

MANAGE

YOUR JOB SEARCH

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Practical ink

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6.3 Insert Technical Skills and Education Last

If you are looking for a knowledge work position, make sure you highlight your experience with your value. See [Explain the Value of Every Item on Your Résumé](#). This will take time, so make sure you provide enough time to think through the value of each position.

For your first draft résumé, insert your skills last on your résumé, and go back to your value. Keep refining the value. It will be easier to add all your applications and technical skills than it will be to add your value. It's fine to add your technical skills and education while you think about them, but make them last.

6.4 Keep Your Résumé to Two Pages

Here's a guideline: your résumé should be no longer than two pages, three at the outside. Why? So a hiring manager can read it quickly. You don't have much time to impress a hiring manager. Make the most of it.

You can't make your résumé and cover letter say everything about you. You still need something to discuss at the interview.

Say you've been working for more than 20 years. How do you do this? Well, only the most recent 10 years is important. The rest can be grouped together. Remember, you can refer people to your LinkedIn page for more detail. Or, if you have an online résumé page, you can refer people to that.

Do you know about [about.me](#)? For now, at least, it's a free service that allows you to create personalized web pages. You can add your personal page at [about.me](#), insert a link on your résumé, and point your readers to that page if you need to create more pages and you don't have a website.

If you have significant accomplishments, you want to keep them on your résumé. There are some items you do not want to leave off your paper résumé:

- Patents
- Books
- Honors
- Awards
- Publications

If you have many of any of the above, you can refer people to a page on your website, or to your LinkedIn profile. If I say “author of several books, 2 more upcoming, see this URL for more information,” that’s enough.

The most important things about you are how you work at work, how you take responsibility, how you take initiative, how you work with your colleagues, *not* what you wrote. How do you learn and how quickly do you learn? How do you work with people? How do you deliver?

6.4.1 Explain the Value of Every Item on Your Résumé

Your technical skills are important. But what’s *most* important about you are your talents: your qualities, preferences, non-technical skills. The way you talk about it is to discuss it in terms of the value you bring to your employer. I like the way Rich Stone wrote it down in [Value Action Method: Explain the Value](#).

For every line on your résumé, explain the value. If your build system automation work on a project saved three-person weeks every quarter, you would say something like this:

Saved three person-weeks every quarter via automation by delivering scripts for the build system

That’s still a little wimpy. As a first draft, that might be good enough. If this is your first week, maybe you stop there. However, if you are refining your résumé, or you haven’t worked for too long, you want to craft each line on your résumé. How can you clarify this line to specify your value?

Saved three person-weeks every quarter by automating scripts for our git-based build system. We transitioned from SVN to git and I automated the scripts.

Anyone who knows anything about version control will now understand what you did and will be able to ask you questions. You've written this in English—well, abbreviated English, and you have something to discuss in the interview.

Let's try another example which is a little less technical. Maybe you're a project manager. Project managers tend to facilitate and coordinate. Sometimes, it's difficult to articulate a project manager's value, especially if you're not a command-and-control project manager.

Led a program to integrate all the platforms into one suite of software. I coordinated 10 distributed technical teams in three time zones over 14 months. We released internally to verify our deliverables with our sponsors as a risk management effort four times (not agile, but not waterfall). We released to high customer acclaim and notable press and media coverage. Our support costs decreased 80%. Revenue increased 50% in the first quarter.

With such great success, you will have to explain why you are looking for a new job.

This is difficult. You want to use numbers as much as possible. Use sentences. Read them out loud and see if they make sense.

If it's hard for you to write down, chances are good that you are articulating your value. See Andy Lester's *Land the Tech Job You Love* for more helpful tips about your résumé (LES09).

6.5 Never Lie on a Résumé

Never lie on your résumé. Never expand the truth a little bit. Never fake it. It's too easy for other people to check on your résumé's facts.

If you went to Harvard and didn't graduate, say "attended Harvard." That's it. Never lie.

I attended MIT as a special student for three classes. I don't even put that on my résumé. It would raise more questions than it would settle. Sure, MIT is a prestigious institution, but I never got a degree, I just studied there for three classes. It's not worth the aggravation of trying to explain what I did. It doesn't go on my résumé.

Never lie or even stretch the truth. When it matters professionally, someone will discover it and you will be in trouble. Don't do it.

6.6 Don't List Reference Names on Your Résumé

You might want different references for different positions. And, you want to provide your references with advance warning that someone will be calling when you have a hot job, one that is close to an offer.

You do want to say "References on request," somewhere on the résumé or in the cover letter.

6.7 Ask People to be References

When you ask people to be your references, make sure you ask for their work phone number, home phone number, and as many email addresses as they are able to provide. Some reference checkers prefer email-only checks. Some reference checkers prefer phone only. Ask your reference what *their* preference is, and explain that to the reference checker.

You should have at least three references. Select at least two managers and one peer. If you have three managers, that's better. Of course, it also depends on how long ago those references worked with you. If those references are very old, what they have to say may

not seem relevant to your current potential hiring managers. Look for people who will be relevant.

Ask the reference what they would say about working with you again. If they would *not* work with you again, don't use that person as a reference. Find someone else. Or, understand the circumstances, so you can prepare the reference checker.

Here's an email that one of my readers sent to one of his references:

Joe,

As you know I'm currently looking for a full-time job and going on interviews. You may have received a reference-check call or email inquiring about me in the past few months from other recruiters. I would like to formalize my references list and I hope I can count on your support moving forward.

I found a couple local jobs that look very promising and am in the process of interviewing for them. In the interview process, I'm going to be asked for references. I have thought about the people I've worked with over the past few years and you are one of the 3 people for whom I have the highest regard in my professional life. I know that you are very busy. I would like to give the recruiters your email address and ask that they first contact you via email and, if they need to speak to you (which they probably will) that they provide their own phone number and ask you to call them back at your convenience.

One concern I have is that we're in a challenging "buyer's" market. I usually don't have a 100% match for all the posted requirements so you may be asked about a skill that I don't yet have or you're not aware of. That's OK. Just let them know that I've demonstrated that I pick up new frameworks and technolo-

gies quickly. Hopefully they'll find value in that response.

I will be happy to return the favor if you are looking for either a job or a business reference for a contract in the future. Thank you for being there for me and I still hope we can work together again in a future venture. Let me know if you have any concerns.

Thanks, Happy Holidays, and best of luck for a prosperous new year!

I bet you noticed a few things in this email. My reader is preparing the reference to be asked, and how he will be asked. The “first contact via email” is a request. It might not survive, but my reader is letting his reference know he has made the request.

He's also addressing the reality that he might not have a “100% match” for all the requirements. But he does remind the reference that he learns quickly. That's a nice touch.

Also, notice how he offers to pay the request forward, by helping Joe find a job, be a reference, or working together in the future.

Consider using this kind of an email or note for your references. You won't use the same language. You'll want to emphasize something different. Maybe you want to emphasize your ability to coordinate across the organization, or your design skills, or your language skills, or something entirely different. But this is how you ask people to be your reference.

Who would say no? Only someone you don't want.

6.8 Iterate on Your Résumé Several Times

Your résumé is the same as any other piece of writing. You should expect to draft it and send it out for review several times.