THE AUSTIN WRITING SHOP'S
Guide for Job Seekers

Your Resume: General Strategies

Your first goal in a resume is to convince a hiring manager that you are a good fit for the job and company. To do this, focus on accomplishments, not duties. If you list "technical writer" as your job title, especially if you are applying for other technical writer positions, then there are certain responsibilities that the hiring manager will assume you performed. It is neither impressive nor necessary to exhaustively list them. You want a resume to show that you are exceptional, not just that you did your job.

Mediocre	Better
Customer Service Manager, Company A ● Answered escalated phone calls from customers and resolved their complaints or problems ● Coached customer service team ● Attended and ran regular meetings with team and higher ups	Customer Service Manager, Company A ● Resolved escalated customer calls with a 95% satisfaction rate ● Managed team of 25 customer service agents ● Led highest performing team for 10 months in 2017 as a result of high morale and coaching ● Developed and presented proposal for increased call efficiency, leading to new processes that improved time per call by 15%

> " *You want a resume to show that you are exceptional, not just you just did your job.* "

Your second goal in a resume is to tell a compelling story. Your resume is not your life's story and you do not need to exhaustively include everything you've ever done professionally and academically. Focus on a narrative and only include details that fit that narrative. If you are trying to demonstrate that you are a highly experienced customer service professional, it does not make sense to include/emphasize 6 months you spent doing data entry.

In addition to the two goals above, follow these guidelines:

- The first bullet under a listing should be most impressive and last bullet should be second most impressive.
- Avoid indentations.
- Don't write an objective statement because the employer isn't as interested in your goals as they are in the benefits they will gain by hiring you.
- Don't include a picture of yourself unless your looks are related to the job (e.g. you're a model or actor).
- Always include a link to an online portfolio or website if relevant to the job.

Wording. Wording is very important in a resume. You want to use strong, action-oriented words when possible. Some action words you may want include are:

- Advise
- Establish
- Improve
- Oversee
- Supervise
- Upgrade

- Compile
- Examine
- Influence
- Direct
- Prepare
- Critique

- Generate
- Invent
- Illustrate
- Recruit
- Coach
- Guide

- Negotiate
- Resolve
- Design
- Hypothesize
- Motivate
- Train

There are certain words and phrases you want to avoid, such as:

- Try
- References available
- Upon request

- Objective
- Love
- Responsibilities include

- Goal-oriented
- Hard working

You don't want to just tell a reader that you have interpersonal skills or leadership skills. Those are vague categories that anyone can claim they have. Instead, you want to demonstrate that you have these skills by including specific experiences and proficiencies throughout your resume, particularly in your job descriptions:

Demonstrate interpersonal communication skills by using wording like:

- Writes clearly and concisely
- Openly expresses ideas
- Cooperates and works well with others

- Resolves/negotiates differences
- Provides and asks for feedback
- Offers well-developed solutions
- Persuades

Demonstrate planning and organization skills by using wording like:

- Forecasts/predicts
- Identifies and gathers appropriate resources
- Thinks critically to solve problems
- Coordinates and completes tasks
- Creates plans/proposals/timelines/roadmaps
- Thoroughly researches background information
- Develops strategies
- Manages projects effectively
- Meets deadlines
- Plans and arranges activities

Demonstrate management and leadership skills by using wording like:

- Leads and directs others
- Teaches/trains/instructs
- Counsels/coaches
- Manages conflict
- Helps team members set and achieve goals
- Delegates effectively
- Makes and implements decisions
- Enforces policies

Demonstrate social media skills by using wording like:

- Manages social media campaigns
- Measures and analyzes campaign results
- Enhances brand image through social presence
- Engages with industry influences
- Creates and executes content strategies
- Drives engagement and leads

> **TL;DR**
> - Be specific and concrete in your resume.
> - Use your resume to tell a compelling story.
> - Use strong action-oriented words

Your Resume: The Skills Section

We put a skills section in most client resumes because this section can serve two functions:
- Provide a quick, scannable summary of the candidate's qualifications
- Beat an Applicant Tracking System (ATS) by including keywords

The first function is important because most resumes are only reviewed for 10 seconds. This means you need to impress the hiring manager, so they are inspired to look at your resume for longer than that. A good, well-formatted skills section can convince the hiring manager that you may be a perfect fit, prompting them to review your job history and education sections.

