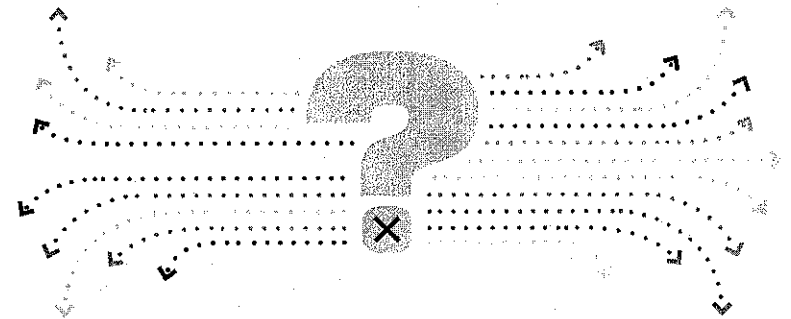


# YOU MAJORED IN WHAT



MAPPING YOUR PATH  
from CHAOS to CAREER

KATHARINE BROOKS, ED.D.



A PLUME BOOK

# PLUME

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*To my parents and teachers,  
on whose shoulders I stand:*

*infinite gratitude for shaping and guiding  
my work and my life.*

*And*

*to singer, songwriter, and daydream believer  
John Stewart (1939–2008):*

*thanks for providing the soundtrack.*

*You Majored in What?*

## FINAL QUESTIONS

What experimental wanderings are you going to try in the next twenty-four hours? What is your goal in doing this?

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Is there a secret experimental wandering you would love to do, but are concerned that you might not do well in it? If you knew you couldn't fail, what would you do?

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## CHAPTER 8

# MY JOB AS A KRACKEL BAR

CREATING IRRESISTIBLE RÉSUMÉS  
THAT WILL GET YOU THE  
INTERVIEW

Ken, Barry was looking at your résumé and he agreed with me that eating with chopsticks is not really a special skill.

—BEE MOVIE (2007)

A popular theory holds that there are four stages to learning:

1. Unconscious incompetence (where you don't know what you don't know)
2. Conscious incompetence (you now know what you don't know and are completely overwhelmed)
3. Conscious competence (you know it but you have to concentrate to do it)
4. Unconscious competence (you know it so well you can do it without thinking)

You probably went through these stages when you first learned to drive a car: remember how easy it looked when you watched your parents drive? And then you got behind the wheel for the first time,

and suddenly it seemed as if you had a million things to remember at once? You started driving, but you had to focus intensely on everything. After a while, though, you could drive without thinking about it all, and even talk on a cell phone at the same time.

So why do I bring this up in a chapter about résumés? Because writing a good résumé is one of the hardest tasks you'll undertake in the job search process, and despite the thousands of books and Web sites dedicated to résumé writing, most college students do not produce a good résumé, at least not the first time out. Most employers can eliminate over 75 percent of their candidates by a brief glance at their résumés. And that's a tragedy because a well-written résumé can beautifully encapsulate your experiences and serve as the bridge between you and the interview.

Résumés are a form of creative writing and have their own special rules and methods of construction that are different from virtually any other form of writing. So when it comes to résumés you're probably in that first stage of learning, unconscious incompetence. You are used to writing five-page papers and maybe even used to starting a paper the night before it's due, so you see this rather bland, innocent-looking one-page document and figure you can do it in an hour or so.

You've probably even seen those books that claim you can "write your résumé in an hour" or "overnight." So you set aside an hour and sit down to write your résumé. Then you glance at your watch and forty-five minutes have flown by and you're still trying to structure the education section. Poof—you've moved into stage two: conscious incompetence.

You suddenly realize that there are all these strange rules about formatting and language structure, and you're not sure what information to include, much less how to organize it. If you have acquired a lot of experience, how do you cut it back to one page (that is the rule, isn't it)? Or if you don't have much experience, how do you make a whole page out of it? Use a size 28 font and list everything from tenth grade on? After an hour of this, like most people in the conscious incompetence stage, you walk away. Frustrated. Because it's one thing to have the motivation of a fifteen-year-old who wants to drive—that will pull you through any tough stage of conscious incompetence—but you probably don't have the same sense of urgency about writing

a résumé, at least not today. Maybe tomorrow. And then you procrastinate until you discover a great job opportunity, it's 11:00 p.m., and the deadline to upload your résumé is midnight.

It doesn't help that so much of the résumé advice out there is conflicting and creates confusion or, dare I say, résumé chaos? For every employer who says "Job objectives are unnecessary" you'll find another who says "I won't read a résumé that doesn't have a job objective." For every résumé guide that says "The résumé must be one page only" another says "Two-page résumés are fine." I've always told my students to spell everything correctly because spelling errors stop the job search. But I've heard employers say, "Oh, I overlook the occasional spelling error on a résumé if the candidate is really qualified." See what I mean? Chaos. Well, once again, you can relax. Here's what you need to remember: résumés are evaluated based on opinions, not hard and fast rules. So ultimately every piece of résumé advice comes down to one person's opinion. Let's just say that some opinions are more consistent and helpful than others. In this chapter, you're going to get an opinion based on years of experience and reviewing thousands of résumés: good, bad, and ugly. The opinions expressed will fall well within the bell curve of traditional advice and are endorsed by a majority of employers. If you follow the guidelines presented here, you will produce a résumé that will serve you well in the job search process and place you ahead of a majority of other applicants.

