5 ways to talk to achievements in your resume

Many people find it tricky to describe their achievements. Listing your previous jobs in your resume might be straightforward, but when it comes to writing about what you achieved in those jobs, you might stumble or feel stuck.

Your achievements are the things you've accomplished in the roles you've held – they go beyond the duties or tasks that were part of your role.

When you apply for a job, highlighting your achievements can help you make an employer feel confident that you're a great fit for the role.

"Hiring managers get a sense of what you can do for them by what you've accomplished in your previous jobs," explains Carolyn Whitfield of Total Resumes. "Outlining the challenges you tackled, the actions you took to solve the problem, and the results you generated can be a powerful way to attract their attention."

Here are five tips to help you identify your achievements, write about them in your resume and talk about them in interviews.

Know the difference between a duty and an achievement

Whitfield says the most common mistake she sees people making on their resume is listing the duties they had in previous jobs, rather than describing their achievements in those roles. "They write about what they did, not what they achieved," she says.

You'll know you've done this if you use phrases like 'responsible for' or 'duties included'. Duties don't tell the full story of your impact in your job, and that's exactly what you need to do if you're going to spark the interest of employers and hiring managers.

"Your resume must tell a story," Whitfield says. "How did what you've done lead you to the right combination of skills, experience and education for the job you want? What can you do for the company that no one else does?"

Identify your achievements by asking yourself questions

If you're struggling to come up with your successes, Whitfield says you should ask yourself: "How is this company better because of me?"

Here are some prompts that may help you define your unique achievements:

- What project have you accomplished recently that helped the company make—or save—more money?

- What is your biggest professional achievement from the past year?
- What project have you accomplished recently that helped you or your co-workers save time with something?
- What's the best thing a customer said about you or to you this year?

It's always important to tailor your resume to the job you're applying for, by looking at the job ad and matching your relevant skills and experience to it. That includes your achievements – you want to highlight what's most relevant to the job.

Quantify your achievements

Once you're ready to write your achievements into your resume, try using the 'Challenge, Action, Result' format. "Every accomplishment should include the problem or challenge, the action you took, and the result of your work," Whitfield says. "When answering these questions, think in terms of money, numbers and time. Strong resume achievements are quantifiable."

To do this:

- First, note what the challenge was. For example, 'I was given the responsibility to…'
- Next, say what actions you took: 'So I…'
- Finally, explain what the result was: 'As a result of my efforts…'
- If you can, quantify the result or achievement in dollars, numbers, and/or percentages, Whitfield says. For example, 'I saved $100K year on year by decreasing the operating budget by 52%.'

Identify non-quantifiable accomplishments

Not every role gives you easily measurable results that you can point to as achievements. That's okay! If that's the case for you, think about non-quantifiable accomplishments that you can include in your resume.

Here are some examples from Whitfield:

- 'I led the help desk in partnering with customers, providing clear and actionable instructions and empowering clients to self-troubleshoot.'
- 'I repaired critical relationships with key clients by assigning dedicated analysts to their project.'
- 'I was praised by [Client or Leader Name], [Client or Leader Title] at [Company Name]: "[Direct quote from them about why you're awesome.]"'

Map your achievements to the job description

When it comes to the interview, make sure you thoroughly understand the company and role you're applying for, so that you can match your skills and knowledge to the responsibilities.

"Look at each requirement on the job description and make notes on how you meet them with your skills and experience," Whitfield says. "Doing this should prepare you for most questions the interviewer asks you around your suitability."

Use these notes you take to practice your interview responses – this can help you to build confidence and be ready to bring to mind the achievements, skills and experience you want to talk about most. You can also try using the Practice Interview Builder tool to help you prepare.

Describing your achievements might feel a little unfamiliar at first – especially if you're used to downplaying your accomplishments! But in the end, it comes down to assessing the impact you made with your work, and sharing that in a compelling way. By writing about your achievements in your resume – and getting comfortable with talking about them – you'll be able to make a stronger application and an even better impression to employers.

Read more:

- How to write a great cover letter
- What to do when you don't hear back on a job application
- 4 tips for getting your application noticed