

A vintage typewriter with a white body and black keyboard is positioned on a dark wooden desk. The typewriter's carriage and paper support mechanism are visible. In the foreground, several pieces of white paper are crumpled into balls, scattered around the base of the typewriter. A dark grey banner is overlaid on the top half of the image, containing white text. Another dark grey banner is overlaid on the bottom right, containing white text.

Painless Resumes:

How to Create a Resume that
Stands Above the Crowd

By Becca Ribbing

Painless Resumes: How to Create a Resume that Stands Above the Crowd
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The big promise

Have you been dreading this moment?

The moment where you have to actually type the first couple sentences of your resume?

Or maybe you've already written out half of your resume, but you can't put your finger on why it isn't right?

I've spent the last eight years helping people from a very diverse array of professions to figure out a) what they want to do with their lives; and b) how to go after what they want as strongly as possible once they figure it out.

This means I've been helping people create great resumes for years. In those years, I have figured out the main obstacles to writing a good resume and how to get around them.

I hope to make this process as quick and as painless as possible.

I know at the moment, that might seem impossible. Resumes are hard. We only write them every couple years, they are so important and they are filled with rules that you don't want to follow.

But first of all -- congratulations for taking the first step on the journey of getting an amazing new job! Give yourself credit. Many people get stuck here and never get started.

So let's get started.

The single most important thing to remember is that almost no one is going to “read” your resume at first.

Seriously.

They are going to skim it.

Job searchers vastly overestimate the time that the average HR person or hiring manager spends reading resumes.

If it takes more than seven seconds to get the gist of why you're amazing, then it's going to be tossed for the next one.

In most circumstances, people will skim your resume. If it interests them, only then will they

go back and read it. This even includes friends, acquaintances and former colleagues.

I'm pretty sure that right now you're thinking: *“Are you trying to tell me that people won't actually even read this document that I'm spending hours upon hours writing?”*

That's exactly what I'm telling you.

This is why skimmability is the most important trait of a good resume.

(Oh and for your resume, don't make up words)

If you can get this down, your resume will be better than 90% of competitors' resumes.

I'm going to help you do this.

I am going to help you figure out what will make your resume stand out in those seven seconds, and greatly increase your chances of landing that job interview.

It's not that hard once you've gone through this workbook and know exactly what needs to be in your resume to stand out as much as possible.

And even better, the art of resume writing is actually going to make sense to you.

It's not as hard as it looks. You can write a great resume.

I'm going to help you make this as painless as possible.

So where do you start?

With figuring out what is going to appeal to your audience.

Who is your audience?

There are actually three audiences for every resume, and many people forget that their resume needs to appeal to all three.

The key audience is the hiring manager for your perfect job. Hiring manager is just a way of saying the person that will be your boss and has final say on who gets hired for a specific job.

The second audience is HR. In order to get to the hiring manager, most of the time you have to get through HR first. Unfortunately, many people forget that they need to appeal to both, and thereby accidentally shoot themselves in the foot with one of them. You need both to get an

interview.

The third audience is the most ignored audience. This is the network of people that would be more than happy to pass your information around, if only you had a great resume.

Every time someone passes your resume, it's an endorsement of you. In order to get the most endorsements, you must have a solid, but skimable resume. People aren't going to waste their own extended network's time if your resume is denser than War and Peace.

Aggg, that's a lot of people to try to write for.

Yes, but that's the whole point of why I wrote this workbook.

I'm going to help you through this and make it as painless and intuitive as possible.

The goal of this book is to help you gather your thoughts so that you are in a good position to jam out your resume in a clear and strategic way that is both skimable and appeals to the people in the best position to get you the job you want.

It will also help you to sound interesting and engaging without falling into the trap that 90% of other resume writers fall into: having boring, dense, or hard-to-read resumes.

So let's get started, shall we?

What Have Your Bosses and Coworkers Loved About Your Work?

Think back on your career so far.

What have your bosses praised about you and your work? What are the strengths that they have listed on your annual reviews?

If you can, ask a previous supervisor or co-worker describe your strengths to you. This is very helpful because these are likely to be characteristics that your next boss would appreciate as well.

This will help you directly tailor your resume to the most important audience, the hiring manager for your ideal job.

Action Items:

1. What have your bosses loved about your work? What accomplishments stand out to them? Bonus: Either ask a former boss what they like about you, or get out an old performance review and note the things that stood out to your boss.

