

Quintessential Careers: FAKTSA: An Easy Acronym for Remembering Key Resume Enhancers

by Katharine Hansen, Ph.D.

What are the most important things to remember about writing an effective resume? They can be encapsulated in a six-letter acronym, **FAKTSA**, in which the letters stand for:

Focus
Appearance
Keywords
Transferrable **S**kills
Accomplishments

Focus

A sharp focus is an extremely important resume element. Given that employers screen resumes for between **2.5 and 20 seconds**, a resume should show the employer at a glance what you want to do and what you're good at. In a study by Career Masters Institute, employers wanted resumes to show a clear match between the applicant and a particular job's requirements. A "general" resume that is not focused on a specific job's requirements was seen as not competitive. In a more recent study by CareerBuilder.com, 71 percent of hiring managers preferred a resume customized for the open position.

One way to sharpen your focus is through verbiage at the top of your resume that instantly catches the reader's eye and identifies the area(s) in which you can make a contribution.

This verbiage can take one of several -- or a combination -- of forms:

1. Objective statement: Described in more detail below.
2. A "headline," usually simply the title of the position you're applying for, which can be adjusted for every job you apply for.
3. A branding statement, a punchy "ad-like" statement that tells immediately what you can bring to an employer.

The headline and branding statement are often used in combination. Example:

SENIOR EXECUTIVE

Specialize in raising the bar, creating strategy, managing risk, and improving the quality and caliber of operations.

If you go with an Objective statement, it should be labeled as such and use language telling how you'll benefit the employer. Something like:

Objective: To contribute strong _____ skills and experience to your firm in a _____ capacity.

In this day of being able to manage our own computer files, you could have several versions of your resume that are exactly the same EXCEPT for the objective/headline/branding statement.

Specific verbiage at the top of your resume is always better than a vague or general wording.

To sharpen your focus, you could also add a section called something like "Summary of Qualifications," "Profile," or the like. Such a section, in a reader-friendly bulleted format can contribute to powerful resume opener that draws the reader in; it can be part of the top third of resume that showcases your best selling points, catches the prospective employer's attention, and immediately demonstrates your value as a candidate.

A synthesis of the ideas of two leading resume experts, Susan Britton Whitcomb, author of *Resume Magic*, one of the best books on the market for resumes, and Deb Wile Dib of Advantage Resumes, reveals that a Summary/Profile section can contain:

- Title/functional area/level of your current position and/or position you seek.
- Number of years of experience (which, for age-discrimination reasons, should not exceed 15-20; "15+" is a good guideline for mature workers)
- Industry you're in or seeking to be in.
- Core competencies/areas of expertise/strengths/specialization for that field.
- Highlights of representative accomplishments, especially used to demonstrate skills and competencies you've used throughout your career.
- Top business, leadership, craft-related skills, both "hard skills" and "soft skills" (such as communication, interpersonal, teamwork).
- "Value-added" information: Skills/accomplishments/experience that add to your value because they are not necessarily expected of someone with your background (e.g., operations manager with deep knowledge of IT).
- Any advanced degrees, certifications, or licenses that are integral to the type of job you seek.
- Language and international business skills, if relevant.
- Technical/computer skills, instead of burying them at the bottom of your resume (Exception: IT professionals, who should place IT skills in a separate section).
- Personality /management style: Open a little window into your personality with your Summary/Profile (e.g., mention sense of humor)
- Possibly affiliations if integral to the job, otherwise in a separate section.
- Any extremely prestigious colleges, employers, or clients.
- Quantification whenever possible, using numbers for, e.g., revenue generated, size of accounts, typical budgets, money saved, etc.
- Positive quotes, testimonials from supervisors, clients, taken from memos, letters, performance evaluations.
- Awards you've earned, such as Employee of the Month and President's Club, can also be listed in the Summary/Profile section to give them more up-front attention than if they were listed in their own section.
- Keywords/buzzwords from ads or job postings you're responding to.

Appearance

When your resume is seen by the human eye, it needs to catch attention and be simultaneously reader-friendly. In the study by Career Masters Institute mentioned above employers ranked easy readability as the most important resume point in terms of first impressions.

Avoid instantly recognizable Microsoft Word resume templates. Employers have seen a million of them, so they don't stand out. They are also somewhat inflexible and contain some problematic formatting. "Using a template or any kind of boilerplate to demonstrate your value to a company is the worst thing you can do to yourself when job hunting," says Nick Corcodilos of Ask The Headhunter. "You're supposed to be uniquely qualified so the company will choose you instead of some cookie-cutter drone -- right? Do you really want a template?"

