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Basic information that should be on your resume

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Your resume is a “snapshot” of you, your qualifications, and your knowledge, skills, and abilities. The purpose of a resume is to give a “down and dirty” quick look at your background to see if it relates to the position you are being considered for. Putting too much information on a resume is almost as bad as putting not enough information on a resume.

INTRODUCTION

Can you honestly say that your resume is a masterpiece? Not too many people can. Most resumes that I see are drab, boring, blah, and either full of useless information or inadequate information. Whoever is reading your resume might have less than a minute to do so. Do you believe you make an awesome impression of yourself with your resume in less than a minute? Remember that the person that is reading your resume has probably seen numerous other resumes over the course of the day, the week, the course of the interview process for a specific hiring process, and over the course of their life. The point I’m trying to make is that your resume must be able to promote all of your knowledge, skills, and abilities in a positive, unique and refreshing way that is different from all of the other candidates.

MAJOR HEADINGS (SECTIONS) OF A RESUME

I believe there should be no more than about five (5) major headings or sections contained in your resume. No more, maybe one or two less – depending on what you have to offer. Some of the major headings I believe in are your objective, experience, education, community service / volunteer work, certificates / licenses, and/or special skills and training. Let me discuss each section in detail:

OBJECTIVE:

A one-line description of what position you’re going for and with what agency. Some people say you don’t need an objective. I disagree. By listing the exact job title (taken from the job description) and the agency you’re testing for, I think it shows a little effort and personalization. Listing no objective is almost as bad as listing something like “to become a firefighter (and nothing else).” That makes it look like you use the same resume for every department. A little effort can go a long way. Also, stay away from objectives that are three to four lines long that sound like a story with no obvious ending. I’ve seen ones that say something to the tune of “to obtain a position that will allow me to utilize my knowledge, skills, and abilities to be able to serve the community, and so on, and so on, and so on...” GET TO THE POINT! *To become a Firefighter for the Alameda County Fire Department* gets your point across perfectly.

EXPERIENCE:

Some people like to write employment history or job history or work experience. I like experience because it is short and sweet, and because it can be paid or volunteer experience. List two to three employers at the most (don't stress – the rest are going on the application since most applications require you to list EVERY employer you have ever worked for). Start with your present employer and work backwards (chronological order), not leaving any obvious gaps.

For each employer, I like the following information:

- Name of Employer (Company – not the name of your supervisor)
- City and State of employer (no street address, no zip code, no phone number)
- Exact Job Title – this is the title the background investigator is going to verify you held when you worked there.
- Dates Employed – all you need is the month and date. The exact date will go on the application. June 2002 or 06/02 is sufficient. Just like your job title, make sure your dates employed match what the personnel department at your employer (or ex-employer) has on record for you. If they don't match up – that will bring up a red flag. Say you list that you started in June and your employer says you started in May. Put yourself in the shoes of a background investigator. It either gives the impression that you are lying about something, or that you are not responsible at keeping records on your personal life.
- Duties / Responsibilities – Here is a section I can actually justify not listing on a resume. Why? Because you have already listed them on your application and because they can take up needed space for other things. I've seen resumes where the experience section took up $\frac{3}{4}$ of the page. Don't get me wrong – experience is one of the best things we can offer. However, experience itself is not everything. You have to balance it with education and other knowledge, skills, and abilities. If you need words on a resume – keep the duties / responsibilities. If you need to save space, eliminate them.

EDUCATION:

This section should be no more than a couple of lines. List any degrees you may possess. You only need to list one or two schools (one to two lines per school). Keep it simple. List the name of the college, the city and state of the college, your degree you received or are pursuing, and your date of graduation or expected date of application. That's it. If you graduated from college over 10 years ago, you might want to leave that date off of the resume (it will still usually be required on the application) – just to eliminate any potential bias based on age.

Some people ask me “should I list my units received, or all five of the colleges I've been to – including the ones I went to but never completed my degree?” NO! Remember – all of that information is usually requested on the application (it usually says “List **every** school you have ever attended.”) and the resume is left up to you to *PICK AND CHOOSE* what goes on it.

Last, but not least: ***DO NOT LIST YOUR HIGH SCHOOL INFORMATION!*** Why? First of all, that information will be going on the application. Second, it can show your age (which can be negative or positive). Even though it is illegal to discriminate based on age, it can potentially

happen. If I'm on the oral panel and I think you are very immature, don't add fuel to the fire by showing that you just graduated last month from high school. I'm supposed to evaluate you on the answers you provide to the questions; however, if you add things in there such as high school dates, it can potentially go against you. Third, it is a waste of space! Chances are you are in college now or taking college-level classes (EMT, Firefighter 1 Academy, etc), so it is unnecessary!

