



Is your resume working for you? There's never been a better time to take a close look and make sure it is. With today's high rate of unemployment, many Americans are competing in a tight job market. Will your resume grab the attention of a prospective employer? Does it accurately reflect your qualifications?

A resume is an essential selling tool in any job search. The document presents a clear, concise outline of your qualifications, skills and accomplishments. "The function of a resume isn't to get you a job, but to get you the interview," says Tammy Smith, director of career services at Brown Mackie College - Hopkinsville. "It's up to you to land the job."

Smith's responsibilities at Brown Mackie College - Hopkinsville include guiding students through the process of creating high-performance resumes. "Employers spend an average of 15 seconds reading a submitted resume, and 85 to 95 percent of all resumes end up in the trash, according to First Place Resumes. In order to keep a prospective employer's attention, your resume must create immediate interest and provoke action. It's important to be concise because every second counts," continues Smith. How do you do this? Smith outlines several important considerations to note when creating or updating a resume.

Create visual appeal.

Your resume should be visually appealing. "This includes suitable font," says Smith. "Job-seekers should use the Times New Roman, Courier or Arial fonts, no smaller in size than 10 and no larger than 12." Smith also counsels students to use professional quality paper in beige, white or gray. Definitely stay away from pink paper, and don't even consider clouds in the background or flowers on the border.

Customize content for each individual position.

It helps to clearly emphasize your specific skills that relate to the open position of interest. Smith advises students customize the resume for each job opportunity. "List duties from prior positions in order of preference relative to the job you want the most, not the job you had. Don't include responsibilities that you don't want to do again," she says. Eliminate job information that is more than 10 years old. Old information is no longer relevant. She also reminds students to be prepared to discuss the content of the resume at the interview.

Use active language and keywords.

When writing your resume, avoid using passive language. Place achievements and results within each job description on the resume. This demonstrates capabilities and responsibility. "When describing job duties, you must use strong action verbs," Smith says. Action verbs, such as implemented, improved, operated and earned, strengthen a resume, making it more powerful and appealing.

"Next, it is crucial to use keywords," says Smith. Keywords can be a single word or a phrase that summarizes your core competencies. These are words or phrases others would use to search online for applicants that could fill a position of interest to you. "This is especially important when posting your resume online with search engines such as careerbuilder.com or monster.com," Smith continues.

Be prepared for unexpected opportunities.

Always ensure your resume is up to date. "You never know when the perfect career opportunity will knock," says Smith. Remember, your resume is the first impression you make to an employer. It is a selling tool that highlights the skills and experience you can contribute to the employer's workplace. It structures the interview, providing a framework of topics to discuss. A resume also reminds employers of you when you're not there, and can help an employer justify bringing you on board. (ARA)