
BUSINESS PROFESSIONALS' RANKINGS OF APPLICANTS' RÉSUMÉS: UPDATED CONSIDERATIONS FOR RÉSUMÉ INSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

The standard recommendations for the design and content of an effective résumé have held mostly constant since the mid-1990s. Within these standard guidelines, this study investigates which aspects of effective résumés influence hiring professionals' evaluations of equally qualified candidates in order to update and strengthen business professors' résumé instruction in order to improve business students' résumés. Based on an analysis of 45 business professionals' rankings of ten sample résumés and 21 interviews, this study finds that targeted internships and chronological organization positively influence a résumé reviewer's evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

Employment communication—including cover letters and résumés—is a major component of many business communication courses (Moshiri & Cardon, 2014), and nearly every major business communication textbook includes a chapter on the topic. Résumé instruction often includes discussion of content organization, use of action verbs, elimination of unnecessary information, language correctness, and design principles (e.g., Bovée & Thill, 2012; Cardon, 2018; Alfred, Brusaw, & Oliu, 2019; Shwom & Snyder, 2019).

Much of business communication scholarship from the 1990s through early 2000s attends to technological trends affecting applicant selection (e.g. Baker, DeTienne, and Smart, 1998; Diaz, 2013) or innovative strategies for teaching résumés (see Ding & Ding, 2013; Furbish, 2015; Randazzo, 2012; Wright, Domagalski, & Collins, 2011). Some research also explores the influence of personality and identity factors on résumé evaluation (see Burns, Christiansen, Morris, Periard, & Coaster, 2014; Derous & Ryan, 2019; Hiemstra, Derous, Serlie, & Born, 2013; Kang, DeCelles, Tilcsik, & Jun, 2016; Lacroux & Martin-Lacroux, 2020). Within the past ten years, there has not been much research about the “basics” of résumé content and design.

Based on 45 business professionals' ranking of ten résumés that follow the basic guidelines for effective résumés, this study considers how a résumé that adheres to the basic guidelines for effective résumés might stand out amongst other generally effective résumés. The trends identified in this study offer suggestions about which aspects of résumé development should be emphasized in résumé instruction and how instructors can help students refine their résumés. Following a review scholarship about effective résumés and the study design description, the results and implications for instruction are presented, highlighting the importance of internships and the chronological organization.

SCHOLARSHIP AND COMMON INSTRUCTION ON EFFECTIVE RÉSUMÉS

While most of the recent research about résumé focuses on other aspects, scholarship about effective résumés and current trends in résumé instruction typically builds on results from surveys conducted by Hutchinson (1984), Harcourt and Krizan (1989) and Hutchinson and Brefka (1997). In each study, the researchers mailed surveys to 500 personnel administrators at Fortune 500 companies asking participants to self-report their preferences about résumé content, with 120-155 responses depending on the study. The results of these studies helped confirm résumé reviewers' preferences for certain résumé content sections, including objective statements, college-level academic background, and work experience. The common sections included in popular business communication textbooks match those identified in these foundational studies.

Business communication scholarship and textbooks emphasize some common points of instruction for résumé content. In 1989, Harcourt and Krizan noted an increase in Fortune 500 personnel administrators' preference for discussion of achievements, work accomplishments, and special skills. Similarly, in their 1992 study of résumé reviewers' responses to Marketing résumés, Charney, Rayman, and Ferreira-Buckley found that reviewers prefer résumés that use active voice and include details about the outcomes of the applicant's work efforts. Business communication textbooks highlight the importance of effective active verbs that identify the applicant's skills (Diaz, 2013; Smart, 2004). Diaz (2013) finds that with the increasing use of computer software to scan résumés, there is an increasing emphasis on the use of keywords throughout a résumé. In addition to using active voice and verbs, textbooks and professors also often advise students to quantify their accomplishments when possible (Smart, 2004).