The second function is important because you never know when your resume will be read by an ATS. ATS's look for keywords and may discard your resume before a human ever looks at it. There are no guaranteed tricks to beating an ATS, but a good strategy is to look for keywords in the job listing and mirror the language used there. For example, look at this job listing for a web content writer:

> **Our mission.** *As the world's number 1 job site, our mission is to help people get jobs. We need talented, passionate people working together to make this happen. We are looking to grow our teams with people who share our energy and enthusiasm for creating the best experience for job seekers.*
>
> **The team.** *We are a rapidly-growing, fast-moving, highly-capable UX team building the most popular job site on the planet.*

" There are no guaranteed tricks to beating an Applicant Tracking System, but a good strategy is to look for keywords in the job listing and mirror the language used there. "

Our designers work in Seattle, San Francisco, Austin, Tokyo and Hyderabad, collaborating with Product Managers and Engineering to deliver simple solutions to the real-world problems that job seekers and employers face hiring and getting hired. Most importantly, our team is expected to deliver results, and be able to demonstrate the impact our changes have on our business.

Your job. *We are a newly formed content strategy team partnering very closely with UX Design, Product Management, SEO and Research in Seattle, San Francisco, Austin, Tokyo and Hyderabad to build the most popular job site on the planet. Our goal is simple and clear: to deliver the right solutions to the real-world problems that employers and job seekers face hiring and getting hired. Most importantly, our team is expected to deliver results, and be able to demonstrate the impact our changes have on our business.*

What would you be doing?
As a Web Writer, you'll apply your passion for creating clear, concise, transparent and on-brand copy across a range of web and mobile experiences for job seekers and

employers. You'll assist users by writing clear instructions, intuitive labels and compelling calls to action. You'll partner with product managers, UX designers, researchers and senior team members to identify unmet or insufficient user communication needs and solve them.

- *Perform review and analysis of existing content across identified flows to identify elements that would benefit from testing and/or optimization.*
- *Write clear, concise, usable and useful editorial copy, user interface text, emails and landing page content, and community/social media responses and moderation.*
- *Partner with subject matter experts to explain products/tools to end users in an easy-to-understand manner.*
- *Ensure that online content supports SEO and follows corporate brand standards, web style guidelines, ADA requirements, legal and compliance, and is consistent across multiple experiences, platforms, and touchpoints.*
- *Incorporate learnings from analytics data and usability testing into the development of content.*
- *Assist with localization efforts to identify and test specific copy changes needed to be relevant and accurate in different locales.*
- *Create and maintain a comprehensive library of technical terminology and documentation.*
- *Manage deadlines and deliverables across concurrent projects.*

About you. Qualifications:

- *BA in English, journalism, advertising, marketing, or other relevant field or equivalent education and experience.*
- *A minimum of 5+ years of web content production and UI writing experience.*
- *Superior writing, editing and proofreading skills; can fit a complex idea into a handful of words.*
- *Passionate advocate of user-centered writing.*
- *Understanding of design principles, web writing best practices ,and how content fits into the user experience.*
- *Experience collaborating with designers, engineers, and product managers.*
- *Able to balance business and marketing needs with user needs for clarity and transparency.*
- *Strong technical literacy, with skills in Google Docs, Sheets, and Slides as well as basic HTML.*
- *Outside-the-box problem solving capabilities.*
- *Knowledge of A/B testing, usability testing, and web analytics.*
- *Understanding of SEO principles.*
- *Multiple language fluency a plus.*

Why Indeed? *Indeed is making a major investment in content strategy and design. We are aggressively growing a global team and investing in a new, modern design language. This is an opportunity to use this new design language and take one of the world's top sites (indeed.com - #50 in US, #150 globally per Alexa) to the next level.*

Your contributions will make a difference. If you are the type of technical writer that wants to know that what you are doing matters, then you'll like our data-driven approach to product development. Working for Indeed you'll be able to confidently describe how your copy has benefited both job seeker and employer's user experience. And that means you'll be helping people get jobs.