Before we move into the details of résumé writing, here's one recommendation: don't try to do it all alone. You will need more than this book to write a great résumé. You should take your résumé to your career center or to someone who is familiar with current résumé styles for suggestions and feedback. Use this book and others to help write your draft, but *always* find other people to assist you. This chapter will give you the key information you need to write your résumé, but it can't cover résumé writing with the thoroughness of a complete book on the subject. The goal is to make sure you articulate your wanderings in the best possible way, so this chapter will give you key guidelines to make your résumé stand out. Soliciting other opinions is always helpful. Just remember that ultimately it's your résumé, so when you get conflicting information, go with what you think is right.

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With that in mind, though, you still need to write your résumé yourself. Do not pay a service to write it for you and do not copy a résumé verbatim from a book or Web site. You might think you're saving time and energy by paying someone else to write your résumé, but the work you'll do answering their questionnaires and filling in your experiences will take almost as long as writing it yourself, and the résumé won't really be yours. And if you copy some great lines from the sample résumé on your career center's Web site, you can bet twenty other students did as well, and the employer will catch the similarities in a minute. Even résumés that have been created by special computer résumé-writing programs need editing, if only because a lot of the programs use the same formatting and recommend boilerplate phrases that students like and use, resulting in a formulaic résumé. Employers can spot a formulaic résumé a mile away. In fact, boilerplate formatted résumés that resemble every other résumé get rejected just as quickly as résumés with obvious errors. So use one of those computer programs if you'd like to start your résumé, but edit and adapt your résumé from there on, incorporating your unique background and taking advantage of all the help available.

You now know that it's going to take more time than you think, so plan for that and give yourself time to rewrite and rework it. Your final résumé will be worth every extra second you put into it. In tight job markets, employers are looking for easy reasons to reject candidates and the résumé is one of the quickest and easiest ways to do that. While the résumé won't get you the job, it will get you the interview that will get you the job, so your goal is to create a document that is interesting and compelling enough to convince an employer you're worth meeting. If you've already written a résumé, get it out and review it as you go through this chapter. And if you haven't, well, it's time to start with that blank piece of paper again. Although this time I recommend you use a blank word processing screen instead of paper.

Before you get started, think back to Chapter 3 and get ready to apply many of the mindsets you developed as you work on the résumé, including analytic, strategic, creative systems, and perhaps most important, the positive mindset and right mind. It's easy to get bogged down in the résumé-writing process, so keep your focus

positive and remember how much you have to offer an employer. You may be tempted to read some of the rules and decide that you're not going to follow them simply because you don't want to. Try not to do that. You break the rules and guidelines at your own risk. In some very specific and special situations (such as in highly creative fields) the rules can be broken without consequence, but in general it's better to follow them. So when you read that your résumé should be one page, don't think "I'm going to write a three-page résumé to impress employers with how much I've done." Instead, think "I'm going to impress employers by conveying the most relevant information on one page." When you start to think "I'm going to print my résumé on a brightly colored piece of paper so it will stand out," think instead "I'm going to print my résumé on standard résumé paper—the content of my résumé will make it stand out."

While you're digging up old résumés and your mindset list, get out your Wandering Map as well. Review it for any forgotten strengths or experiences you want to work into your résumé. Is it time to update it and add more experiences? Have you discovered some new themes or threads, or done any experimental wanderings since you wrote your map? Be sure to add the new information to your map and note where it connects with other themes and experiences in your life.

The last section of this chapter breaks down résumé writing into five distinct sections you can complete all at once or one at a time, depending on your schedule. You will be creating a basic résumé that will serve as your template, which you can adjust as needed to fit specific opportunities that come along. First, however, you're going to learn three secrets that will keep your résumé at the top of the stack.

### **THREE SECRETS ABOUT AN IRRESISTIBLE RÉSUMÉ**

OK, so I'm exaggerating a little. These aren't necessarily secrets; you'll read similar advice elsewhere. But they are far and away the three key aspects of résumé writing most ignored by college students

and new résumé writers, so they might as well be secrets. Consider these vital elements as mantras to be repeated over and over while you write, critique, and edit your résumé:

1. To whom am I writing and why will they care?
2. Can I picture what I've written and can my claims be substantiated?
3. Is every word spelled correctly and is my résumé professional and attractive?

Let's look at each of these vital elements in detail.

### **VITAL ELEMENT 1: TO WHOM AM I WRITING AND WHY WILL THEY CARE?**

Well, I suspect there's more to come from Dave Scott. But, in the meantime, "Brought back original crust from the moon" should weigh pretty impressively on your résumé, you know?

—DR. LEE SILVER, FROM *THE EARTH TO THE MOON*  
(1998 MINISERIES)

A classic adage in writing is to know your audience and write to them. If you're writing a book on dogs, you need to know if your primary audience will be veterinarians or first graders. You wouldn't write to a professor in the same style and language as you would to your best friend, and because a résumé is intended for a potential employer or graduate school admissions panel, you need to put yourself in their mindset and focus on what they are seeking. As you write each section of your résumé, ask yourself "Why am I telling my audience this?" and "What is my reader most interested in?" Constantly consider how you can add value to an employer: "What should this employer know about me?"

Asking these questions will help keep your résumé relevant, giving you a major advantage over other job seekers. The job to which you're applying becomes your thesis statement, so to speak, and your résumé should support that central point. One way to do this is by

using language common to the field (keywords). For example, if you are applying for a human resources job and you have tutored students, you might want to say "trained" students, because the word *training* is commonly used in human resources. Your keywords should be relevant to the field, particularly if your résumé is likely to be scanned. Using keywords is one of the best ways to demonstrate how your experience and education match the requirements of the position. You can find keywords in books about the field you're interested in. The text for an introduction to an advertising course, for example, will likely contain all the keywords you need for an advertising job.