Standard grammar, mechanics, and spelling are important aspects of effective résumés. Charney, Rayman, and Ferreira-Buckley (1992) found that résumé reviewers in the Marketing and Engineering fields preferred résumés with less experience and no errors to résumés with more experience that contained errors. Also, the résumé reviewers more harshly evaluated the style and mechanics of résumés with more experience (Charney et al., p. 55). Similarly, in their study of 536 business professionals, Martin-Lacroux and Lacroux (2017) found that spelling errors increased the likelihood an applicant was being rejected, especially when the applicant had more work experience. These findings show the strong influence of correct grammar on résumés.

The most preferred organization of the standard résumé sections is the chronological organization, which organizes content based on work history rather than skills or attributes (Schullery, Ickes, & Schullery, 2009; Diaz, 2013). Schullery, Ickes, and Schullery (2009) found that 71% of résumé reviewers preferred the standard chronological format. Business communication textbooks often include other content organizations, such as functional and hybrid formats, as well. Although the textbooks often note that the chronological format is preferred and the functional format is to be used by applicants with “extensive” work history (Diaz, 2013). Recent textbooks also often include information about scannable formats and professional social media platforms, like LinkedIn (e.g. Hamilton, 2014; Lehman, DuFrene, & Walker, 2019).

Common advice for résumé layout and design generally recommends simple, high contrast layouts that fill the page. Business communication textbooks offer advice about balancing white space, incorporating contrast, and visually filling the page (Diaz, 2013). The length of the résumé is usually considered part of the layout. Most personnel administrators report a preference for one-page résumés (Blackburn-Brockman & Belanger, 2001; Hutchinson & Brefka, 1997; Harcourt & Krizan, 1989). However, Blackburn-Brockman and Belanger (2001) found that résumé reviewers for the major accounting firms consistently ranked two-page résumés over one-page résumés, even when they explicitly stated a preference for one page.

Beyond the basic guidelines for effective résumés, the National Association of Colleges and Employers’ (NACE) annual Job Outlook report summarizes results from a survey of its employer members that asks about their upcoming hiring expectations. Employers provide information on the attributes and skills they seek on a candidate’s résumé and which attributes influence the decision between qualified applicants. In the annual NACE survey, employers regularly indicate their preference for skills in communication, problem-solving, teamwork, analysis, and leadership.

Prior to 2018, employers were asked about the value of internship experience separately from the attributes that influence decisions between two candidates. From 2014 to 2016, 56-60% of employers reported a preference for applicants who held an internship position and indicated that either leadership experience or the applicant's major was the determining factor between strong candidates (NACE, 2014; NACE 2015; NACE 2016). In 2017 and 2018, internship experience was included in the questions about determining characteristics; in these years, having an internship became the top-rated criteria for differentiating between qualified applicants, just before major and leadership experience (NACE, 2017; NACE 2018).

With the standard instruction regarding résumé development and the NACE findings in mind, this study further investigates which résumé characteristics and content can help a strong applicant communicate the strongest fit for a position, particularly in comparison to other strong applicants. In order to identify these résumé elements, this study asked 45 business professionals to rank ten equally qualified sample résumés submitted for a sample job posting. The participants were also invited to complete an optional follow-up interview. Thereby, the study offers insight into which résumé elements distinguish top candidates from one another so that business professors might further refine their employment communication instruction.

METHODS

Using common templates and the résumé content guidelines from business communication scholarship and textbooks, the lead researcher developed a fictional position advertisement and ten fictional, qualified résumés tailored to the fictional position. The position advertisement described an entry-level "Recruiting Assistant" position for a staffing company that required basic skills like reviewing résumés; determining applicants' potential fit for open positions; interacting with applicants in the recruiting, interviewing, and on-boarding processes; and completing basic information management tasks (See Appendix A). The advertisement content was based on similar postings available on websites like LinkedIn and O*Net Online.

The ten fictional résumés generally followed the best practices recommended in popular business communication textbooks and business communication scholarship, as previously reviewed. While some designs could have better balanced white space, the résumés all used designs that the lead researcher often sees when working with students and that followed most of the basic design advice. Nine résumés used chronological organization, and one résumé used a functional/hybrid

organization. The researcher selected the applicants' names based on her own knowledge of and internet searches for common and gender-neutral first names and the most common surnames in the United States, with three traditionally masculine, two traditionally feminine, and five gender-neutral first names. The last names were Flores, Harris, Jackson, Johnson, Miller, Smith, West, Williams, Wilson, and Wood.