Indeed is useful and successful. People all over the world were looking for jobs last year and they will be looking for them next year. Recruitment is a mature, established industry with billions of dollars flowing through it. We've been profitable for years and are a market leader not just in the US, but all over the world.

Indeed provides a variety of benefits that help us focus on our mission of helping people get jobs. View our bounty of perks: *http://indeedhi.re/IndeedBenefits*

You'll want to pull keywords mostly from sections that are specific to the job, not to the company. In the listing above, those sections are "Your job" and "About you." These are the key words and phrases we would want to include in a resume:

- Able to write CLEAR, CONCISE, and TRANSPARENT copy (all three of the keywords are repeated twice)
- Able to write ON-BRAND copy that follows CORPORATE BRAND STANDARDS and STYLE GUIDELINES
- Able to identify UNMET COMMUNICATION NEEDS and solve them
- Able to ANALYZE EXISTING CONTENT
- Works well with SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS
- Experienced in LOCALIZATION, including identifying, making, and testing copy changes
- Maintained documentation and terminology LIBRARY (this is a unique term when talking about documentation organization, so it should be included)
- Excellent at meeting DEADLINES
- Experience with WEB CONTENT PRODUCTION and UI WRITING
- WRITING, EDITING, and PROOFREADING skills
- Proficient in USER-CENTERED WRITING
- Knows SEO principles
- Proficient in GOOGLE DOCS, SHEETS, and SLIDES (because this is phrased this way, I wouldn't replace it with Google Drive)
- Proficient in HTML

A good skills section works well for human and machine readers. It allows you to pack these keywords in a section where the hiring manager is likely to look in their first 10 seconds. It also allows you to repeat keywords, which is important for passing an ATS. I

can put, for example, WORKING WITH SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS in my skills section, then put "I work efficiently with over 30 subject matter experts in multiple countries" in one of my job descriptions. A good skills section for the job listing above would include the following skills:

- Writing web content
- UI writing
- User-centered writing
- Following brand guidelines
- Analyzing content
- Organizing documentation library
- Localization
- SEO
- HTML
- Google Docs, Sheets, Slides

In order for your skills section to be scannable and not a block of text, you shouldn't list more than 10 skills. If you need to include more than that, e.g. you know 8 coding languages, split your skills section into parts, like "Software," "Coding Languages," and "Leadership Skills."

TL;DR
- Use your Skills section to create a quick summary of your qualifications.
- Mirror the language in job listings in your Skills section.
- Keep the Skills section under 11 items or split into different sections.

Your Resume: The Summary Section

Another way to include keywords and provide a quick summary for the hiring manager is to create a summary section. We recommend making this section very short, no more than 3 or 4 sentences. It is a good idea to bold the most important qualifications in your summary, e.g.

I am a natural educator who likes to see students succeed. My interest in STEM is both broad and deep; I have earned a **PhD in neuroscience** and worked with students across a variety of basic and advanced subjects, including math, chemistry, biology, and genetics. I am skilled in **customizing lesson content**

to match a student's understanding with new material that they wish to learn, and, as a tutor, I am easily able to switch between teaching mode and coaching mode.

You should mirror the language used in the job listing in your summary. For example, the following jobs are all the same job:

- Content Writer
- Technical Writer
- Knowledge Manager
- Writer

That doesn't mean you should just use any of them in your resume, because the hiring manager may not know that they're the same job! So if a job listing uses the term "Content Writer," reflect that in your resume, as a title under your name, in your summary, and in your job descriptions. (It's fine to not put your "official" job title in your resume and replace it with something descriptive or a synonymous title.)

> **TL;DR**
> - Mirror the language used in job listings in your Summary section.
> - Bold the most important parts of a summary to make it scannable.

