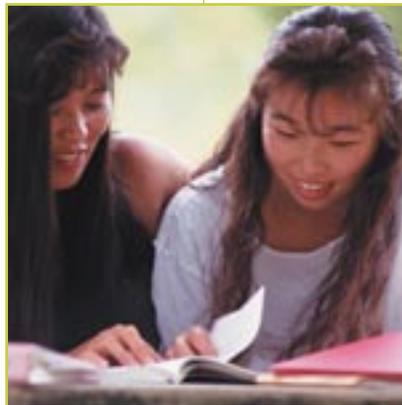
relevant personal activities.

1 Demographics

Include your name, address, phone number, and e-mail address. You may choose to include a work phone number, but be sure a system is in place so that you receive messages confidentially. If your home answering machine contains a personal message, make sure the greeting is still professional.

2 Education

Begin with your most recent degree, highlighting any honors you have received. Include school names and locations with city and state, as well as years of graduation. If you are currently enrolled in an advanced



degree program but have not yet graduated, include this information and your expected completion date. Report your grade point average if it is outstanding, such as 3.5 or greater. Do not include a grade point average if you have been out of school and working for more than one year.

3 Employment History

List your previous positions in reverse chronological order, beginning with your most recent position. Include the employer name, address, job title, dates of employment, and a brief description of your overall responsibilities, including leadership roles and any special responsibilities. Organize this section to highlight your career progression. Although positions early in your career do not need to reflect accomplishments, your success in later jobs should be emphasized with:

- **Bullets that list three or four key accomplishments per position.**
- **Numbers wherever possible to reflect quantitative results, such as cost savings or profits.**
- **Action verbs, such as “created,” “implemented,” or “increased” or “decreased.”**

It is appropriate to include positions held outside health care if your responsibilities are relevant to the position you are seeking. For example, your job as a bank teller may reflect your unique experience in dealing with the public. Use your judgment before including jobs that are outdated or not directly related to your current career path.

4 Professional Achievements

This includes certifications and professional memberships, including any offices held. Completely spell out the full name of the association, and avoid abbreviations, such as ANA or AONE. Some recruiters may prefer that the applicant list certifications under a separate heading from memberships, if the candidate is active in many organizations.

5 Personal Activities

This optional category, which includes information about community service or other hobbies or interests you hold, demonstrates to potential employers that you are a

well-rounded individual. It provides insight into your personality and can augment your resume, but does not replace work experience.

6 Other Optional Information

A short objectives paragraph describing your professional goals can define your career objective in less than two sentences. Many recruiters prefer that you place this information after your heading. The trick here is to be specific without excluding potential opportunities. For example, “seeking a position in maternal/child nursing” may generate more opportunities than “seeking a position in a Level III neonatal intensive care unit.”

Many nurses describe their nursing school clinical experience in their resumes. This can add

substance to an otherwise thin resume, but should only be used by new graduates or nurses using the functional format. If the clinical experience section makes your resume more than two pages in length, leave it out.

Another optional section lists presentations, including workshops, case studies, or other continuing education offerings you have given at work or in the community. Academic honors and awards can also be recorded in a separate section, if they are relevant to your job search. Be sure to cite the year in which the award was granted with its title and the awarding organization. Some nurses insert a licensing section. You should specify the state and license number; however, the year in which you were licensed is not required.

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Sample Cover Letter

Nancy Nurse
123 Main Street
Anytown, USA 12345
(123) 123-4567 (Home)
(123) 123-4567 (School)

January 23, 2001

Christine Tierney, RN, C, MSN
Nurse Recruiter
Albert Einstein Medical Center
5501 Old York Road
Philadelphia, PA 19141

Dear Ms. Tierney:

I am responding to your advertisement for an Oncology Clinical Specialist that appeared in the February issue of Nursing Spectrum. As you can see from the attached resume, I have a strong background in oncology nursing.

I have molded my career from its inception to achieve my goal of becoming a Clinical Nurse Specialist. My education and work experience have prepared me to become an excellent oncology clinician. This coupled with my attention to detail and organizational skills will allow me to become one of your organization's finest assets. I will contact you on March 17, 2002, to establish a convenient time for us to meet and further discuss my qualifications. I look forward to learning more about Einstein and the possibility of becoming part of your team. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Nancy Nurse
Nancy Nurse, RN, BSN, ONC

Sample Resume

Nancy Nurse

123 Main Street
Anytown, USA 12345
(123) 123-4567 (Home) (123) 123-4567 (School)

OBJECTIVE:

To obtain a Clinical Nurse Specialist position in Oncology.

EDUCATION:

University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA
Master of Science in Nursing, Anticipated Date of Graduation, May 2000
Grade Point Average: 3.8
University of Delaware, Bachelor of Science in Nursing, May 1995

EXPERIENCE

1999 - Present Allegheny University Hospitals, Hahnemann, Philadelphia, PA
Registered Nurse / Clinical Associate
Controlled Environment Oncology Unit
Responsibilities include nursing care of patients undergoing bone marrow transplants. Permanent charge nurse on night shift.
1997 - 1999 Staff Nurse
Hematology / Oncology Unit
1995 - 1997 Staff Nurse
General Surgery

HONORS/AWARDS:

Excellence in Clinical Practice Award, 1997
National Student Nurses Association Scholarship

MEMBERSHIPS:

American Nurses Association
Sigma Theta Tau, International
Oncology Nurses Society (ONS)

CERTIFICATIONS:

ONC, ACLS, BCLS

ACTIVITIES:

Volunteer, St. John's Hospice
American Red Cross Relief Volunteer

REFERENCES:

Available upon request

Design Tips

Your resume must be carefully created and designed to convey a professional image. The following tips will help ensure good results:

1. Use heavy bond paper in neutral tones or pastel colors. If possible, have the envelope match the paper. Avoid any flashy colors, for either your paper or your type.
2. Use a word processor to produce your resume and cover letter. Never send a resume with handwritten changes.
3. Spell check your resume, both on your computer and on your own, and proofread it for grammatical errors. Typos are unacceptable.
4. Avoid using multiple fonts and typefaces as these will only make your document look busy. One or two type styles are sufficient for the standard resume. Keep your column formats consistent, and allow at least a 1" margin on all sides.
5. Send only good quality laser prints of your resume. Avoid poor quality xerox copies.

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A final option is a references section. It is acceptable to state that references are "available upon request." More specific reference information can be provided to the recruiter during the interview.

Do not include your photo, references to marital status, children, age, race, or religion.

7 The Cover Letter

A cover letter, a concise personal introduction, should accompany your resume. Two to three single-spaced paragraphs is the standard length. Begin by addressing a specific person, making sure the spelling of the name, title, and credentials are correct. Next, state the purpose of your letter, referring to the title of the position you are applying for and how you heard about it, such as the location

and date of an advertisement or a referral by a current employee. The next paragraph should present your qualifications. Finally, close the letter with an offer to provide additional information if necessary and your desire to hear from the recruiter. You may also state a time when you will assume responsibility for follow-up. You might state, for example, "I will contact you on November 4 to further discuss my qualifications." Remember that being creative within the cover letter will attract attention. Just make sure the approach is professional and appropriate. It is not necessary to send a return envelope with your cover letter — the employer will contact you if they want to interview you. In order to save time in your job hunt, save a template of your cover letter for future

communications so you don't have to start from scratch each time. Just remember to update the contact information and include any specifics that differentiate your qualifications from one job offer to another.

Remember, the hardest step is getting started. Once you have completed your resume, you can build on it for years to come. ■

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