COMMUNITY SERVICE / VOLUNTEER WORK:

You are performing volunteer work, aren't you? Many fire departments almost expect their candidates to have some experience in volunteer or community service work. When I say community service, I don't mean the type where you put on an orange vest to do the weekend roadside cleanup work after getting convicted of a crime (not that there is anything wrong with that....)

I like to list volunteer work like my experience. List the name of the organization, city and state, what exact title you have, maybe some brief duties (if you have room), and most importantly, a running tally of your total amount of volunteer hours you have performed.

Janet Jackson performed the song "what have you done for me lately?" Think of volunteer service this way. Putting down that you helped out at a neighborhood cleanup day for two hours yesterday is not bad. However, as the months progress, if that is the only thing you have on your resume, it doesn't look to good. That was then, this is now. That is why I suggest picking something that you can continuously do over time (and wouldn't mind continue doing even after getting hired as a firefighter). That way you can show continuity, just like staying at the same job for a period of time can show loyalty, dependability and stability.

Many people tell me "I'm so busy that I don't have time to volunteer." Who does? I bet you can find something you can do to better the lives of someone or something else, even if it is only for a couple of hours a month. Over time, those couple of hours can add up. There are so many ways you can volunteer your time; just use your imagine and try to do something that is unique from the next person so you can stand out in a positive way.

CERTIFICATES / LICENSES:

Don't list all 100 of the certificates you've received. Pick about five of your most important selling points (EMT, Firefighter 1 Academy, Firefighter 1, Paramedic, CPR, Class "B" Firefighter's Drivers License, Rescue Systems 1, etc.). The reason I put the word "license" in there is because Paramedic is a license, as well as a driver's license. The rest are certificates. Don't list your Class "C" (Standard Motor Vehicle license in California) Driver's license on the resume. It is a waste of space – it is already on the application. Only list unique licenses that are above and beyond what the average person might possess. Which one do I list first? The one that you feel is most important, then working downwards in order of importance.

When listing each certificate or license, you only need **three** things:

1. Exact name / title (as taken from the certificate or license)
2. Who certified you (as taken from the certificate or license)
3. When it expires or when you took it (as taken from the certificate or license).
Expiration dates are extremely important with medical related cards such as CPR or EMT. That initial date you took the EMT class four years ago makes it look like you're expired if you only list your initial date you completed the class.

SPECIAL SKILLS OR TRAINING

Do you speak, read, and/or write a second language fluently? If so, list it here. I don't know of a fire department that wouldn't want someone that was fluent in a second language. Some fire departments in Southern California actually require second language fluency, in addition to EMT and Firefighter 1 just to take the entry-level firefighter test (and they get plenty of candidates!)

I can't think of too many other things to put under this heading. Not everyone will probably use this heading, but if you do – it might be something that goes towards the top of your resume. Stay away from things such as “I get along well with others.” Last time I checked, a human being was expected to get along well with others. It is a “fluffy” statement that really has no relevance since it can't be backed up and sounds generic.

SUMMARY

Which of the above “major headings” should you list first? Obviously the Objective should always be listed first. As for what goes next, I would suggest the one that is your strongest point, and then work downwards in importance. Why? Because the average person reads from the top down; so if you list it up towards the top, the perception is that it should be important. The farther something is towards the bottom of the page, the more it might be overlooked or seem unimportant.

About the only thing I wouldn't list first would be my education. I had a four-year degree when I started testing, but I quickly realized that I needed to bury it in the middle of the page or the bottom. It is not that I was ashamed of it, it was that I didn't want to come across as a “college kid that was better than everyone on the panel and wanted to go straight to fire chief.”

Having a four-year degree (or higher) is very commendable and valuable for the fire service as the level of education required for promotion continues to increase; just be careful you don't “oversell it.” Mention and acknowledge that you have it, and that you want to be the best probationary firefighter that you can be; just don't dwell on it. It is possible that the people on the oral panel do not have that level of education; so don't come across like you are better than them. You are not – they have the job and you don't.

Until next month, keep plugging away and don't give up – why should someone else get that badge you have worked and prepared so hard for!