by Katharine Hansen, Ph.D.

In my line of work, I see hundreds of resumes, and I often see the same patterns over and over again. I frequently observe resume tendencies that are not necessarily mistakes, yet the job-seekers behind these resumes could have much nicer, cleaner, more readable resumes if they just tweaked a few things. And none of these tweaks are hard to accomplish. Even if your resume has other problems, you'll see significant improvements if you make these 10 easy fixes.

1. **Use a bulleted style to make your resume more reader-friendly.** Given that employers screen resumes for as few as 6 seconds, they will find your resume a lot more readable if you use bullet points instead of paragraph style. It's just easier to read.

2. **Follow "The Resume Ingredients Rule."** Set forth by Donald Asher, author of numerous resume books (see our Q&A with him), the rule says that information on a resume should be listed in order of importance to the reader. Therefore, in listing your jobs, what's generally most important is your title/position. So list in this preferred order: Title/position, name of employer, city/state of employer, dates of employment. I can't tell you how many resumes I've seen that list dates first. Dates can be important to some employers, but they're generally not as important as what your position was and whom you worked for. Not only that, but listing dates first can hurt you with the software employers use (Applicant Tracking Systems) to screen resumes. Citing John Ciampi, Jon Ciampi, CEO of Preptel, a company that aims to help job-seekers penetrate these systems, Meridith Levinson wrote on CIO.com: "To ensure applicant tracking systems read and import your work experience properly, ... never start your work experience with the dates you held certain positions."

   Education follows the same principle; thus, the preferred order for listing your education is: Name of degree (spelled out: Bachelor of _____) in name of major, name of university, city/state of university, graduation year, followed by peripheral information, such as minor and GPA. If you haven't graduated yet, list your information the same way. Simply by virtue of the fact that the graduation date you've listed is in the future, the employer will know you don't have the degree yet. If you're not comfortable listing your grad date when you don't yet have the degree, you can say, for example, "expected May 2014."

   By the way, the Resume Ingredients Rule is also the reason that experience and education are listed in *reverse* chronological order on your resume; it's assumed that your most recent education and experience are most important and relevant to the reader.

3. **Eliminate "responsibilities" words from your resume vocabulary.** *Never* use expressions like "Duties included," "Responsibilities included," or "Responsible for" on your resume. Why? Because your resume should be accomplishments-driven, not responsibilities-driven. Anyone (well, maybe not

anyone...) can perform the duties listed in a job description. Job-description language is not what sells in a resume. Accomplishments-oriented language tells employers how you've gone above and beyond in your jobs, what makes you special, how you've taken initiative and made your jobs your own. Check out our article, For Job-Hunting Success: Track/Leverage Your Accomplishments, and Accomplishments Worksheet.

4. **Eliminate clutter from your resume.** Several elements can clutter up your resume and impede readability:

   ○ *Unnecessary dates*. Don't list dates that don't add anything to your resume; for example, dates you spent involved in college extracurricular activities. If you were involved in these activities during college, the reader can pretty much guess your dates of involvement, and listing the dates will just clutter up your document. Same with dates of involvement in professional or civic organizations; ask yourself if those dates will be meaningful to the employer reading your resume.

   ○ *Parentheses*. Job-seekers have a particular tendency to set off dates of employment with parentheses. It's easier on the reader if you just use commas.

   ○ *The line "References: Available upon request."* This statement is highly optional because it is a given that you will provide references upon request. If you couldn't, you would have no business looking for a job. The line can serve the purpose of signaling: "This is the end of my resume," but if you are trying to conserve space, leave it off.

   ○ *Articles*. Those little words "a," "an," and "the." Generally speaking, resumes aren't written in sentence form, but in concise phrases that have become an accepted shorthand that employers understand. Articles tend to clutter up that shorthand; your resume will read in a more streamlined manner without them. Consider these "before" and "after" examples:

BEFORE:	AFTER:
Recruited to manage the women's division and oversee the opening of the Madison Avenue Store.	Recruited to manage women's division and oversee Madison Avenue store opening.
Promoted within five months to Vice-President and General Manager of the Beverly Hills store.	Promoted within five months to Vice-President and General Manager of Beverly Hills store.
Managed and controlled all aspects of the company's presence on the West Coast.	Managed and controlled all aspects of company's West Coast presence.
Coordinated and supervised all aspects of the opening of the Beverly Hills Store.	Coordinated and supervised all aspects of Beverly Hills store opening.