Your Resume: The Education Section

If you graduated 10 or more years ago, do not include your GPA or accomplishments from school. You can and should mention if you graduated with honors or Latin honors.

If your GPA is above a 3.0, include it on your resume for up to 5 years. If it is above 3.5, include it on your resume for up to 10 years. If it is below 3.0, do not include it on your resume unless the potential employer requires it.

In general, list your advanced degrees first. However, if some of your education is more relevant to the job you are seeking, e.g. you are a marketer who graduated with a B.A. in Women's Studies and have taken some community college coursework in marketing. The more relevant education, in that case, should be listed first, though you should still list your unrelated degrees.

You should not list high school education unless it is the most advanced degree you've earned AND the employer requires a high school diploma or GED.

If you have completed additional coursework or training that is relevant for the jobs you are seeking, we recommend including this information at the beginning of the education section. For example, perhaps you took some time off from nursing and then completed several nursing-related classes to refresh your skill set. List these courses as evidence of your interest in and commitment to the field of nursing. If the coursework was graded, you can include your grades, but ungraded coursework or training is still relevant and should be included. Examples of ungraded training could include skills or leadership training provided by your employer, online coursework from a site like Lynda.com, or independent study with an expert such as a language or technical tutor.

> **TL;DR**
> - Use your Education section for formal degrees, self-guided online coursework, and other training.
> - In general, order education by most recent to least recent, but it's okay to mix it up if some of your education is more relevant.

Your Cover Letter

Cover letters are annoying because, unlike your resume, there's a very good chance no one will even read it. So you're writing something that COULD be the difference between an interview and no interview, but there's no way of knowing if those lines you spent time drafting will even be looked at by another person. Many companies are more likely to look for candidates via recruiters (who almost never read cover letters), social media, and references. Almost every other part of your job search, from the resume to the interview to networking, is more likely to impact your chances of getting a good job.

All that said, if a cover letter is required, you should write one that feels genuine, demonstrates enthusiasm for the position and company, and connects the dots between your resume and the job requirements.

The mistake that most job seekers make in cover letters is to be too vague and generic, both about their qualifications and about the job or company. No one wants to read a regurgitation of your resume's bullet points. And trust us, every hiring manager can tell

when you send the same letter in all your other applications. You have to do more than just swap out company names. Here's how to combat that vagueness:

Talk about why you love the company. If you don't love the company, their vision, their product, or their approach, then any cover letter you send will sound insincere, like a form letter. Show the hiring manager that you actually *want* to work there, not just that you'd be successful working there.

Talk about how your skills would be put to good use at the company. Don't just say, "I know that my experience writing employee documentation would be valuable for your customer service team." That's just a way of saying you have experience, which they (should) already know from your resume. Share a couple specific ideas about what you might do at the company, using your past accomplishments to demonstrate your ability to do so. For example, *I would be able to analyze your current documentation system to find opportunities for improvement, from content reorganization to developing or improving a style guide. I have spearheaded documentation changes both large and small at [previous employer], where I have completely reorganized employee wikis by audience, developed a style guide both single-handedly and with a new team, and located underserved wiki audiences.*

A cover letter should not list skills or qualifications. It should include examples of accomplishments just like the example above. To help you brainstorm these examples, use the following strategies:

> " *Trust us, every hiring manager can tell when you send the same cover letter in all your other applications.* "

- Circle the skills required in the job listing. For each one, think of an accomplishment or some way you've successfully use that skill. Be as specific as possible. This step might be easiest in conversation at first, not just writing, so see if a friend will help you brainstorm and listen to your examples, giving you feedback on the ones that sound the most convincing or impressive.
- Ask yourself: What problems can you solve for a potential employer? Can you provide an example of a time you solved a similar problem, inside or outside of

a job? Spend 10 minutes writing the answers to these questions without stopping.

There are a lot of formulas for cover letters on the internet, but all you really need to worry about is that your cover letter shows some personality, is customized for the company, and demonstrates that you can hit the ground running.

