



Chapter  
**7**

# Editing: Résumé-Speak 101

*“Words, like eyeglasses, blur everything that they do not make clear.”*

—Joseph Joubert

**H**ow do you make an average résumé outstanding? Edit, edit, edit. Conversely, when you disregard the details of style and punctuation, you can make an average résumé mediocre—certainly not the impression you want to give prospective employers.

Copyediting on résumés presents some special challenges. With too many words, your résumé will look crowded and uninviting to read. With too few, it will look anemic next to its competitors. If you err on the side of too much detail, you might drone on with detailed job descriptions that leave readers offended by your presumption that they are interested in, or have time to read, such minutiae. If you lean too far in the opposite direction you might submit a skeletal, overly generic presentation that leaves readers wondering whether you were purposely vague in an attempt to hide something. The anemic version also presents another risk with the advent of online and employer résumé databases: Your résumé might float aimlessly because search engines cannot find any relevant keywords in it.

To find the right balance, you must “hook-n-hold” your reader—much as an advertisement hooks your attention with sales appeals that address “what’s in it for *me*,” or as a mystery novel casts clues that hold you captive and make you want to read more.

In this chapter, you'll learn how to write in the language of résumé-speak. This material is divided into two sections:

- ✦ Development editing, which covers how to write compelling copy.
- ✦ Technical editing (or copyediting), which answers an array of questions on grammar, usage, and style.

Beyond that, you'll review the importance of pruning and proofing your résumé before you send it out.



*Tip* If you're in a hurry, check the index for the topic on which you need help most and review the top-ten list for writing persuasive copy in the next section.

## Development Editing: A Primer in Power Writing

Perfecting your hook-n-hold technique requires fluency in what I call *résumé-speak*, a unique style of writing that is part advertisement and part business communication. You'll get a quick course, "résumé-speak 101," a little later in this chapter. But first, take a look at the top ten tenets of developing your résumé.

### Top 10 Tenets of Developing Your Résumé

1. **Address your audience.** Every sentence should pass these test questions: "Is my reader interested in this?" and "Does this information explain why the employer should hire me over my competitors?"
2. **Be accurate.** Check and double-check all details, especially numbers.
3. **Be brief.** Delete information that is repetitive or irrelevant.
4. **Be clear.** Ask two or three people to read your resume. Is anything confusing?
5. **Avoid jargon that is too specific to your current company** (specific names of reports, company-specific acronyms, and so on).
6. **Deliver the goods up front.** Start accomplishment statements with the results and then describe the method for achieving the results.

7. **Start sentences with action verbs** (*directed, led, performed, collaborated with*) or sometimes noun phrases (*operations executive, team member, team leader, sales professional*) instead of passive statements like *Responsible for* or *Duties included*.
8. **Sidestep any potential negatives.** It's easier to address issues in person.
9. **Avoid baseless personality attributes.** Use personality pairing to combine your soft skills with tangible documentation of the skills.
10. **Proof the resume.** Proof it again. Have someone else proof it, as well.

## Examples of Résumé-Speak

Résumé-speak converts a quiet, conversational writing style into a punchy, quasi-advertising writing style, as these examples show.

### **Before**

I had the largest share of sales on staff for over eleven years running. There were nine people on our team.

### **After**

Ranked #1 in sales production among team of 9 for 11 consecutive years.

### **Before**

I am responsible for drawing blood for various types of tests, including microbiology, bacteriology, chemistry, hematology, serology, and special chemistry. I also process these tests.

### **After**

Performed blood draws and processed tests for microbiology, bacteriology, chemistry, hematology, serology, and special chemistry.

### **Before**

I had to handle a lot of extra work recently because our company was going through some difficult times and the department had its staff cut by 30%.

### **After**

Good time-manager—handled notable increase in workload during recent 30% reduction in staffing.

Résumé-speak adheres to accepted grammatical form yet refrains from a rigid, “one-size-fits-all” set of rules. For instance, in formal business communications, you would usually spell out numbers from one through nine.

In résumé-speak, you can present these same numbers as Arabic numerals, which attract the reader's attention and help them pick up the pace of reading, as the first *After* example does.

Résumé-speak is telegraphic yet informative. Note how the second *Before* example uses 25 words to describe a laboratory technician's responsibilities, whereas the *After* example requires only 15.

Résumé-speak is fluid yet forceful. The third *Before* example is written in a style that "explains." The *After* version is written in a style that "sells" the candidate by including keywords (such as *time manager*) and turning the negative statement about the company's trials into an impact statement about the candidate's time-management skills.

Above all, résumé-speak is compelling and leaves the reader with the feeling of "Wow, I'm impressed. I must know more."

## The Keys to Writing Compelling Copy

There are three keys to developing clean, compelling copy:

- ✦ First, you must address the needs of your audience (your employer-to-be).
- ✦ Second, you must be succinct and sum up years of experience within the confines of one or two pages.
- ✦ Third, you must focus on your transferable skills so that the reader can relate your experience to his or her frame of reference.

### Address the Needs of Your Audience

This advice sounds obvious, but job seekers repeatedly overlook it. I have emphasized this concept since chapter 1 and will continue to hammer it home throughout the book because of its importance. For example, when you edit your résumé, one of the first questions to ask yourself is "Does this information explain why the employer should hire me over my competitors?" The answer to this question will give you clues about how much information to include, what keywords to use (see chapter 9), and what buying motivators to address (see chapters 2 and 6).

Another important question to consider is what salary you anticipate receiving. Employers who are ready to commit to an investment of a healthy salary expect a certain level of intelligence, as manifested by your vocabulary and written communication skills. A phrase misused, a word misspelled, or a comma misplaced could spell disaster for your search. Even if you plan on a modest hourly wage, don't plan on skimming the rest of this