Have you ever tried to open one of those annoying plastic packages that are vacuum sealed around an electronic device or a pack of batteries? You have to really want what's inside the package to go to the effort of opening it. Focus on that image when you're writing your résumé. Are you making it easy for employers to find the information they're seeking? Or do they have to read through all sorts of text before they can find what they're looking for? Most recruiters will scan your résumé in less than fifteen seconds, and if they don't see what they want right away, they'll probably quit looking.

Part of knowing your audience is anticipating what they will like or dislike. You don't want to set yourself up to be rejected by presenting your politics, religion, unusual hobbies, or other aspects of your personality if they are not relevant to the employer. Your participation in a particular church's activities would be relevant in an application to a faith-based social service program; your hobby of playing "World of Warcraft" probably would not. On the other hand, if you're applying to work for a gaming company they're going to be much more interested in your knowledge and experience with online gaming than the church you attend. If you're applying to work with a Republican senator, you might want to list your work with the college Democrats as "managed a campus political organization." You can use your interview to explain the details if necessary. In the same vein of relevance, résumés are designed to reflect what you've done since entering college, so after your sophomore year, do not include high school information unless you are applying to work in a high school.

## **VITAL ELEMENT 2: CAN I PICTURE WHAT I'VE WRITTEN AND CAN MY CLAIMS BE SUBSTANTIATED?**

You know, for someone who's got "Watcher" on his résumé, you might want to cast an eye to the front door every now and again.

—SPIKE IN *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER* (1997)

To put it bluntly, there are a lot of bad résumé-writing guides out there. Maybe it's because the writers are trying to make their guides unique, but some of their advice is just plain lousy and out-of-date. One of the worst examples of bad advice on many Web sites and in books is the promotion of fluffy language. Fluffy language, for lack of a better term, is sometimes called marketingspeak. It relies on phrases that sound important and meaningful at first glance, but really don't say anything or tell the reader what you have done. Some examples include:

- Hard worker with great communication skills
- Team player who regularly upgrades collateral to ensure successful responses
- Experience with fast-paced environment and multitasking requirements

Your résumé should substantiate your strengths; it should show what problems you solved, what skills you possess, what experiences you have had, and how you were valued in the workplace—but not through buzzwords and trite phrases. Use numbers, percentages, dollar amounts, and other specifics to support your statements, particularly if they are impressive. Don't just say "sold merchandise." Say "increased weekly store sales by 20 percent in first month of employment" (if it's true, of course). Instead of "raised funds for charity," say "raised over \$2,000 for the American Cancer Society." Some impressive examples would include managed a \$5,000 budget, supervised ten people, advised over fifty students. On the other hand, these figures are not as significant: worked eight-hour days, supervised one person, managed a \$200 budget. It would be better to say, "supervised staff and managed a budget," and let it go at that.

Working eight hours a day is expected, so leave it off unless you also took classes on those same days, making your typical day longer than twelve hours.

So just what is fluff? When I review résumés, I use two rules to uncover it: (1) can I picture it?, and (2) if I use the opposite words, does it sound dumb?

Here's an example that answers the "can I picture it?" question: Ashley spent a summer working at Hershey Park, a family theme park in Hershey, Pennsylvania, known, of course, for its chocolate. Her title was something like guest services specialist, and she described her experience as "assisted guests and promoted a fun environment for parents and children." I had trouble picturing it. How does one promote "a fun environment"? It sounded like fluff. So I asked her. It turns out she spent the summer dressed in a Krackel bar costume and basically roamed the park, helping children find lost parents, signing autographs (!), giving people directions, and playing little games with the children. It's possible she even saved the life of a guest by using CPR, but her favorite part of the job was watching the children's faces light up when they would see her. "I had no idea anyone would want to run up and hug a candy bar!" she said. So we changed her job title to Krackel bar and rewrote her résumé entry to include:

- Greeted more than twenty thousand families, including posing for photographs, signing autographs, and playing with the children, ensuring a pleasant visit and encouraging return visits
- Located lost parents, and solved numerous problems from answering mundane questions to providing CPR and quickly obtaining emergency medical assistance for guests
- Consistently maintained pleasant demeanor despite heat and fatigue, and received award for highest number of positive comments from guest satisfaction surveys

Now I can picture her job. And so could the employers—she received numerous requests for interviews with the on-campus recruiters because they all wanted to meet the Krackel bar!

The second question I use to determine whether claims can be substantiated is what I call the rule of opposites, that is, does it sound dumb if I use the opposite words? Some career guides recommend



that you use phrases designed to impress employers, such as “team player,” “hard-worker,” or “strong communicator,” because that’s what employers are seeking. And it’s true, employers are seeking those strengths, and in Chapter 10 you’ll learn to use those phrases in a much more powerful way. But on a résumé they just sound boastful and empty. After all (and here comes the rule of opposites), who’s going to put on their résumé “loner who can’t work with others,” “lazy worker,” and “poor writing and speaking skills.” That’s how you know you’re writing fluff. Fluff shows up a lot in job objectives as well: “seeking a challenging position in a growing organization with potential for promotion.” This would be as opposed to “seeking a position where I can do nothing in an organization that’s likely to go out of business and fire me.”

