



TECH JOB FEATURE



Writing Tips for a Tech Job Resume

In the following article, the author provides a variety of tips to help readers write a solid tech resume. From researching the company in question to getting your resume past HR screeners, the article includes numerous insights that should help you in your quest for your next techie job.

The task of writing a resume for a tech job is no different during a recession than it is during an economic boom. The thing that is likely to be different is the size of the pile of resumes on the hiring manager's desk. During a recession it is likely that more people will be looking for work, and that stack of resumes will, consequently, be larger. Therefore, during a recession doing everything possible to help that resume do its job is more important than ever.

The job of your resume is to get you an interview. To do that, it must serve the needs of three people and at least one machine (more about the machine later). Each of the people has completely different needs. The three people are you, a human resources screener, and a hiring manager.

The 30-Second Window

The hiring manager is the most important of these. He is the person who will decide whether to toss your resume aside, conduct a screen by telephone, or invite you for an interview. He has a huge problem. HR sent a stack of two hundred resumes for the position you want, and he has to review them all between 8 a.m. and noon because he has meetings for the rest of the day.

You will be lucky if your resume gets a 30-second look. Your resume has to make it

easy for him to notice that you have either done stuff or know stuff that gives you the skills he wants in his next employee. He wants to see the prior experience section; he needs to see statements there that give him the idea, "this person might fit." He does not need extraneous details (he might see something that tells him, "no, not this guy"), severe wordiness (he might get bored or annoyed wading through all that verbiage), or that glowing Objective/Summary statement that every last resume book tells you to write.

To get an idea of what a hiring manager *does* want in a resume, scour the Internet for blogs or comments by such managers on what they want in a resume or on how their evaluation processes work. If you are looking for a tech job, you should have access to the Internet. (If you don't, then your first step is *get* access to the Internet.) Researching managers this way is part of your homework; here is a link to a sample of this sort of material to get you started: ["A Glimpse and a Hook."](#) The ideal situation, of course, would be to find commentary or business writing by the actual hiring manager for the position you want to interview for.

Screening and Screeners

The second person your resume has to function for is the headhunter, the recruiter

at the staffing agency, or the HR generalist. Hope that only one of these three is involved in the hiring process, because each one screens out resumes. In any case, whoever the screener is, this is the person who just might read that glowing Objective/Summary statement. The best approach is to keep the Objective and Summary brief (lest it annoy the hiring manager), make sure it matches the job title exactly, and make sure it mentions one or two keywords from the job listing and not much else (lest someone notice a reason to screen your resume out).

Remember, even if you're lucky, yours may be one of five hundred or so resumes aimed at a single open position. You want the HR type to conclude, "this guy might be a good fit," even after their applicant tracking system (ATS) software parses your resume.

Your next homework assignment is to learn everything you can about ATS software and what it might reduce your resume to. (That glowing Objective/Summary statement might be reduced to a short list of keywords.) Here is a link to get you started: [Applicant Tracking Systems \(ATS\) — HR.](#)

View (But Don't Copy) Samples

The last person your resume functions for is you. It needs to tell your story, truthfully, but without details that would give somebody



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a reason to make a snap decision against selecting you. If you have no idea where to begin, or what a resume should look like, go hunting on the Internet for sample resumes. There are tons of them, both generic ones and genuine ones posted by individuals on their personal web pages. Look for the resumes (or CVs) of other professionals in your field. Check out the competition. Remember, the HR types and the hiring managers will have seen *thousands* of resumes before, so avoid the generic, canned resume formats available in popular word processor applications. The reviewers have seen them all before. If you use one, customize it somehow, so that it will stand out from the crowd.

Exception to Following a Format: Tech Recruiting Firms

If you are applying through a recruiting firm, find out what their recommendations or requirements for a resume are and follow them. If you are lucky, they will have tips regarding how best to help your resume survive whatever electronic screening system they use.

The Machine: Flat-Text Format and Scanability

Your resume will be required to serve the needs of a machine, a machine that runs ATS software, and it won't be pretty. Your resume will be abused. It will be parsed. It will be changed into flat-text format. This means that nonstandard characters (even if they are Unicode compliant) will quite likely end up as gibberish. Graphs, tables, and nifty graphical elements or dividers may also turn into gibberish. All of these are things to avoid.