Ensure that the appearance of your resume holds up when you transmit it electronically. If you are regularly sending your resume as an e-mail attachment, you may want to experiment with sending it to friends' computers to ensure that the formatting appears consistently from computer to computer.

Display your name boldly and in a large font at the top of your resume to project confidence; a small name makes the job-seeker look timid.

We recommend a resume body font no smaller than 10.5 points and no larger than 12 points. Type at 11 points is often the best choice for resumes. Don't use justified text blocks; they put odd little spaces between words. Instead, make your type flush left. Employ some typographic variety -- judicious use of bold and italics. You can use up to two different fonts on your resume, and make sure they are readable. Avoid underlining because it adds clutter to your resume.

Include pleasing white space on your resume, but don't go overboard. The default margin setting in Microsoft Word is 1.25", but you'll have an easier time fitting everything in if you set your margins at .75" to 1".

Include some design elements, such as rule lines, to give your resume graphic interest. We also strongly recommend a bulleted style to make your resume more reader-friendly. In the above-cited study by Career Masters Institute, use of bullets was the 2nd-highest ranked preference by employers, and density of type (paragraphs rather than bullet points) was ranked highly as a factor that would inspire employers to discard a resume.

Be sure your headings and sections are clearly marked and information can be located easily.

Some job-seekers hurt the appearance of their resumes by trying to squeeze a lot of information onto one page. Don't be afraid to go to a two-page resume. Two pages is totally acceptable and even expected for those with higher levels of experience. If you have only a few lines of type on your second page, however, try to condense to one page. Number your pages and include your name on each page in case the pages of the resume get separated.

Keywords

More than 80 percent of resumes are searched for job-specific keywords. Therefore, if you apply for a job with a company that searches databases for keywords, and your resume doesn't have the keywords the company seeks for the person who fills that job, you are pretty much dead in the water.

The summary/profile sections mentioned above under Focus can be important for front-loading your resume with these all-important keywords. (Lack of front-loaded keywords decreases ability to match resume to potential jobs quickly at critical first- and second-level scanning. Many job-seekers would likely benefit from a section of industry-specific keywords, labeled with a heading such as Areas of Expertise, Core Competencies, or Key Proficiencies.

Transferable Skills

One of the most important concepts you will ever encounter in the job-hunting process is that of transferable job skills. In fact, I tell my undergraduate college students that transferable skills is the most important idea I mention all semester. The deft use of transferable skills should pervade your job search and be a key factor in your resume, cover letter, and interview strategies.

What are transferable skills? Simply put, they are skills you have acquired during any activity in your life -- jobs, classes, projects, parenting, hobbies, sports, virtually anything -- that are transferable and applicable to what you want to do in your next job.

Always portray your skills in your resume as applicable to the job you seek. If you have good experience and you're seeking in a job in the same field you've pursued in the past, portraying your skills as transferable is relatively easy. But if you are changing careers and seeking to do something entirely different from what you've done in the past, or you are a college student or other entry-level jobseeker without much experience, you have a much more difficult task ahead of you.

Accomplishments

Many resumes are duties-driven when they should be accomplishments-driven. Job-seekers should, for example, NEVER use expressions like "Duties included," "Responsibilities included," or "Responsible for." That's job-description language, not accomplishments-oriented resume language that sells. After all, if you were an employer and wanted to run a successful organization, would you be looking for candidates who can perform only their basic job functions, or would you want employees who can make real contributions? In these days in which most resumes are placed into keyword-searchable databases, you won't find employers searching resumes for words like "responsibilities," "duties," or "responsible for."

Instead, focus on accomplishments that set you apart from other job candidates. In each job, what special things did you do to set yourself apart? How did you do the job better than anyone else or than anyone else could have done? What did you do to make it your own? What special things did you do to impress your boss so that you might be promoted? What were the problems or challenges that you or the organization faced? What did you do to overcome the problems? What were the results of your efforts? How did the organization benefit from your performance? How did you leave your employers better off than before you worked for them? How have you helped your employer to:

- make money
- save money
- save time
- make work easier
- solve a specific problem
- be more competitive
- build relationships
- expand the business
- attract new customers
- retain existing customers

Accomplishments are the points that increase reader's interest, stimulate a request for a job interview, and really help sell you to an employer -- much more so than everyday job duties. In the above-cited study by Career Masters Institute, content elements that propel employers to immediately discard resumes include a focus on duties instead of accomplishments, while documented achievements were highly ranked among content elements that employers look for. Be sure also that the accomplishments you list support your career goals.

We also advise against isolating accomplishments in a section by themselves. Everything on your resume should be accomplishments-driven, and isolating accomplishments suggests that the other things you did in your jobs were NOT accomplishments.