The résumés' content was fictional but based on the kinds of experiences that are common to students who perform well academically and who work while seeking their degrees. All ten fictional applicants had recently earned or were about to complete a relevant degree with a 3.3 or higher GPA. All applicants had work experience. Five résumés included work experience common to traditionally aged students who worked while in high school and/or college (e.g. cashiers, stockers, food servers). The other five résumés include four years of professional work experience before entering higher education. Five of the applicants also had an internship or a volunteer experience that directly related to the fictional job advertisement. Nine résumés include an objective or summary sections. Nine résumés included additional information beyond the objective, education, and relevant experience sections, such as information about professional and honors organizations, language proficiency, professional skills, leadership skills, and awards. The descriptions of relevant experience used active voice and verbs, and some descriptions include quantification of work level and/or accomplishments, all of which were adapted from similar postings on LinkedIn profiles and O*Net Online position descriptions.

Participant Description & Study Procedures

A convenience sample of 45 participants were recruited from the career fair for business students held at the researcher's university, from the local chapter of the Society of Human Resource Management, and the lead researcher's professional network. To be eligible, study participants were required to review résumés as all or part of their official position. At the time of the study, all participants worked in the South or Midwest regions of the United States. Twenty-four of the participants were female and 21 were male. Participants were not asked about their race, age, or education level. Participants' years of professional experience ranged from one to 37 years, with some having multiple positions and some with a single position throughout their career. Using LinkedIn industry categories, the participants represented 21 different industries. Sixty-two percent of the participants held positions in the Human Resources field, with 54% of those participants in managerial roles and 46% in recruiting roles. The other 38% of the participants held managerial roles outside

of the Human Resources.

All participants reviewed the sample position advertisement and then ranked the sample résumés. Twenty-one of the participants agreed to the optional audio-recorded interview. A semi-structured interview approach was used to limit the researcher's influence on the topics and résumé elements discussed by the participants (Creswell, 2009; Crotty, 1998). Participants were first asked four basic questions about their experience, including their years of experience reviewing résumés, the size and type of companies for which they reviewed résumés, desired skills that they seek on résumés, and common "red flags" on résumés. Most of the interview was a conversation about the participants' rankings of the résumés. If needed, the researcher asked clarification questions to elicit concrete details but otherwise avoided introducing new topics.

RESULTS

Each participant's rankings of the ten sample résumés were recorded, with Position 1 as the highest and Position 10 as the lowest. The researchers then separated the ranking positions into three categories based on the level of "fit" with the job description: Good, Moderate, and Low. The Good Fit rankings include rankings 1 to 4. The Moderate Fit rankings include rankings 5 to 7. The Low Fit rankings include rankings 8 to 10. Discussions with the interviewed participants informed the decision to establish "fit" categories and the ranges for the categories. Many of the interviewed participants indicated that the applicants they ranked in the first two to four rankings were "interchangeable." Other interviewed participants indicated that they would interview the lower ranked applicants but were less optimistic about the applicants' fit. Using these categories, the researchers identified how often each résumé was ranked in the Good, Moderate, and Low Fit categories (See Table 1).

Table 1
Number of Rankings in Each Category per Résumé

| | Good (1-4) | Moderate (5-7) | Low (8-10) |
|----------|------------|----------------|------------|
| Johnson | 37 | 8 | 0 |
| Wood | 27 | 9 | 9 |
| Miller | 20 | 18 | 7 |
| Flores | 20 | 12 | 13 |
| West | 18 | 17 | 10 |
| Smith | 17 | 15 | 13 |
| Williams | 14 | 7 | 24 |
| Wilson | 12 | 19 | 14 |
| Jackson | 10 | 16 | 19 |
| Harris | 6 | 14 | 25 |

Based on the ranking distributions, the researchers selected four résumés for further consideration: Johnson, Wood, Williams, and Smith (See Appendix A). Johnson's and Wood's résumés received a high proportion of Good Fit rankings in comparison to the other résumés. Sarah Williams' résumé rankings were primarily Low or Good, with only seven Moderate rankings. Erin Smith's résumé earned the most evenly distributed rankings. The researchers considered the differentiating aspects of and the interviewed participants' comments about these résumés to provide insight into the influence of these résumés' features on reviewers' evaluations. The following sections discuss the findings and implications of this further review.