A hardcopy of your resume will be scanned. From there it might be stored as an image

file or run through optical character recognition (OCR) software. This means that the following things are bad ideas: staples, holes left from torn out staples, paper that is not white, paper with a watermark, or anything else that might cause shadows or extraneous lines. Obviously, counting on a staple to keep the second page of your resume with the first is a poor idea; therefore, if your resume has run to two pages, make sure that your name and email address are included on *both* pages. (If one page gets lost, they can email you for a complete copy.) For further reading on this topic (more homework, sorry), check out this link: [Scannable Resumes](#).

Research the Company, Then Rewrite

After you have gotten a first draft together, be prepared to rewrite and customize it on an ongoing basis. There is no link for this one — it will be different for all jobs— but find out as much as possible about the company, the stuff it makes, and what it does to get revenue. Tailor everything you can on your resume toward the target company without bending the truth. That hiring manager might notice that you tailored that glowing Objective/Summary statement to his exact job. If he does notice, he will probably appreciate the brevity, the fact that you showed a touch of initiative, and that you did at least a little homework. A good approach is to have a master resume that is individually edited for every job. In case you do get the interview, have a saved copy that is exactly the same as the one initially submitted available. Whoever you are interviewing with may ask for a fresh hard copy. They may be having difficulty retrieving the one you submitted by email from their ATS, or they may simply be checking to see how well prepared you are. In either case, it wouldn't do to give them two different

resumes. That would just be another reason to screen you out.

Main Content I: Don't Include Anything You Can't Back Up

As mentioned previously, your resume is your story, but it should not be a work of fiction. You should be able to back up anything mentioned on your resume by being able to talk intelligently about the topic. If you somehow get hired by overselling yourself with a clever snow job, you are just setting yourself up to fail after the ninety-day probation period.

Main Content II: Emphasize Your Experience

Try to devote three quarters of the document to your work history and experience. This is what a thoughtful, competent hiring manager or engineer is going to key in on. He is looking for the story of your working life, for stuff to ask you about in an interview, for items that will make him think, "I'd like to talk to this guy (or gal)." Too many words will make him work too hard to find what he is looking for. He is also looking for red flags and warning signs, so avoid too much detail. You don't want him to think, "That was more than I wanted to know."

Main Content III: List the Skills and Acronyms

A technical resume needs a section like this. It will help the ATS software map your name to a job opening. It won't be all that interesting to humans. The hiring manager will be bored by it — he has seen all those acronyms before. The recruiter most likely won't understand half of it. The HR person lives or dies by the keywords it contains and will very likely decide your fate accordingly, so you can count on him to hunt for it. Put this information last.



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What Disability?

Don't mention that you have a disability on a resume unless the job is specifically recruiting disabled persons. The place to explain how you overcome and compensate for that trick knee (or whatever) and how the disability won't affect your job performance is the interview. It may be an uphill battle to get hired if you have some sort of physical limitation, so don't tempt someone to screen you out by including anything about it on the resume. On paper, people are likely to assume the worst, thinking you have put the best possible face on the situation. In person, you have some chance to show that you are still a completely capable human being in spite of what ails you, and there is a chance the interviewer will admire you for it.

Leave It off the Document: Interests, Hobbies, Volunteer Work and Other Stuff

Don't include much of this type of information unless there is a reason to. If you are applying for a job at a nonprofit

organization, include the fact that you've done volunteer work for them. Include a hobby only if it relates to your field in some way: if you are an aerospace engineer who builds radio-controlled model aircraft, for example. Do have a section on professional certifications and training you have received. Consider working this info into the work experience section where the hiring manager will be the most likely to see it.

Guard Against the Unintentional Gaffe

Sometimes people seriously wanting jobs say the funniest things. Review this link—[Resumania!](#) — and then try not to be one of these people.

Have a Friend Read the Final Draft

The friend needed for this is the one that you've known for years who will tell you when your ego is getting ahead of your abilities. It will help if this friend is very detail-oriented, sharp-eyed, and knows how to spell. Software spellcheckers have

their limitations. If your tech resume has numerous acronyms and industry specific abbreviations, a software spellchecker is going to kick-up a lot of false alarms. A human proofreader who can find instances where "swill" should have been "swirl" or "rafter" ought to have been "drafter" is invaluable. If one person doesn't have all those attributes, show your resume to two people. Finally, proofread it yourself several times. You are going for a technical job, so don't spoil the message that you are a highly competent technical employee with a lot of misspelled words.

Conclusion

You don't really need to do anything different on a resume during an economic downturn, you just have to try harder.

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