

RESUME WEAKNESSES



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HOW TO TAKE CARE OF WEAKNESSES ON YOUR RESUME

Do you have a unique circumstance that might raise a recruiter's eyebrows when reviewing your resume? Your first impulse might be just to lie about your past experience, but there are other ways still make yourself attractive to an employer without necessarily being deceitful.

GAPS IN WORK HISTORY

Many people have gaps in their work history. If you have a legitimate reason for major gaps, such as going to school or having a child, you can simply state this on your resume. You could, in some situations, handle one of these gaps by putting the alternative activity on the resume, with dates, just as you would handle any other job.

Minor gaps such as being out of work for several months, do not need an explanation at all. You can often simply exclude any mention of months on your resume. Instead, just refer to the years you were employed such as "1993 to 1994" and any gap of several months is not apparent at all.

BEING OUT OF WORK

Some of the most accomplished people I know have been out of work at one time or another and one out of five people in the workforce experiences some unemployment each year. It's really not a sin and many people who are bosses have experienced it themselves. But the tradition is to try to hide this on the resume.

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One technique is to put something like "19xx to Present" on your resume when referring to your most recent job. This approach makes it look like you are still employed. While this might be an acceptable approach in some cases, it may also require you to have to explain yourself early on in an interview. This soft deception can start you off on a negative note and may not end up helping you at all.

If you are currently out of work, your other alternatives are to write the actual month that you left your last job or to write in some interim activity such as being self-employed. Even if that means that you are working at a temporary agency or doing odd jobs, it may be better than being deceitful. Remember that many employers have experienced being out of work themselves and may have more understanding of your situation than you realize.

BEING FIRED AND OTHER NEGATIVES IN YOUR WORK HISTORY

There is no reason for a resume to include any details related to why you have left previous jobs -- unless, of course, they were positive. For example, leaving to accept a more responsible job is to your credit. If you have been fired, analyze why. In most cases, it is for reasons that do not have to do with your performance. Most often, people are fired as a result of interpersonal conflicts. These are quite common and do not indicate that you will necessarily have the same problem in a different situation. If your performance was the reason, you may have to explain why that would not be the case in a new job.

The resume itself should present what you did well in previous situations. Leave the discussion of problems for the interview, and take time in advance to practice what you will say if asked.

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JOB HISTORY UNRELATED TO YOUR CURRENT JOB OBJECTIVE

If your previous work experience is in jobs that don't relate to what you want to do next, your best bet is to use a skills resume. The advantage of the skills resume in this situation is that it allows you to emphasize those transferable skills that you have developed and used in other settings.

CHANGING CAREERS

This is a situation related to the one described above and would also be handled through the use of a skills resume. A change in careers does require some justification on your part, so that it makes sense to an employer. This should mean that you should present experiences where you have demonstrated ability in or preparation for success in a different occupational area.

RECENT GRADUATE

If you have recently graduated, you probably are competing against those with similar levels of education and more work experience. If you don't have a lot of work experience related to the job you want, you will obviously want to emphasize your recent education or training. This might include specific mention of courses you took and other activities that most directly relate to the job you now seek. New graduates need to look at their schoolwork as the equivalent of work. Indeed, it is work in that it required self-discipline, completion of a variety of tasks, and other activities that are similar to those required in many jobs.

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You also may have learned a variety of things that are directly related to doing the job you want and you should present these in a skills resume in the same way you might present work experiences in a chronological resume. You should also play up the fact, if you can, that you are familiar with the latest trends and techniques in your field and can apply these skills right away to the new job. And, since you are experienced in studying and learning new things, you will be better able to quickly learn the new job.

A skills resume will also allow you to more effectively present skills you used in other jobs (such as waiting on tables) that don't seem to directly relate to the job you now want. These jobs were also work experiences and can provide a wealth of adaptive and transferable skills that you can use, with some thought, to support your resumes job objective.

OVER QUALIFIED

After a period of unemployment, most people become more willing to settle for less than they had hoped for. If you are willing to accept jobs where you may be defined as overqualified, consider not including some of your educational or work-related credentials on your resume -- though I do not necessarily recommend doing this. And be prepared to explain, in the interview, why you do want this particular job and how your wealth of experience is a positive and not a negative.

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NO DEGREE OR LESS EDUCATION THAN TYPICALLY REQUIRED

If you have the previous experience and skills to do a job that is often filled by someone with more education, you should take special care in preparing the education and experience sections of your resume.

For those with substantial work experience, you can simply not include a section on education at all. While this does have the advantage of not presenting your lack of formal credentials in an obvious way, a better approach might be to present the education and training that you do have without indicating that you do or do not have a degree.

For example, mention that you attended such and such a college or program but don't mention that you did not complete it. This approach avoids your being screened out unnecessarily and provides you with a chance at an interview that you might not otherwise get.

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