> **TL;DR**
> - Do not regurgitate your resume in letter form.
> - Show enthusiasm for this particular company and this particular job.
> - Use specific accomplishments to demonstrate your qualifications.

Your Interview

An interview is the most important part of your job search. Your resume (and possibly cover letter) have already demonstrated that you might do well in the job, but an interview is where the hiring manager makes a personal judgment on whether you are a good fit for the job, the company, and the team.

People make judgments about other people within the first few seconds of meeting them, so what is even more important than your answers or preparation is what you look like and how you carry yourself. Make sure to do the following:

- Get to the interview about 10-15 minutes early. If you get there any earlier, wait in your car or outside until 15 minutes before your scheduled time.

- Dress appropriately. Research what you can about the company's dress code and dress a bit above that. It's perfectly okay to ask your interviewer or recruiter if you should aim for formal or business casual for your interview.

- Watch your body language. Listen to your inner mom voice and stand up straight, with your shoulders back, smile, and give a strong handshake when greeted.

- Don't eat or drink in the waiting area. Once you've sat down, it's okay to drink something, but don't arrive at the interview with a drink in hand (a bottle of water in your purse or briefcase is okay). Definitely don't eat or chew gum before or during the interview.

- Accept water or a beverage if it's offered. It will make it clear you're appreciative of their hospitality and establishes a more give-and-take dynamic in which you and the interviewer both have something to offer each other, even though technically you are not on equal footing. Plus, you can use taking a sip of the drink as a way to gather yourself for a few seconds before answering a tough question. (Caveats: Don't accept food and don't request a drink if it's not offered.)

Once you're past that first impression, you need to nail the actual interview. Come prepared. Bring 2-3 copies of your resume, a list of references to offer at the end of the interview, and samples of your work if you have any. It's okay to have notes, including reminders of how you want to answer some common interview questions, and to glance at them before giving a response to a question. We also recommend that you *take* notes during the interview, both so that you look engaged and so that you have some things to look back on if you're offered the position. Note things like names of your interviewers, the name and title of your potential boss, what team you'd be on, aspects of company culture you think are important, and any details about the job that are divulged during the interview.

During the interview, mirror your interviewer's body language. If they are making a lot of eye contact, leaning forward, or crossing their legs, it's a good idea to wait a minute or so and do the same. If they are making any negative body language, don't copy it. (You should practice this before an interview.) Also mirror their actual language. Use the jargon they do and mirror some of their phrases when answering questions.

You will be asked if you have any questions for the interviewer at the end of the interview and you should always ask at least one question. (A list of questions to ask is a great thing to include in the notes you bring with you.) Example questions are:

- What do you like most about working for this company?
- What is the culture like here?
- Is there anything in my application that concerns you?
- What challenges is the company facing that I could help with in this position?
- Will there be opportunities for employees to attend trainings or continuing education classes to improve skills relevant to the job?
- How is the organization set up for this position? How big is the team I will be working with?
- Will there be opportunities for me to take on leadership roles in the near future if I'm hired?

Immediately after your interview, email the interviewer to thank them for their time and the opportunity. If, on your way home from the interview, you thought of an answer to a question you couldn't answer, an idea for the company, or anything else pertinent, you can use this email as an opportunity to communicate it.

At the same time you send your email, mail a handwritten thank-you note to your interviewer. This should be classy, short, and sweet.

> **TL;DR**
> - First impressions are everything.
> - Be prepared. Overly prepared.
> - Mirror your interviewer's language and body language.
> - Send a thank you note.

How to Network

Networking can be a daunting task! We like to think of networking as "people helping people" instead of a chore that you must do to get a job. Networking is both a chance for you to improve your job prospects *and* a chance for you to help another person.

Figure out your networking needs. In order to use networking as an effective tool, you need to know what you want from your network. Here is a list of ideas for what you might ask of your existing network:

- Are you job-searching *within your current field*? Are you trying to connect with hiring managers or recruiters within your field? Let your professional colleagues know you are job-searching and ask, "Is there anyone within your network with whom you think I should meet?" If you don't ask, they might not think to share a new contact with you.