2. If any of these are character-related, can you make them more concrete? For example, describe how you multitask and then how it directly relates to improvements in productivity, instead of just saying that you are good at multitasking, say that you “Managed two major fundraisers at the same time while coming in 20% under budget.”

3. In addition to supervisors, co-workers can be excellent sources of useful information about your most valuable strengths. What have your co-workers appreciated about working with you?

Job-Description Cannibalization

Pull up at least three online descriptions of jobs you'd want and are relatively well-qualified for.

The employers who wrote these descriptions have invested a fair bit of time thinking about what exactly it is that they want from the candidates for these positions.

With these descriptions, they have already told you the language that they are looking for.

Why reinvent the wheel?

This step is especially important for getting through the gatekeepers, namely HR.

Often, HR has people (or computers) go through the collected resumes and see which ones most clearly match the exact words and phrases used in the original job description.

Does this sound mechanical?

You bet - which is why machines are increasingly doing it.

These gatekeepers usually are not in your line of work. Their job is to look at the job description and find the resumes that match up the best, or even worse, look at the print out of which candidates the computer thinks are the best fits.

This is not the time to get clever.

Find the language used in these job descriptions -- and mirror that language in your own resume.

They won't be amused if your resume is a word-for-word repetition of their original job description. So, I want you to list these words and phrases on a separate page (instead of just highlighting them on a printed page).

Your resume will be fresher and more authentic if you draw upon this language in your own way, rather than just cutting and pasting from job descriptions.

Note: If you're suck here because you're having a really hard time deciding what to do next so finding job descriptions feels pointless, I totally understand. You're not alone. So many people struggle with this. Please consider [applying for a free strategy session](#) with me. I've helped lots of people with this and I can almost certainly help you too.

Problem Areas on Your Resume

Be honest here.

Are there any ghosts in your past or - even more tragically - your present?

If there are, know that you're not alone.

Nearly everyone has gone through a rough patch before. Most people have at least one gap in their resume, a job that they weren't in for very long, or a job that they took because they were desperate but it wasn't exactly a resume builder.

These things are not the kiss of death for getting a new job, but they do need to be addressed as positively as possible.

Ok, so lets get started with the hard part.

I'm here to help you come up with strategies to get around the tough spots as much as possible.

But first, a word of encouragement.

A technically flawless resume isn't as important as a resume that does a great job selling you.

The person with no employment gaps is attractive, but applicants with a solidly skimmable and readable resume will often get interviews - even with a job gap.

That's because their "sales pitch" stands out significantly more than the gap.

Ok, so what are the elements of your resume that you are most afraid of sharing with a prospective employer? What are the potential "red flags" that you dread having to include on your resume?

This might include long gaps between jobs; any jobs lasting less than a year; or a lack of certain qualifications (such as obvious management experience).

Examples: Maybe you haven't had a management title, but you did lead a project. Or maybe you have managed outside contractors or interns. The bottom line: You may have more management experience than you realize, even if you've never had a management title.

It can be hard to fix an extended period of unemployment, unless you can cite meaningful volunteer, freelance, or contract work that you did during that period -- and, ideally, explain

how this work may have deepened your qualifications for a particular role.

Tip: If you're unemployed right now, it's vital to pick up some sort of contract work or volunteer work - something, anything - related to your field of interest. I've seen many people allow a bad situation get worse on their resume by not being proactive about minimizing gaps on their resume. Being laid off is demoralizing, and you are probably doing everything you can to get a new job as quickly as possible. However, in case this period of unemployment continues, it is best to come up with a strategy now for keeping your resume fresh.

Another solution to employment gaps is lumping multiple contract jobs together under the heading of freelance, or if they are relatively similar jobs, you can post them under one job title with multiple companies broken out.

It may be helpful to use only years, not months, to list time spent in a given job. This avoids calling attention to the specific times. This works better if you've been at most other jobs for at least 2-3 years.

Have a situation not mentioned here? Shoot me an email. I will try to help you brainstorm a solution. I can't fix every problem, but I can try and help.

Seriously, email me, becca@beccaribbing.com.

I would like to encourage you to actually write the action items below down on paper. I find that putting your fears down actually helps you both by facing them, and realizing that they are surmountable.

Action Items:

1. What am I most afraid of?

2. Does anything mitigate this problem area?

3. Why am I an excellent hire anyway inspite of this problem?

4. If you're struggling here, ask a mentor or friend for help brainstorming. In my experience, this can help. If you're still stuck, email me.