Rather than tell an employer your strengths, show them. We can assume that Ashley is a patient, hardworking, and naturally friendly person who is a good problem solver because of the way she described her position. She never had to *tell* us; she *showed* us. Verbs and nouns are much more powerful than adjectives.

Use action words to start your phrases and follow with a description that can be pictured. Avoid weak phrases such as “was responsible for,” “duties included,” “did some work with,” and “handled assorted jobs.” Those phrases are passive and don’t illuminate your skills. Instead of writing “was responsible for managing the front desk,” write “managed the front desk, including answering phones, greeting visitors, and assisting staff with a variety of projects.” Depending on the space you have available, you could expand that entry to describe the projects if your work was meaningful and of interest to the employer. If all you did was staple reports, it’s probably not worth mentioning, even if you’re applying for a job that requires stapling reports. Go back to your Wandering Map for more powerful themes and ideas to put on your résumé.

### VITAL ELEMENT 3: IS EVERY WORD SPELLED CORRECTLY AND IS THE RÉSUMÉ PROFESSIONAL AND ATTRACTIVE?

So, under experience, you’ve listed here on your hat-shaped résumé that you can skin a buck, run a trout line and that all your rowdy friends. . . .  
—SQUIDBILLIES (2005)

In his excellent book *Does Your Marketing Sell?* British writer Ian Moore says, “Think fast—your audience is whizzing by.” In general, your résumé will only receive a few seconds glance, so the information needs to be easily accessible and readable and spelled correctly. Keep your entries short and to the point. Lead with verbs and nouns and don’t use the word *I*. Think of it as translating your experiences and education into sound bites for the six o’clock news. Write what is most important. If you’ve buried your most important experience somewhere in the middle, it will likely be missed. Keep in mind that image of the plastic packaging that’s hard to break through. Make sure the important information pops off your résumé. Here are five tips to ensure your résumé complies with Vital Element 3:

➤ **Format and print the résumé in an attractive, consistent, and professional manner.** Your creativity should show in your phrasing and writing, not through a funky-colored résumé or a strange font. Creativity expert Edward DeBono describes the shift beyond creativity as crossing over the line from creativity to “crazytivity.” As in the quote from *Squidbillies* above, if you have a hat-shaped résumé, you’ve probably crossed that line. Printing your résumé on green paper with images of money on it probably won’t thrill a bank. But always consider the job you’re seeking. One student who applied for a job as the Oscar Mayer Wienermobile driver put her mustard-colored résumé inside a pickle relish jar. It worked. That was a unique marketing trick and she was applying for a unique marketing job. Remember Vital Element 1: Know your audience.

➤ **In general, keep your résumé to one page, particularly if you’re going into business.** If you have a lot of experience and *it is all relevant*, you can have a two-page résumé. But make sure the most important information is on the first page. Employers disagree on

this topic and many are amenable to two-page résumés from new graduates (particularly in the nonprofit and education fields), but tread carefully: one page is usually best for a recent graduate entering the business world.

- **Always proofread and proofread again.** Spell-checker is wonderful but it doesn't catch everything: homonyms can slip by, as can a faulty word. I've seen résumés where students "mange" projects as opposed to manage them, work with "perspective" members rather than prospective members, or who claim to "writ" well, rather than write well. One poor student applied for a job in "pubic service," and neither she nor the spell-checker noticed the missing *l* until a savvy roommate laughed herself silly and wished her luck finding that job. Correct spelling can't be stressed enough. Employers are looking for reasons to eliminate résumés from the stack and spelling is an easy way to do this.
- **Use bullet points for emphasis,** but if you start to have more than five bullet points in one entry they will lose their emphasis. You may need to write a few short phrases and then use bullet points to highlight key accomplishments. As you write your phrases, you may be tempted to abbreviate common words like *assistant* to *ass't*. Don't abbreviate unless the abbreviations are well known. You can use the standard two-letter abbreviations for states, for example, or for well-known companies like IBM or ESPN, but don't use abbreviations for words like administrative assistant.
- **Use reverse chronological order** (your most recent experience comes first), and if you start by naming the employer, the location, and then your title, you should use that order in every entry.

## STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO WRITING YOUR RÉSUMÉ

This guide will help you write a general résumé that will serve as your template for the targeted résumé you will develop as you move along in your search. *The general résumé you create may be several pages*

*long and will contain virtually everything you've done since high school because you won't actually be sending it to anyone.* Instead, you will draw from it to create your targeted résumé by selecting the most relevant information that will appeal to a specific employer or career field. If you don't have a specific field or employer in mind, you can use your general résumé to create a one-page condensed all-purpose résumé that will highlight your best experiences and accomplishments. As you move through the steps, remember three things: it will take longer to write than you think (sorry), conscious incompetence will creep in and you'll want to quit, but most important, *writing your résumé can be one of the biggest self-esteem and confidence-building activities you can do.* So make this experience as enjoyable as possible: reward yourself, work on it in a fun setting, break the task into small pieces by taking it a step at a time, seek help from your career center or whatever works best for you. Here we go . . .

### STEP 1: COLLECT THE INFORMATION YOU NEED

Start by gathering the information you collected about yourself and your plans in Chapters 6 and 7. If you've already written a résumé, print it out. As previously stated, this chapter won't give you everything you might need, so check out résumé Web sites, particularly the information posted on your career center's Web site. When you see a résumé you like, print it out and use it as a model. Just remember: do not copy the wording verbatim. You must write the entries yourself, because most of your fellow students are copying them as well, and your résumé will read like everyone else's. Big mistake. Employers don't like lazy résumé writers and they can spot them a mile away.