DISCUSSION

Johnson and Wood: The Best of the Best

The résumés for Eric Johnson and Morgan Wood earned the highest number of rankings in the Good Fit category, with 37 and 27 rankings, respectively. Johnson earned zero Low Fit rankings, while Wood earned nine rankings in both the Moderate and Low Fit categories. Figure 1 shows the ranking category distributions for the Johnson and Wood résumés.

Figure 1
Ranking Category Distribution for Johnson and Wood



The ranking distribution of these résumés primarily in the Good and Moderate categories suggests that these résumés offered a stronger argument that the candidates were a good candidate for the position. These résumés share some key content elements.

Both résumés include internship experience as the most recent position for the candidate. The internship titles include keywords from the job advertisement: “Human Resources Intern” for Johnson and “Recruiting Intern” for Wood. Twelve of the 21 interviewed participants explicitly mentioned the value of the internships when discussing their evaluation of the Johnson and Wood résumés. These participants often described Johnson’s and Wood’s internships as relevant Human Resources experience, and for Wood’s “Recruiting Intern” position, some participants noted that Wood had prior experience with the duties listed in the description.

While there are three other résumés that include internship experience (and one that includes “Human Resources Volunteer” experience), the West résumé was the only other résumé to include a keyword from the job advertisement in the internship position title. The other internship position titles were Miller’s “Store Manager Intern” and Flores’s “Marketing Intern.” Eleven of the interviewed participants mentioned Flores’s marketing internship. These participants were positive about the internship experience, but some raised concerns that the internship wasn’t “from an HR standpoint.” Similarly, six participants mentioned Miller’s store manager internship, which includes cross-training in the HR department, as a generally positive experience, but they also had concerns that the time spent in the Human Resources department was brief. Overall, the inclusion of the keywords from the job

description in the candidate's prior position titles—especially internship positions—may improve the résumé reviewer's sense of the candidate's fit—reinforcing the 2017 and 2018 NACE findings that internship experience “in your organization” was the top rated distinguishing factor between two equally-qualified candidates, and “in your industry” was a close second.

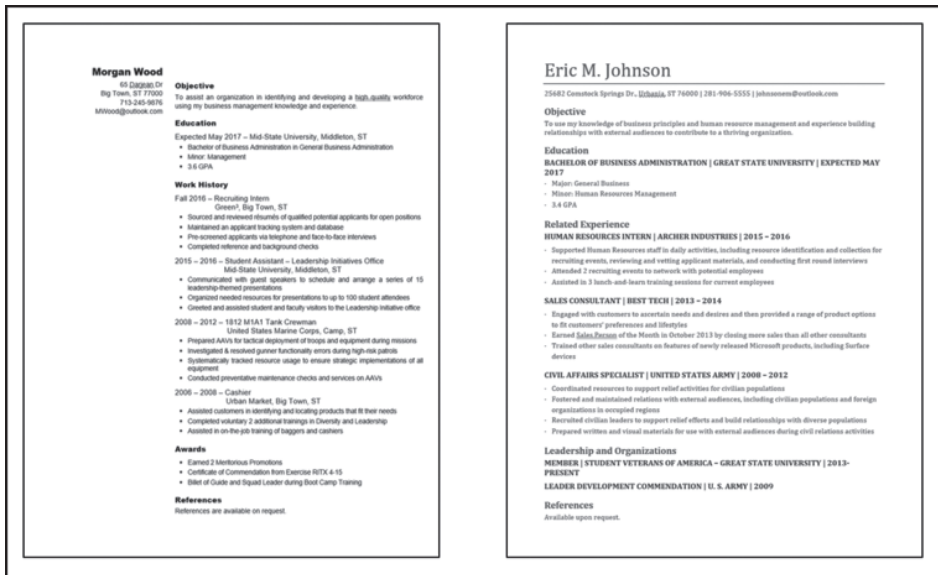
The Johnson and Wood résumés also include explicit and implicit indications of the candidates' leadership abilities. Johnson's résumé includes a section titled “Leadership and Organization,” which includes an entry for the applicant's membership in a student organization and an award for “Leader Development.” Wood's résumé includes an “Awards” section with indications of two “meritorious promotions” and a “Squad Leader” appointment. Also, one of Wood's “Work History” experiences is a student assistant position in the university's “Leadership Initiatives Office.”