Action Verbs (yes, you **HAVE** to use them)

This is one of those places that you're just going to have to trust me. The first word of every bullet point in your resume should start with an action verb.

Everyone has heard this rule.

Yet no one follows it.

Who made this stupid rule in the first place?

I don't know, but I do know why the rule exists and why you really, really should follow it.

It goes back to my main point:

The best resumes are skimmable and the best resumes can be easily read in seven seconds for key points.

Action verbs make your resume much more skimmable.

How?

Because as the first word of every sentence, they create a vision of who you are in the workplace.

They show you taking action.

They also help you save yourself from writing in long run-on sentences.

Wait a second, I missed this topic in English class. What's an action verb?

An action verb is exactly what it sounds like. It is a verb that indicates an action taking place. Run is an action verb. So is manage, write, and consult. They will be in the past tense for past jobs, and present tense for items that you are currently doing at your present job. Example: Ran monthly meetings at my last job. Run monthly meetings at my current job. Managed five employees at my last job. Manage five employees at my current one.

You're either going to find the above description too basic or you still don't understand.

So, let's try to make this easy.

I'm going to give you a list of all the action verbs I could come up with (with the internet's help, of course).

Your job is to read them over and pick out 20-30 that apply to your job history. These will then become your new best friends.

The idea is to make writing your resume easier and faster because you don't have to spend time thinking of action verbs to start with. I already have you covered.

This will make the writing process flow a lot quicker and more naturally.

Bonus: Go back through your 3 job descriptions and see if you find any action verbs there.

This is the last action item before the main event. Once you've completed it, it's time to move on to putting it all together. But don't worry, I will help you with that too.

LIST OF ACTION VERBS

([Download this list here](#))

For anytime you helped:	To show your communication skills:	To show your creativity and moxy:
adapted advocated aided answered arranged assessed assisted clarified coached collaborated contributed cooperated counseled demonstrated educated encouraged ensured expedited facilitated familiarized furthered guided insured intervened prevented provided referred represented resolved simplified supplied supported volunteered	addressed arbitrated arranged authored collaborated consulted convinced corresponded developed directed drafted edited enlisted formulated influenced interpreted interviewed lectured listened mediated moderated motivated negotiated persuaded promoted publicized reconciled recruited referred spoke synthesized translated wrote	acted adapted composed conceptualized created customized designed developed directed drew entertained established fashioned formulated founded illustrated initiated instituted integrated introduced invented originated modeled modified performed photographed planned revitalized shaped

For all those things HR related:	For managers:	To show how organized you are:
Adapted advised clarified coached communicated coordinated critiqued developed enabled encouraged evaluated explained facilitated focused guided individualized initiated instructed persuaded set goals stimulated	administered analyzed approved assigned attained authorized chaired contracted consolidated coordinated delegated developed directed eliminated established evaluated executed generated handled headed hired improved increased initiated instituted organized overhauled oversaw planned prioritized produced recommended reorganized restored reviewed secured streamlined strengthened	approved arranged categorized classified collected compiled corrected corresponded dispatched distributed executed filed generated implemented incorporated inspected logged maintained monitored obtained operated organized prepared processed purchased recorded retrieved screened specified systematized validated verified

For research wonks:	For the mathematically minded:	For the technically minded:
analyzed clarified collected conducted critiqued detected determined diagnosed evaluated examined explored extracted identified inspected interpreted interviewed investigated organized researched reviewed searched solved summarized surveyed systematized tested	administered adjusted allocated analyzed appraised assessed audited balanced budgeted calculated computed conserved developed estimated forecasted marketed measured netted planned prepared projected qualified reduced researched	adapted applied assembled built calculated computed constructed converted debugged designed determined developed devised engineered fabricated fortified installed maintained operated overhauled programmed rectified remodeled repair replaced solved specialized standardized trained upgraded utilized

All About Templates

First of all, I'm so glad you've stuck with me and gotten this far. I hope it has been helpful.

Now it's time to move on-to the question of how (and whether) to use resume templates.

I get asked about this more than anything else - and for good reason. A good template makes your resume much easier to read.

A bad template makes a good resume impossible to read.

80% of people write pretty bad resumes (even if they are normally good writers), but the other 20% often undercut their otherwise decent resume with bad formatting.