### STEP 2: WRITE OUT YOUR EXPERIENCES

Take out your notebook or tablet or open a file on a word processor and at the top of each page write one experience or activity you plan to include in your résumé. Use as many pages as you have experiences or activities. If you had a title or several titles, write them down. Take a few minutes to jot down everything you can recall about that position no matter how silly. Think about what made you unique or stand out;

think about promotions, the skills or knowledge you learned, the mindsets you used, commendations from supervisors, what you did during a typical day, and so on. Was there a special event or activity that occurred while you were there? What problems did you solve? What responsibilities did you have? What types of people did you work with? Your list doesn't have to be in any particular order and you don't have to write it the way it will ultimately appear on your résumé. Just do a quick-writing exercise and complete it as quickly as possible.

As we consider résumé entries, we're going to follow Justin, a senior international studies major at Longstreet College in Washington, D.C. Here's an example of one of his pages describing his work as an administrative assistant and legal assistant for a law firm one summer:

**ORGANIZATION:** SRLQ Law Firm, Washington, D.C.

**TITLE:** Administrative Assistant/Legal Assistant

**DATES:** Summer 2008

**BASIC DESCRIPTION OF WORKPLACE:** SRLQ law firm consists of five attorneys practicing mostly corporate law, including occasional trial work.

**WHAT I DID:**

- Kept the office running smoothly so that the attorneys could do their work
- Opened the office at 9:00 in the morning and closed it at 5:00
- Answered phones—clients, other lawyers, judges, professionals from banks, expert witnesses
- Welcomed visitors politely and offered coffee, etc.
- Maintained visitor and call log for legal records and billing purposes
- Created and mailed bills—organized better billing system using Excel
- Had to cope with changing needs, last-minute deadlines, emergencies, etc., on a regular basis: flexible mindset
- Dressed professionally every day—first impression for law firm
- Learned to write basic legal documents
- Prioritized workload because all attorneys wanted their stuff first. Used strategic mindset and team mindset
- Delivered documents to clients or to courthouse—needed to be punctual—five minutes too late and a deadline might be missed—pressure
- Assisted one attorney with a sales presentation at a bank by creating a PowerPoint presentation
- Trained replacement when I left
- Dealt regularly with sensitive and confidential information
- Did a lot of stuff at once because some days I was the only assistant for all the attorneys—had to manage time and multitask. Flexible mindset
- Converted documents to PDF format and e-mailed them
- Learned legal guidelines for maintaining and/or shredding files
- Used my Spanish skills to assist with case involving a Mexican restaurant

Depending on the job he's applying for, Justin has a basic list of his experiences to pick and choose from. For instance, if he were to

apply for a job requiring a high level of security or integrity (such as the CIA or FBI), he might select the entries that focus on his work with confidential information and dealing with pressure and deadlines. If he's applying for a management position, he might focus on the independent projects he worked on, training his replacement, and his Excel and multitasking skills.

Now it's your turn. Go ahead and fill out as many sheets as you can with your experiences. Doing these sheets now will save you tons of time when you're writing your targeted résumés. Don't forget to do a sheet for all your school activities or groups, volunteer experiences, or even classes that required work above and beyond traditional note taking and test taking. Some sheets may only have two or three entries, and that's OK. The point is to get as much down on the paper now so you don't forget it later when you're quickly writing your targeted résumé to meet a deadline. Write quickly, write casually, and don't censor yourself.

### STEP 3: WRITE THE HEADING SECTION OF YOUR RÉSUMÉ

This step is rather simple, although mistakes can be made. You should include your name, address (current and/or home address), a phone number where you can be reached, and your e-mail address. You can bold your name, but don't make it more than one font size larger than the text in your résumé (that is, if your résumé is in Times New Roman 12, your name shouldn't be larger than 14). Do not use creative fonts for your name; stick with the same or a similar font you use in your résumé. Some preformatted résumés use different styles for the heading with special fonts, underlining, and so on. As long as it looks professional, you can use the style you prefer.

Here's one way Justin could write his heading:

**Justin Matthews**  
123 Maple Street  
Smalltown, MD 55555  
e-mail: jmmd  
Cell phone: 301-555-5555

Remember the discussion about being sensitive to new cultures in Chapter 7? Your phone and e-mail habits can label you as stuck in the student culture if you're not careful. Be sure your e-mail address is professional sounding. Create a new e-mail account for your job search and keep "lilsuzieq@" or "buysthebeer@" for your friends. If you give employers your phone number, they might actually call you, so make sure you answer your phone professionally and create a professional voice mail. Turn your phone off (or scrupulously read the caller ID before answering) at parties or other events where you might not present your best self.

#### **STEP 4: WRITE THE JOB OBJECTIVE AND/OR STRENGTHS SECTION**

Employers are mixed in their reactions to this aspect—some insist on a job objective; others don't care. But they all agree that a bad job objective (fluffy, poorly written, or not appropriate for their organization) will greatly hurt your chances, so tread lightly here. Remember you will likely be creating several résumés, so you can use a different job objective on each one.

Do you have a specific job or career field in mind and are you sending it to organizations that hire for that position? Then go ahead and state it:

- Technical writer
- Research analyst
- Market researcher

If you have some ideas, but aren't completely sure, try considering the following:

- What activities would you like to perform (writing, editing, teaching, managing, and so on)?
- In what setting would you like to work (outdoors, education, insurance, banking, nonprofit, and so on)?
- What kinds of people, data, or things (children, the elderly,

money, stocks, computers, statistics, laboratory equipment, electronic equipment, and so on) interest you?