These résumés also include implicit indications of their leadership characteristics through their prior full-time professional experience in the military. In U. S. culture, military personnel and veterans are often perceived as having strong leadership skills (Harrell & Berglass, 2012; Stone, Lengnick-Hall, & Muldoon, 2018; Shepherd, Kay, & Gray, 2019). The interviewed participants demonstrated that they shared this cultural belief by stating things like, “[a] stint in the military, that helps develop leadership” and “I like the leadership experience ... that he did in the military.” These explicit and implicit indications of the candidates' leadership skills likely influenced the participants' high rankings of the résumés. NACE (2016; 2017; 2018) consistently finds that employers rate leadership skills as a desirable attribute for applicants.

While the Johnson and Wood résumés earned more Good Fit rankings from the participants than the other résumés, Johnson's résumé did not earn any Low Fit rankings while Wood's résumé earned nine. The interviewed participants' discussions of these résumés offer some suggestions about which aspects of the Wood résumé may have influenced the participants to rank Wood's résumé lower.

First, ten of the interviewed participants commented on the layout or design of Wood's résumé (eight critical and two positive comments), and seven of the participants highlighted the design of Johnson's résumé (five positive and two critical comments). Figure 2 shows a visual comparison of Johnson and Wood's résumé.

Figure 2
Visual Comparison of Wood and Johnson Résumés



More of the interviewed participants mentioned the format of Wood's résumé than Johnson's résumé, and the interviewed participants were more critical of Wood's design, which aligns with the common recommendation to balance white space across the page (e.g. see Diaz, 2013). Interviewed participants described Wood's résumé as "crammed," "too off center," and having "a lot left over on the left side." One participant described this layout approach as "good if you don't have enough that you can fill in," suggesting that the participant felt Wood may lack experience. In contrast, positive comments about the layout of Johnson's résumé claimed that it was "appealing," "easy to read," and other similar claims, while the two critical comments focused on the amount of bolding and use of all caps.

Overall, the high rankings of the Johnson and Wood résumés and comments from the interviewed participants reinforce the NACE (2017; 2018) findings that internships in the industry and leadership experience helps improve a candidate's sense of fit for the advertised position. The comments from the interviewed participants about layout and design support recommendations from business communication scholarship to balance the distribution of text and white space across the width of the page. Still, some interviewed participants paired critical discussion of Wood's résumé layout with positive discussion of Wood's "Recruiting Intern"

position—suggesting that a highly relevant position that is well-described could be enough to persuade the reviewer to consider a candidate even if some other elements are not perfect.

Williams: Responses to the Functional Organization of Content

Twenty-four participants ranked the résumé for Sarah E. Williams in the Low Fit category. Only the Harris résumé earned more Low Fit rankings (25). The Williams, Harris, and Jackson résumés are the three résumés with the most rankings in the Low Fit category, but unlike Harris and Jackson, Williams's second highest category for rankings was the Good Fit category, with 14 rankings. She earned only seven Moderate Fit rankings.

Like the other nine résumés, the Williams résumé presents a candidate who is qualified for the position: a relevant degree with a 3.4 GPA, three prior work experience positions, and additional information about the candidate's skills in leadership, communication, and organization. The most distinguishing characteristic of the Williams résumé is that the layout uses the functional rather than chronological organization, giving most of the page-space to describing the candidate's skills rather than organizing information based on prior experiences.