- Are you trying to *advance your career along its current trajectory*? Set up a coffee date or lunch with a friendly colleague from your network who has worked or is working in the position you want and ask them for their advice on how to make yourself a good candidate for the next position.

- Are you trying to *switch fields*? Tell your network! Even better, do you have anybody in your network who works in that field or a related one? Reach out to them to set up a meeting to chat them up about how they got into the field and what advice they would offer someone in your position.

- Do you *not know what you want to do*? This question might be the toughest to address through networking, but could you reach out to people in your network who seem *really excited* about their work? Talking to people who have a strong sense of their passions and motivations might help you start figuring out your own sense of purpose in life.

" Networking is both a chance for you to improve your job prospects and a chance for you to help another person. "

Maintain your network. As time passes, keep in touch with people from former legs of your education and career path. Use social media, such as LinkedIn, Facebook, or Twitter, to connect with former colleagues, bosses, classmates, or teachers. If they are local to you geographically, invite them to coffee or lunch to catch up. Try not to see networking as something you do ONLY when you need something from other people.

Remember the power of weak connections. One reason to network is to connect with people who are only weakly connected to you. These people represent the more distant nodes of your network. They also represent the most opportunity in terms of their ability to connect you to people who may be able to help you in direct and powerful ways.

Attend a networking event. Networking events are like the "wild card" of networking strategies. Who knows who you might meet? Here are a few tips for getting the most out of a networking event, even if you are an introvert:

- Bring business cards with you. This tip may seem really obvious, but it's both convenient and confidence-boosting to have your own contact cards to exchange with people whom you meet.

- Bring a buddy. Attending a networking event with a friend or colleague can make it less intimidating to chat with new people together.

- Try to connect with other people authentically. At a networking event, most people are trying to figure out if they might be able to help you or if you could

help them. Ask questions to figure out if you have anything of value to offer each other. Here are a few topic ideas for conversation:

- What brought you to this networking event?
- What kind of work do you do?
- Where did you go to school?
- What do you enjoy most about your work?

- Moderate your expectations. You don't have to meet everyone at this event. Perhaps you meet 2-3 people instead of 10 and that's okay. Those people with whom you do connect will be more memorable and you might be able to forge a relationship with them.

Be helpful and generous. Once you have some experience in a career field, you can serve as a networking resource to someone else. You might be able to mentor another person or provide a useful connection to them. The more you see yourself as being able to help, either now or in the future, the less daunting it will be for you to ask for help when you need it.

Update your resume. This tip may also seem obvious, but it's a common enough practice for anyone who might be interested in working with you to ask for your resume that you'll want to have an updated, accurate resume ready to send out at a moment's notice. Don't wait until someone asks for it to update it!

Be curious. Building a career is rarely a linear path. Learning how other people have carved out a professional niche for themselves may help you see new opportunities and new strategies for building a career that you love.

> **TL;DR**
> - Treat your network like people, not resources.
> - Help other people when you can.
> - Be specific if you are asking your network for help.

In Conclusion

If you have reached the end of this guide and feel a bit overwhelmed, don't panic! Building a career you love is a long-term process. It is not a realistic expectation to implement all of our advice at one time. Take things slowly and start with the suggestions that sound most useful to you.

If you are job-searching, please be kind to yourself! We know this process can be painful and exhausting. If you don't get an interview or a job offer, know that there are many reasons for that, and those reasons may have nothing to do to your resume, cover letter, or potential value. Many listed jobs are not truly open to all candidates; they may be listed, for example, because company policy requires it, but the organization has already chosen an internal candidate. In addition, many open jobs are not listed, which is why networking and other informal methods of job searching can be highly effective. So practice self care and remember that whether you land a particular job may be largely out of your hands.

Austin Writing Shop offers a variety of services to support job seekers, including resumes, cover letters, LinkedIn profiles, and interview coaching. Get in touch with us by emailing info@austinwritingshop.com or calling 512-956-6101.