- How does the position mesh with future career plans?

Pull it all together, as in

- Management training position in retailing leading to a career as a buyer
- Secondary-level history teacher and soccer coach in private-school setting
- Marketing or grant-writing position for nonprofit organization

Instead of a job objective, you might find it more effective to have a strengths section. A strengths section can help pull together a varied background and focus the employer's attention on your most important accomplishments. This section should list your top three or four strengths in a bulleted format. Remember to tailor your strengths to fit what the employer is seeking and show concrete accomplishments, not fluffy boasting. Here is an example:

- Extensive experience with PC and Mac operating systems; software knowledge includes Microsoft XP, SPSSX statistical software, and Adobe Creative Suite
- Bilingual Spanish/English
- More than three years' experience in customer service occupations

Notice the lack of fluff—no "hard-worker who will bring a team spirit to your workplace." The skills should be tangible and relevant to the employer.

Justin is considering three Possible Lives after graduation: working in a law firm for a few years and then going to law school; working in a bank; starting in a customer service capacity; and/or working in the sports/recreation field—he's not sure exactly where or how. Because the three industries he's selected are different, Justin will need to

create three résumés, targeting each to the specific industry. As you read through the next stages of creating the résumé, note how the different sections of Justin's résumé change depending on his focus.

## STEP 5: WRITE THE EDUCATION SECTION

Most résumés of college students and recent graduates should list the education section before the experience section, because that is the primary feature they are selling to an employer. In addition to listing your school, graduation date, and major(s), you can add other information as appropriate. Consider if any of the following education-related elements are relevant to your future employment. You can expand or contract the information based again on relevance to the employer.

- Special courses beyond your major
- Skills, knowledge, or training you acquired in classes
- Projects you worked on
- Presentations you gave
- Research you conducted: What type of research? What instruments or methods did you use? Was it published? Did you assist a professor with research that will be published?
- Papers you wrote
- Honors you received
- Study-abroad experiences

Justin studied abroad in Mexico. He thinks his experiences aren't particularly relevant to the recreation/sports field, so he's going to keep his entry short, as in:

Study abroad, Guadalajara, Mexico (August 2007–June 2008). Immersion program.

On the other hand, for the banking and legal positions, his knowledge of Spanish and his ability to work in a different cultural environment might be more relevant, so he will expand his entry as follows:

Study abroad, Guadalajara, Mexico (August 2007–June 2008). Immersion program. Intensive study of Mexican culture, history, language, and international politics. Resided with Mexican family. Courses taught entirely in Spanish. Taught English to children of Mexican family.

If you have completed an internship, you can list that in the experience section. If you have not started the internship yet, but plan to do one soon and would like to include it in your résumé because it is relevant, you can put it in the education section and call it "anticipated internship," indicating the anticipated dates when you will complete it and what your duties will be.

## STEP 6: WRITE THE EXPERIENCE SECTION(S)

The experience section is usually the most time-consuming part of the résumé, but it won't be for you because you have already listed the important aspects of your experiences back in Step 2. Start creating your experience section by reviewing those lists you created. Wherever possible, focus on the *outcome* of your actions, not just what you did.

As you look over your experiences, you need to make a key decision—in general, which is more appealing, your job titles or the places where you've acquired your experience? If you have job titles like manager, vice president, legal assistant, and so forth, then you will probably want to lead with your titles. On the other hand, if your titles are clerk, intern, or waitress, you will probably want to lead with the names of the organizations.

Now that you've made that decision you can start listing in reverse chronological order each of the experiences you described on your pages. For the moment, you only need to include the names of the organizations and their locations, your title, and the dates you worked for them.

Justin has a total of six significant experiences between his summer jobs, internship, and college activities. As he looked over the list, he determined that the places he worked were more impressive than the titles he held, so he decided to list his experiences with the organization

first. This listing (with all entries described, of course) would be fine for a generic résumé with no particular focus.

<b>Longstreet College Sports Office</b> , Washington, DC	(Fall 2009–present)
<i>Office Assistant</i>	
<b>Longstreet College Campus Activities Board</b> , Washington, DC	(2007–present)
<i>President</i>	(2009–present)
<i>Treasurer</i>	(2008–9)
<i>Member</i>	(2007)
<b>SRLQ Law Firm</b> , Washington, DC	(Summer 2009)
<i>Legal/Office Assistant</i>	
<b>The Woodlands Inn</b> , Barclay, MD	(Summer 2008)
<i>Lifeguard</i>	
<b>Commissioner Bill Smith's Office</b> , Annapolis, MD	(Summer 2008)
<i>Coordinator/Intern</i>	
<b>Underwater Canoes</b> , Cambridge, MD	(Summer 2007)
<i>Customer Service Representative</i>	

As you look at your list, are there any patterns to your experiences that would interest the employer? For instance, are you seeking a nonprofit job and have several jobs or experiences where you worked for particular causes or with a particular population? Perhaps you are seeking a position that requires creativity, and several of your experiences had elements of creativity to them. If you have two or more experiences that can be combined in a manner relevant to an employer, consider doing that and labeling them concretely. Cut and paste your list to sort it according to the categories. Now, instead of a generic experience section that would simply list all your experiences in reverse chronological order, you might choose to have a Nonprofit/Community Service section if that applies to the position you're seeking. Or a Creative/Communications section, and so on.