To further consider the possible influence of the functional organization, the researchers first reviewed the interview transcripts. Sixteen of the interviewed participants commented on the organization of the Williams résumé. Only one of the participants claimed to like functional format of the Williams résumé, and another described the format as "fine" with no other comments. One participant described the layout as "innovative" before explaining why the layout was ineffective. Fourteen interviewed participants described the layout negatively, using phrases like the following: "very all over the place," "hard to figure out what was going on and just not worth my time," "too busy," "probably the worst to me because [of the organization]," "very odd," "completely wrong," "really disorganized," "really hard to understand," "hard for me to read," "not very good," "isn't very appealing." These descriptions highlight the strong reactions that the interviewed participants had to the functional organization.

Some of the participants also mentioned that they immediately put the résumé at the end of the stack because of the format, planning to review it more carefully at the end, but after more careful review, kept the Williams résumé in a Low Fit ranking. Those participants who elaborated on their frustration with the organization of the résumé explained that they were unable to identify in which

position the candidate developed the listed skills. A common example provided by the participants was Williams's Leadership bullet point: "Managed up to 5 employees on daily basis." One participant explained, "Managing five employees... at a bar or in the Marines? ... it would have been more beneficial to indicate those skills within the position to give a better understanding of those capacities and the elevation of those responsibilities." The interviewed participants suggest that while the content was relevant, the connections between the various claims on the résumé were not effectively presented.

With the ranking distributions and participants' comments in mind, the researchers elected to run a z-test to compare the proportions of the Williams' rankings to a comparable résumé from the sample set that used the chronological organization. Because the résumés' content differed from each other, it was not possible to select a directly comparable chronological résumé. Of the chronological résumés, Miller's résumé was most comparable due to similarities in experience, educational background, and claimed skills. Both applicants have prior full-time professional experience, similar GPAs and degrees, and similar named skills.

To test whether a chronological format is preferred to the functional format, we compared the proportion of participants ranking the functional résumé (Williams) as a Good fit to the proportion of participants ranking the chronological résumé (Miller) as a Good fit, under the assumption that the content of the Miller résumé is most similar to the Williams résumé aside from the organization of the content. P_f represents the proportion of participants ranking the functional résumé as a Good fit. P_c represents the proportion of participants ranking the chronological résumé as a Good fit. The null hypothesis is the assumption that P_f is greater than or equal to P_c . The alternative hypothesis is that P_f is less than P_c or that the proportion of participants ranking the functional résumé as Good is smaller than the proportion ranking the chronological résumé as Good. To conduct the z-test for this set of hypotheses, we estimated the difference between the proportions under the assumption that the true proportions are equal to each other. Therefore, the null hypothesis becomes $P_f = P_c = \bar{P}$. We estimated \bar{P} as

$$\bar{P} = \frac{14 + 20}{45 + 45} = \frac{34}{90} = 0.3778$$

The estimated proportions for P_f and P_c are

$$\hat{P}_f = \frac{14}{45} = 0.3111$$

and

$$\hat{P}_c = \frac{20}{45} = 0.4444$$

The test statistic is

$$z = \frac{(0.3111 - 0.4444) - 0}{\sqrt{0.3778(1 - 0.3778)\left(\frac{1}{45} + \frac{1}{45}\right)}} = -1.304$$

A z -score of -1.304 implies a p -value of 0.17 which is not significant for the commonly chosen levels of significance. The p -value represents the probability of getting a random sample with the values of \hat{P}_f and \hat{P}_c that are at least as extreme as the values we actually got, under the assumption that the null hypothesis is true. The level of significance is the value chosen by the researcher to determine whether the p -value is too small to accept the assumption that null hypothesis as being true. The most commonly chosen values are 0.01 , 0.05 , and 0.10 . Our p -value of 0.17 is larger than all of the commonly chosen values for levels of significance. Therefore, the data supports the null hypothesis that $P_f \geq P_c$.

