

How to strike the right tone in your resume

Your resume is a key tool in helping to get you in the running for a role. When you first apply for a job, you've just got words on paper to impress with—so it's crucial to use those words wisely.

Amanda Buxton, Director at recruitment firm Buxton Pratt Consulting, shares her tips on how to get the tone and language of your resume just right.

Use active voice

Your resume should grab your reader's attention as quickly as possible, and using active voice instead of passive voice will engage your reader faster.

"Passive sentences tend to be wordier and more difficult to read, and are not as impactful as active ones," Buxton says. For example: "A promotion to team leader was awarded to me after only six months of service," is not as direct as the active form, "I was promoted to team leader after only six months."

Scan your resume for passive sentences and replace them with active sentences to create more impact, Buxton says.

Beware buzzwords

Popular, overused words such as 'energetic', 'driven', 'motivated', 'enthusiastic', 'hardworking', 'team player', 'loyal', 'client-focussed' or 'achievement-oriented' should be treated with caution.

"If you do use these words you should make sure you can back them up with solid examples," Buxton says.

Opt for action words

Instead of buzzwords, use words about results. If you're achievement-oriented, you could show it by including specific results you've achieved. Or, if you want to show that you're client-focussed, give examples of what you delivered to clients that went beyond expectations. Do this by using action words such as 'developed', 'established' or 'initiated', for example:

- "Developed a new training manual which was adopted by the entire company."
- "Established new sales targets to help our company achieve a greater share of the market."
- "Initiated the development of a sales strategy."

Leave 'me' out of it

Jobseekers often ask whether resumes should be written in the first or third person. Buxton says both are acceptable but another approach is to remove pronouns (such as 'I' or 'he/she') entirely, for example:

- “Managed a team of 20.”
- “Responsible for setting sales targets and establishing individual key performance indicators (KPIs).”

Highlight your achievements

It's more important to describe what you have achieved rather than what you simply did. Use facts and figures where possible and provide evidence of where you've used skills so the reader can get a good overview of your previous roles and responsibilities.

- Here's an example of a 'doing' sentence: “Wrote the content for the organisation's sales strategy.”
- This is how to make it an 'achieving' sentence: “Increased revenue by 20% by delivering the organisation's sales strategy.”

Remove long sentences

Nothing will lose your reader's attention faster than a long-winded, hard-to-follow sentence. Keep your sentences short and sharp. This will make it easier for the reader to find the key information they need and boost your chances of landing an interview.

Optimise for keywords

Many companies now use an applicant tracking system (ATS) to scan resumes. This software will search your resume for keywords related to the job. You can avoid being overlooked by mirroring the keywords used in the job description.

An organisation is more likely to search for a specialist skill they want, rather than candidates who've described themselves as 'enthusiastic' or 'hardworking', Buxton says.

Check for errors

Give yourself plenty of time to read and reread your resume to make sure there are no typos, spelling mistakes, grammatical errors or inconsistencies. These flaws will make your resume look sloppy and rushed.

Explore more [resume advice here](#).