By dividing your experiences into these specially labeled categories, you are making them pop from the page so the recruiter will see them. Some students use Relevant Experience as their lead experience category, but it begs the obvious question: relevant to what or to whom? It's better to identify why you're placing certain experiences above others with a term that specifically describes it. You can then

create a second experience section to include the other experiences that didn't fit under your initial category. If these experiences fit a category as well, use that word. If not, you can call it Additional Experience.

Here's Justin's first attempt at organizing his law résumé:

<b>LAW/OFFICE MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE</b>	
<b>Longstreet College Sports Office</b> , Washington, DC	(Fall 2009–present)
<i>Office Assistant</i>	
<b>SRLQ Law Firm</b> , Washington, DC	(Summer 2009)
<i>Legal/Office Assistant</i>	
<b>Commissioner Bill Smith's Office</b> , Baltimore, MD	(Summer 2008)
<i>Coordinator/Intern</i>	
<b>Underwater Canoes</b> , Cambridge, MD	(Summer 2007)
<i>Customer Service Representative</i>	
<b>LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE</b>	
<b>Longstreet College Campus Activities Board</b> , Washington, DC	(2007–present)
<i>President</i>	(2009–present)
<i>Treasurer</i>	(2008–9)
<i>Member</i>	(2007)
<b>The Woodlands Inn</b> , Barclay, MD	(Summer 2008)
<i>Lifeguard</i>	

For his résumé for sports/recreation employers, Justin might lead with Sports/Recreation Experience and include his sports office, lifeguard, and canoe sales experience, and then list his other work under Additional Experiences. For his banking résumé, Justin might lead with Customer Service/Office Experience and include his law firm, commissioner's office, canoe shop, and lifeguard experiences. In each case, he will likely change the bulleted point phrases under each job listing to indicate the most relevant parts of the experience.

Are there experiences you listed on your pages that don't fit, or don't seem as relevant? Consider leaving them off. You don't have to list every job and every experience you've ever had on a résumé.

Now that you have decided which experiences fit best in the

categories you've selected, look over the list of duties you compiled for each experience. Which aspects of your experiences best fit this field? Which skills most apply to your potential work setting? Can you phrase them to fit the language of the field to which you're applying? Rank them from most significant to least significant, based on your job objective. Use action verbs followed by specific explanations of what you did. Remember to show, not tell. In general, you should leave out the insignificant or less important tasks.

Justin is going to include his law firm experience in all three of his résumés. For the law firm job, he plans to select his most valuable and responsible roles to highlight perhaps as follows:

- ⇒ Researched cases, and created and filed documents for five attorneys
- ⇒ Designed efficient billing system resulting in 20 percent greater collection of fees
- ⇒ Organized office tasks to ensure all deadlines met and files properly maintained

For the customer service banking job, Justin might list the following entries under the law firm position:

- ⇒ Provided daily customer service to clients, consultants, vendors, and staff
- ⇒ Maintained financial records, created invoices, and reconciled accounts
- ⇒ Interpreted and translated for Spanish-speaking clientele

For the sports/recreation field, Justin might choose to focus on organizational and management skills, such as:

- ⇒ Explained legal documents and reviewed basic laws to clients
- ⇒ Created PowerPoint marketing presentation for law firm
- ⇒ Worked in a fast-paced environment, completing numerous tasks under pressure, never missing a deadline for over fifty cases

As you can see from the example above, one job or experience can lead to a variety of other careers—you just need to think about the way your experience fits the position you're seeking. You'll notice that the word *I* does not appear on Justin's entries. He leads with an action verb and then the subject, trying to make his descriptions as clear as possible and free of fluff. Below is a list of common action words that might help you develop your experience entries.

### Action Words

Achieved	Created	Initiated
Adapted	Critiqued	Inspected
Administered	Delegated	Instructed
Advertised	Demonstrated	Interpreted
Analyzed	Designed	Launched
Approved	Developed	Led
Arranged	Directed	Lectured
Attained	Drafted	Maintained
Authorized	Earned	Managed
Balanced	Effected	Marketed
Budgeted	Eliminated	Mastered
Calculated	Enabled	Motivated
Chaired	Established	Negotiated
Collected	Evaluated	Operated
Communicated	Executed	Ordered
Compiled	Expanded	Organized
Completed	Expedited	Originated
Computed	Facilitated	Oversaw
Conceptualized	Generated	Participated
Condensed	Guided	Performed
Conducted	Identified	Pinpointed
Conferred	Illustrated	Planned
Consulted	Implemented	Prepared
Controlled	Improved	Processed
Coordinated	Increased	Produced
Corresponded	Influenced	Programmed



Promoted	Reviewed	Transferred
Proposed	Revitalized	Transformed
Provided	Revived	Translated
Publicized	Scheduled	Treated
Published	Strategized	Tutored
Purchased	Strengthened	Unified
Recommended	Summarized	United
Recorded	Supervised	Upgraded
Recruited	Surveyed	Used
Reduced	Systematized	Utilized
Reinforced	Tabulated	Won
Reorganized	Taught	Worked
Repaired	Trained	Wrote
Represented	Transcribed	

## STEP 7: THE INTERESTS SECTION

This is a completely optional section of your résumé and another area where you will get mixed responses from employers. Some say they like it because it shows your personality and can provide a common ground for conversation. Others say they aren't interested. So let two factors help you make your decision: space and relevance. If you have extra space to fill on your résumé, an interests section is one way to do that. (Just make sure you don't have a larger interests section than experience section! It might look as if you aren't interested in working.) Also, if your interests are relevant to your career field, by all means include them. Just be sure they don't conflict with your field (for example, someone whose hobbies are sewing and reading applying for a high-pressure sales job) or are risky activities that might indicate an insurance liability for an employer (motorcycle racing, skydiving, and so on).