We modified the test to compare the proportion of participants that ranked the résumés as *Good or Moderate* Fit against the proportion of participants that ranked the résumés in the *Low* Fit category. We got a different result. For the functional résumé (Williams), we got

$$\hat{P}_f = \frac{14 + 7}{45} = 0.4667$$

and for the chronological résumé (Miller), we got

$$\hat{P}_c = \frac{20 + 18}{45} = 0.8444$$

The estimate of the common value \bar{P} is

$$\bar{P} = \frac{21 + 38}{45 + 45} = 0.6555$$

The test statistic is

$$z = \frac{(0.4667 - 0.8444) - 0}{\sqrt{0.6555(1 - 0.6555)\left(\frac{1}{45} + \frac{1}{45}\right)}} = -3.769$$

The p -value that corresponds to this test statistic is 0.000328, which is below all of the commonly chosen levels of significance. In this case, the data implies that we should reject the null hypothesis in favor of the alternative. The data supports the idea that chronological résumés rank higher than functional résumés.

In sum, the Williams résumé content indicates she is qualified for the position. This content paired with the potentially “innovative” layout may account for the 14 Good Fit rankings awarded to the Williams résumé. However, the strong reactions to the layout by most of the interviewed participants suggests that the 24 Low Fit rankings were influenced by the functional organization of the content, an implication that is supported by the z -test results.

Smith: An Example of Low Agreement

The participants’ rankings for the Erin R. Smith résumé were distributed across the three ranking categories, with 17 Good Fit, 15 Moderate Fit, and 13 Low Fit rankings. The distribution of the participants’ rankings suggests that there is little agreement among participants about Smith’s fit based on the résumé.

Like the other résumés, the content of the Smith résumé describes a well-qualified applicant. The résumé includes a relevant degree with a 3.8 GPA, three prior “relevant experience” entries, and three “professional memberships.” Although Smith does not have an internship, she previously held a “Human Resources Volunteer” position. The other two positions are “Leasing Agent” and “Assistant Event Coordinator.” Each position description includes one to three key skills from the job description. The professional memberships include Society for Human Resource Management; Beta Gamma Sigma, International Business Honor Fraternity; and College of Business Administration Ambassadors. The Smith résumé follows nearly all the recommendations from business communication scholarship

and textbooks about résumé content development.

The interviewed participants were generally positive about Smith's fit. They spoke most often about Smith's relevant experience. Eleven of the interviewed participants mentioned the Human Resources Volunteer position; although, three of these participants stated that the three-month duration of the volunteer position was a limited experience level. Participants commented positively on the Leasing Agent and Assistant Event Coordinator positions, and one participant even noted that because "they are all in an office environment; it says [Smith] can work in the workplace." Interviewed participants were also mostly positive about the design of the résumé. Eight participants commented on the design. Positive comments were often vague ("good layout"), but the specific comments highlighted effective use of color (blue) for the name bar and section headings and that the content was easy to read. Only one participant critiqued the design, saying that the font could be larger.

The aspect of the Smith résumé that received the most criticism was the organization of the experience entries. In the Relevant Experience section, Smith includes the following positions and dates:

- Leasing Agent, July 2013 – present
- Human Resources Volunteer, May 2016 – June 2016
- Assistant Event Coordinator, Sept 2011 – Jun 2013

The general convention when listing prior experiences is to list current positions first in order to preserve the reverse chronological order. Prior positions would be listed after the current position. The order of experience entries becomes complicated if an applicant previously held concurrent positions but no longer does. In Smith's case, she held a two-month volunteer position while employed as a Leasing Agent. The starting dates in each entry do not appear to be in reverse chronological order, but because she still holds the Leasing Agent position, its appropriate placement is at the top of the experience entries. The three of the interviewed participants pointed out this seeming discrepancy.

A related concern from some of the interviewed participants was the verb tense used in the position descriptions, with concerns mentioned by three interviewed participants. There are two common approaches to selecting verb tense when describing an experience. The first approach is to use the present tense for current positions and the past tense for prior positions. The second approach is to use the same tense in all entries whether it is a current or prior position. Generally, it is acceptable to use either approach if the approach is used consistently. The Smith résumé follows the second approach, using the present tense for each entry. At least

three participants found the use of the present verb tense in prior positions distracting.

