



Resume Writing For Veterans

Write to the future.

Resume writing is not about rehashing your past history and listing what you've done and where. Rather, resume writing is about writing to the future, to the job that you want or the career path that you wish to pursue. This is a critical consideration throughout every phase of writing your resume and conducting your job search. Clearly define your objectives, identify the skills and qualifications you've gained through your past experience that support your current goals, and then focus your entire search on these elements. Don't position yourself as someone who wants to be a sales professional; rather, position yourself as someone who is a well-qualified sales professional with excellent skills in presentations, negotiations, closings, incentive planning and more. (If you've worked as a military recruiter, you've certainly done all of these things and more!)

“Re-weight” your skills and qualifications.

When writing your resume, you want to bring your skills and qualifications that are most relevant to your current career objectives to the forefront and put the most emphasis on them. Consider the following example: During your 4-year tour of duty, your primary function has been as a Maintenance Mechanic with collateral responsibility for technical training. Now, at this point in your career, as you re-enter the civilian workforce, you want to work as a technical instructor. To best position yourself for such opportunities, you'll want to “re-weight” the information you include on your resume and put greater emphasis on teaching and training than on the actual mechanic functions you performed on a daily basis.

Be inclusive; not exclusive.

Every time you include a military acronym or use other military jargon in your resume, you've given a prospective employer a reason to exclude you from consideration. Employers want to know what you can do for them in language that they will understand and appreciate. This is what the concept of transferability of skills is all about. Change the language in your resume from military to civilian so that “corporate America” can understand what you did and how it applies to them.

Sell it; don't tell it.

Resume writing is sales – pure and simple. You have a product to sell – yourself – and you must create a resume that highlights both the features (responsibilities) and benefits (achievements) of that product. To accomplish that, change your resume-writing mindset. Instead of simply telling your readers what you have done, sell them on how well you've done it. Consider the difference in the following two sentences. Tell: “Managed fleet of military vehicles.” Sell: “Managed fleet of military vehicles valued in excess of \$225 million and achieved 100% operational readiness scores for two consecutive years.” See the difference in impact?

Highlight your keywords.

Keywords are a vital component to every job seeker's successful search campaign. Tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of companies and recruiters use keywords as the primary vehicle to search their database of resumes. For example, a recruiter might be interested in a candidate with a strong background in supply chain management. If your background has been in logistics, you'd be an ideal candidate. However, if you haven't included those specific words – supply chain management – in your resume, you'll be passed over. Take the time that is necessary to learn the civilian keywords that are important to your current career goals, and then be sure to incorporate them into your resume (as long as you actually do have experience in each particular function).

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Define Your Civilian Job Objective

You can't effectively market yourself for a civilian job if you don't have a clearly defined goal. Because so many service people have diverse backgrounds, they often make the mistake of creating resumes that are too general to be effective. Before writing your resume, do some soul-searching, research occupations and pinpoint a specific career path.

Create a Resume that Speaks to Employers' Needs

Now that your objective is defined, you are ready to create a winning resume. Consider a resume's purpose: To answer the employer's question, "What can this person do for me?" A great way to start thinking about employers' needs is to research your target job. What types of skills and experiences are employers seeking? What aspects of your background are most relevant? Any information that does not relate to your goal should be eliminated or de-emphasized, and this includes any unrelated military awards, training and distinctions. For example, that medal you won for rifle marksmanship doesn't belong on a civilian resume. This is often the hardest step for ex-military personnel, which is why it's so common to see military resumes span five pages or longer. As you make the decision about which information to include, ask yourself, "Will a potential employer care about this experience?" Only include information that will help you land an interview.

Assume the Hiring Manager Knows Nothing about the Military

Demilitarize your job titles, duties, accomplishments, training and awards to appeal to civilian hiring managers. Employers with no exposure to the military don't understand military terminology and acronyms, so translate these into "civilianese." Show your resume to several non-military friends and ask them to point out terms they don't understand. Use job postings as a tool to substitute civilian keywords for military terms. One big issue Veterans returning from combat duty are finding as they seek civilian jobs is that civilian employers don't understand that skills honed on the battlefield are in fact transferrable to the civilian jobs they have available. In addition to translating your military record to a civilian resume, a Veteran must be able to speak about their job, position title, and responsibilities in a coherent and easy to understand fashion... without the military jargon.

Showcase Your Track Record of Accomplishments

Your military career has offered you excellent opportunities for training, practical experience and advancement. Tout your accomplishments so the average civilian understands the importance of your achievements and the measurable outcomes.

Here's an example of a demilitarized accomplishment statement:

- Increased employee retention rate by 16 percent by focusing on training, team building and recognition programs.

Here's an example of incorporating a military award so employers understand its value:

- Received Army Achievement Medal for completing 400+ medical evaluations and developing patient database in MS Access that improved reporting functions and tracked patient demographics, records, medication, appointments and status.

Show off Your Military Background

Your military experience is an asset and should be marketed as such. Many employers realize the value of bringing veterans on board. Attributes honed in the military include leadership, teamwork, positive work ethic and cross-functional skills. If you fear a potential employer won't realize the significance of your military experience, make sure your resume clearly communicates the value that you bring to the table.

If You Were in Active Combat, Leave out the Details

Defending your country and its interests is among the most admirable pursuits, but the sad truth is actual references to the horrors of combat leave many employers squeamish. While you might have worked in a short-range air defense engagement zone, this experience might not relate to your future goal. Tone down or remove references to the battlefield.