Facilitated the development of management and staff to ensure store growth and minimize turnover.	Facilitated management and staff development to ensure store growth and minimize turnover.
Created a high profile for the store through effective personal relations with the entertainment community, Chamber of Commerce, the City of Beverly Hills and charity organizations.	Created high profile for store through effective personal relations with entertainment community, Chamber of Commerce, the City of Beverly Hills and charity organizations.

Aren't the "After" versions a lot more streamlined?

5. **Use strong, concrete verbs to describe your jobs, and don't mix noun and verb phrases.** Let's look at this example:
   - Managed and controlled all aspects of company's West Coast presence. [verb]
   - Complete ownership of inventory and financial standards. [noun]
   - Full P&L responsibilities. [noun]
   - Analyzed market and forecast sales, prepared corporate budgets and monitored results to achieve ROI objectives. [verb]

   Instead, be consistent with verbs:
   - Supervised inventory and financial standards.
   - Completely oversaw profit and loss aspects of operation.

   Also avoid the weak verbs, "to be," "to do," and "to work." Everyone works. Be more specific. "Collaborate(d)" is often a good substitute. Instead of: "Worked with Marketing Department to launch promotional campaign," say "Collaborated with Marketing Department to launch promotional campaign."

6. **Focus on describing past job activities that highlight the skills you most like to use and want to use in your next job.** Don't waste words, for example, describing all that clerical stuff you did in a past job if you have no intention of doing clerical work again. Even if you've mastered skills that are in great demand, don't emphasize them if they're not the skills you want to use in the future.

7. **Don't fret about the one-page resume rule.** Sure, it's nice to keep your resume to one page if you can, but don't go to extraordinary lengths, such as by using tiny type. If you have significant experience, you'll probably need more than one page. What you should avoid is having one full page with just a

little bit of text on your second page. If you fill a third or less of the second page, consider condensing to one page. Ways to condense:

- Narrow your margins. The margins in Microsoft Word are set very wide by default. You can have margins as narrow as .75" all around and still have a nice-looking document.
- Use a smaller point size, but not too small. A font size of 11-point is good; don't go smaller than 10.5-point.
- Many jobseekers use a two-column format with headings in the left-hand column. To conserve space, narrow or even eliminate the left-hand column and simply stack your headings on top of each section. Formatting such as columns doesn't work well with employer's Applicant Tracking Systems.

8. **Make sure your resume has a sharp focus.** Again, given the microscopic amount of time that employers spend screening resumes, you need a way to show the employer at a glance what you want to do and what you're good at. One way is to add a section called something like "Summary of Qualifications," or "Profile." Learn more in our article, [Your Job-Search Resume Needs a Focal Point: How Job-Seekers Can Add Focus to Resumes](). For examples of such sections, see most of the samples in our [Sample Professional Resumes for All Job-Seekers]().

9. **Don't emphasize experience on your resume.** The rule of thumb for someone at the senior level is to spotlight about 15 years worth of jobs. Age discrimination, unfortunately, is a reality. Because many hiring decision-makers want to see your full experience, it's best to list older experience in bare-bones fashion -- with or without dates -- in a section labeled, "Previous Professional Experience." Similarly, don't give the date of your college graduation if it was more than about 10 years ago.

10. **Be sure the reader will understand all the acronyms and jargon you use in your resume.** Resumes in the high-tech field are notorious for these mysterious terms. We recently received a resume containing the following acronyms and jargon: MCSE, MCP+I, TCP/IP, CCA, CCNA, token ring and PCMCIA network interface cards for LAN connectivity, NT Service Packs, Ethernet cards, Server 4.0, SQL 6.5, 7.0, Red Hat Linux 6.1, Turbo Linux 4.0 and Caldera 2.3, Cisco 2500 routers and switches. Now, chances are that employers in this jobseeker's field understand all these terms. Just *be sure* that's the case. Spell out any acronyms you think could be questionable, and explain any terms you think some readers of your resume might not understand.

College students, too, need to be aware of "inside" jargon. At Stetson University, my alma mater, for example, we have an annual charity fundraiser called "Greenfeather;" freshman-orientation leaders called "FOCUS" advisers; and a volunteer organization called "Into the Streets." The school's graduates routinely use those terms on their resumes without any explanation, as though everyone knows what Greenfeather, FOCUS, and Into the Streets mean. Look at your resume from an outsider's perspective -- and explain (or eliminate) any unfamiliar terms or acronyms.

Bonus tip: Be sure to list locations (city and state) for all your past employers. It's resume protocol to do

so, and employers expect to see that information. I'm constantly amazed at all the resumes I see that list names of past employers, but don't tell where those employers are located.