That's it! You're done. No need to put "References available on request" at the bottom of your résumé unless, again, you have lots of extra room. Instead, create a separate word file that has "References

of *Your Name*" and list your references' names, job titles, addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses. If you want, you can include one line for each reference indicating how you know the person if it's not obvious from title or place of employment.

So before we end this chapter, let's go back and visit Justin one more time. The more Justin considered his after-graduation options, the more he found himself leaning toward a career related to sports and recreation, even though he had no idea what he could do. He started researching careers related to sports and found that many of them required advanced degrees or special athletic skills. But then he found a Web site called CoolWorks.com, which had a job listing for an office assistant at a tourist resort in Alaska. It was a short-term opportunity offered from May until September, and it involved working in the office of a resort that offered hiking, biking, kayaking, and all the other activities he loved. The salary wasn't exciting, but housing was included, and the company was ranked one of the best employers in the nation, so he figured if he did well on that job, they might promote him or help him find other opportunities. Not only that, he'd get to live in Alaska for five months, which sounded like a great adventure.

The title was "office staff" at the resort and required strong organizational skills, basic bookkeeping/accounting skills, and strong knowledge of MS Word, Excel, and Access computer programs. He would be greeting customers and selling various adventure packages and tours. The advertisement also indicated that because the job involved arranging backpacking, rafting, and hiking itineraries for customers, outdoors experience was a plus. So armed with the job description in hand, he began adjusting his résumé to fit the position.

You may recall that Justin had originally planned to keep his study-abroad experience brief on his résumé for the sports/recreation area, but then he realized that while he was studying abroad he had spent his spare time hiking, biking, and doing all the activities listed in the job description. So suddenly a completely different aspect of his study in Mexico became important. He also decided that based on the job description, it would be better to lead with his office management skills rather than his recreational skills, since the advertisement led with office skills.



### You Majored in What?

On the next page, you'll see Justin's final résumé for his possible career at a resort in Alaska. It would have been just as easy for Justin to create a résumé for a law firm or a bank, and he can still do that when he returns from Alaska in October.

Now it's your turn . . .

What could you do in the next twenty-four hours to make your résumé stronger?

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If you knew you couldn't fail, where might you target your résumé? Is there a dream place where you'd like to work, or a field you'd like to try even though you might not succeed? It seldom hurts to write a résumé and see what happens.

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### Justin Matthews

123 Maple Street, Smalltown, MD 55555 - (301) 555-5555 - e-mail: jmmd@internet.com

#### OBJECTIVE: Office Assistant Position for Vacation Resort

#### EDUCATION

Longstreet College, Washington, DC  
B.A., International Studies

May 2010  
GPA 3.25

#### Study Abroad, Guadalajara, Mexico

August 2007-8

Immersion program. Intensive study of Mexican history and culture. Utilized time off to explore outdoor recreation, including kayaking, backpacking, climbing, and scuba diving. Resided with Mexican family: strengthened Spanish-speaking skills by interpreting and translating for family.

#### ADMINISTRATIVE/OFFICE MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE

##### SRLQ Law Firm

Washington, DC

##### Legal/Office Assistant

Summer 2009

- Provided daily customer service to clients, consultants, vendors, and staff.
- Explained legal services and costs to clients, including service packages and discounts.
- Maintained financial records, created invoices, and reconciled accounts on Excel.
- Coordinated over 40 legal cases simultaneously with 100% accuracy in meeting court deadlines.

##### Commissioner William Smith's Office

Baltimore, MD

##### Coordinator/Intern

Summer 2008

- Supervised office, handled calls and correspondence (including e-mails) with constituencies.
- Resolved complaints and found solutions for constituents' financial and legal problems.
- Maintained a positive demeanor, increasing constituent satisfaction rating by 20%.
- Designed and updated constituent database regularly to ensure accuracy.

#### SPORTS/RECREATION EXPERIENCE

##### Longstreet College Sports Office

Washington, DC

##### Office Assistant

Fall 2009-Present

- Recorded student statistics for official records and answered incoming office calls.
- Called students, supervisors, and officials to remind them of their scheduled working times.
- Supervised sports games and maintained order within the gymnasium and sport fields.

##### Longstreet College Campus Activities Board

Washington, DC

President (2009-Present) Treasurer (2008-9) Member (2007)

2007-Present

- Coordinated and promoted sports-related events, including whitewater rafting and caving activities.
- Negotiated contracts with agencies providing outdoor expedition activities.
- Served as liaison with faculty and administration and organized executive board meetings.

##### The Woodlands Inn

Barclay, MD

##### Lifeguard

Summer 2008

- Maintained cleanliness and order around pool. Monitored water daily and adjusted chemicals as needed.
- Ensured safety of patrons by maintaining constant vigilance and providing rescue services.

##### Underwater Canoes

Cambridge, MD

##### Customer Service and Sales Representative

Summer 2007

- Rented and sold canoes, boats, and kayaking equipment and accessories.
- Instructed clients in the operation and safe use of equipment, resulting in no injuries during season.