

Let Sample Resumes Inspire You, Not Define You



Wouldn't it be nice to be able to find a sample resume that matches your background, copy it to your word-processing program, make minor changes and be done with the arduous task of creating a dazzling resume? While that would be ideal, you can shortchange yourself and sabotage your job search if you base your resume on a sample document.

The good news is that if done correctly, taking ideas from resumes in books or [free resume examples](#) online can greatly improve your own. Here's how to use resume samples without copying them verbatim.

The Pitfalls of Using Sample Resumes

"The problem with using a template or copying someone else's resume -- whether from a book or from a friend -- is that it doesn't allow for the uniqueness of each person's skills, experience and career history," explains Louise Kursmark, a career consultant and principal of Best Impression Career Services. Kursmark is also the author of 18 career-management books, including *Expert Resumes for Managers and Executives* and *Executive's Pocket Guide to ROI Resumes and Job Search*.

Resume writing veteran and author Teena Rose concurs. "Job seekers need to understand that resumes are like fingerprints; no two are (or should be) alike," she says. "Resumes should differ because of the varying education levels, career experience and scope of skills that job seekers possess."

Additionally, copying a sample the author hasn't given permission to copy is plagiarism, so check the copyright notice.

How to Effectively Harness Sample Resumes

Kursmark says there is nothing wrong with taking a little bit from various samples to make it easier to construct your own resume. "That's what sample books are for: To inspire you and guide you," she says.

For example, "You might really like one person's introduction -- the way they've clearly presented their unique value -- and use that introduction as a guide for writing your own distinct content," Kursmark says. "Or you might grab a bold accomplishment statement from someone else's resume and update the numbers or results to make it applicable to you."

Here are more of Kursmark's tips to help you make the best use of resume samples:

- Look for resumes in your field and mine them for industry-specific activities, terms and accomplishments. Have you done similar things? Is your skill set comparable?
- After you've reviewed resumes in your field, peruse resumes across fields to understand how to vary the use of action verbs and get a feel for what makes a powerful accomplishment statement. Then write your own statements, as appropriate, modeled on the ones you like best.
- Look for innovative formats and striking presentation, such as charts and tables. Can you include a strong visual that will immediately grab the reader's attention?
- Dip into numerous resumes to get a feel for good writing, concise yet compelling language and high-impact accomplishments. Work on your own resume with those examples in mind.
- Read your revamped resume with a critical eye to make sure it reflects you. Will the image you present in person be congruent with your resume? "If you've included material just because it sounded good but you don't have the details to back it up, you'll destroy your credibility in the interview," warns Kursmark.
- Finally, when reviewing resume samples, think customize, not plagiarize. "Use samples as a guide for ideas, but take pride in writing a resume that has your own unique content and visual appeal," advises Rose.

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