I'm always surprised when I get a resume that looks pretty bad at first glance, but that (upon further review) is actually well written. The format is what is making it unreadable.

Fortunately, the problem of bad formatting is easy to fix.

A few rules of thumb.

First of all, the cleaner the better. No crazy script-style fonts. Nothing that is going to detract from your words. Make sure you are leaving your margins at 1" on all sides. Anything less, and it's not going to be skimable.

Eventually, I am hoping to have professionally designed templates on my site, but until that happens, here are a few of my favorite template examples:

This one is from Microsoft Office. It's clean and fairly simple to use. I like it because it is minimal and looks very professional -- <http://bit.ly/SBwmOg>

Here's another one from Microsoft that is a little more modern looking -- <http://bit.ly/PLm3ZF>

There are also many good templates that are inexpensive on Etsy.

When using free templates (or ones from Etsy), be aware that they usually have one common problem.

They all tend to have entirely too much white space.

Why is this a problem?

Well as soon as you start using one, you quickly see that there's no room for all your amazing accomplishments.

The only people who can use most of these templates without serious customization are students fresh out of college who only have had one or two jobs.

And honestly, do you know any college graduates who have only had one or two jobs?

I don't, so maybe it would be better to say that they really are best suited to high-school students or college freshmen.

Why all the white space?

Simply because it looks better in the thumbnail picture on the website. It is more likely to get clicked on.

This isn't a problem as long as you make sure to customize the template to allow you enough space, but don't spend time getting frustrated trying to cram all your information from a very successful career into what amounts to 1/2 a page of text.

It's not you, it's the template; so make sure you change the margins to allow everything to fit on one to two pages.

But don't go overboard here, the key here is readability. You need 11 or 12 point fonts and you need to maintain the 1 inch margins, or people's eyes are going to glaze over, and then they'll put it in the trash pile.

And now for the main event!

It's time to sit down and write your resume.

But before you do, take a moment to read back over all your notes. What will make you stand out the most? What are your proudest job-related accomplishments?

Start with what you are most confident about.

Don't worry about making it perfect.

Just start jamming it out.

If you spend too long agonising over each bullet point before getting the whole document done, you will cut off your flow.

Create a very rough first draft, then take a break. Go get a coffee. Take a walk.

Do something to clear your mind.

You need to be fresh before you start the next part.

Now go back and read the draft resume in 7 seconds.

What stands out to you?

Do your biggest selling points draw your eye?

If not, go back and write those points so that they are more eye-catching. Make sure you are starting with an action verb. See if you can cut it down. Make sure it isn't too jargony.

Remember, the HR person that reads your resume first may not understand that much about your field.

Tip: One of the things that stands out the best are numbers. Make sure to include any numbers that you can. This can include sales, customer satisfaction, retention, social media shares/likes, production increases, etc.

Keep repeating this step until you think it is easy on the eyes. Then ask a friend to take 7 seconds to read it and see if they agree.

Only after you get it skimmable should you really dive into making it grammatically correct

and typo-free.

My best advice for managing the editing process is to ask people to indicate what doesn't make sense, what is grammatically incorrect, and what they would like to see changed.

Too often, I read resumes that seem like they were written by committee. By the time they've been through the editing process with eight different friends and family, they get dull.

If you ask your editors to distinguish between true problems and stylistic problems, you can get a better sense of what to change and why.

Don't feel compelled to follow all their advice unless you think it makes sense.

The goal isn't to have a resume that everyone thinks is perfect. That isn't possible. If you ask 20 different people to critique your resume, you will get 20 very different reactions.

The goal is to have a resume that is 80% better than everyone else.

Follow these steps, and you will be well on your way to getting a better job than the one you have now.

Please feel free to email me, becca@beccaribbing.com at anytime for advice, suggestions on how to move forward, or just plain old encouragement. I will be happy to provide any support that you need.

Good luck!

-Becca

P.S. Please forward *Painless Resumes* on to any friends that you have that might be about to start a job search. My goal with this guide is to help as many people as possible.

About the Author

[Becca Ribbing](#) has been a career and executive coach for eight years. She has worked with people from a broad range of backgrounds, from finance to interior design, helping them find career paths that inspire them.



Are you feeling stuck on the basic question of “*what do I want?*” Please consider [applying for a free strategy session](#) with Becca.

In her free time, she loves hiking and backpacking with her husband and two sons in the beautiful parks around the Seattle area.