As shown by the distribution of rankings across the “fit” categories, participants had varying evaluations of the Smith résumé. In their comments, the interviewed participants were generally positive in their description of Smith, praising the relevant experience and finding few small concerns. In some telling phrasing, some of the interviewed participants described Smith, based on the résumé, as “kind of middle of the road” and generally a candidate that “didn’t stand out”; “she has the experience to fit the role; just, you know, there were better candidates.” Participants’ rankings and discussions of the Smith résumé indicate the importance of better understanding what influences a reviewer to rate one strong candidate over another.

CONCLUSION

The participants’ rankings of these résumés reinforce the 2017 and 2018 NACE findings that employers highly value applicants with internship experience. The higher rankings for Johnson and Wood over the other applicants, even those applicants with internships, shows that the phrasing of the internship title can have a powerful influence on the potential employer’s perception of the applicant. Including keywords from the job advertisement in the internship position title can strengthen the résumé reviewer’s perception of the applicant’s fit. Therefore, a student may consider discussing with her internship manager the potential titles that the student might use when including the internship on her résumé. Slight adjustments to the internship position title may help the applicant “stand out” to the reviewer. Students should also carefully select their internship experiences to maximize the internship’s relevance to their desired career field. Some interviewed participants did not perceive the relevance of cross-training internships, preferring internships in which the intern was in a single, relevant department.

The other feature that seemed to influence the participants’ rankings of the résumés was the résumé organization. Although business communication textbooks typically point out that résumé reviewers prefer the chronological format, the functional format is described as useful for applicants who have minimal to no experience in their desired field. Since students often see themselves as having little to no relevant experience, they can be attracted to the functional organization. However, the strong reactions to the organization from the interviewed participants and the significant difference in the ranking of the functional résumé suggest that the functional format should be strongly discouraged, or perhaps not even included

in common résumé instruction. While it may be useful in specialized situations, including the functional organization in standard résumé instruction is a potential source of confusion for students.

Based on the sample data included in this study, we feel confident about our findings and conclusions. A larger and more diverse participant sample would yield more robust results. This study uses rankings from 45 business professionals who review résumés as part of their job and who live and work primarily in the South and Midwest regions of the United States. Still, the 21 follow-up interviews add a level of depth to the reviewers' evaluations that would be difficult to replicate with more participants. A closer examination of the influence of résumé organization on reviewers' perceptions of a candidate would also be helpful. The résumé set used in this study included only one functional résumé. Future research may include a larger and more diverse sample of résumés, which would allow for more robust statistical methods to be used.

The results of this study suggest that using key terms from the job description in prior position titles and using the chronological format are two key recommendations for an applicant who wants to stand out in comparison to all the other applicants. As business professors helping students improve their employment communication, these two tips should be key points of emphasis in the instruction about résumés.

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APPENDIX A – POSITION DESCRIPTION AND SELECTED RÉSUMÉS

This appendix provides the position description and the four discussed résumés. Participants ranked the ten fictionalized résumés against the provided position description.

Position Description

Recruiting Assistant, General Business Services

General Business Services is seeking an entry-level employee who has a drive to join a fast paced team in the staffing industry. This is a great opportunity to leverage the interviewing, recruiting, or HR experience you have gained through internships and college courses. In this entry level position, you will provide recruiting and administrative support to our high growth recruiting team, supporting some of the area's top Fortune 500 companies.

Recruiting Tasks

- Identify and contact new candidates
- Maintain knowledge of candidates in database
- Learn about different job scopes and best fit for positions
- Gather sales leads
- Conduct initial interviews with new candidates
- Post ads on internal and external job sites
- Communicate effectively in written and face-to-face contexts
- Ability to work in fast-paced, changing environments

Administrative Tasks

- Format candidate résumés according to client requirements
- Assist in onboarding of placed candidates
- Maintain up-to-date and accurate documentation in database
- Manage correspondence for interviews with clients and job assignments
- Be available to answer questions for customers and clients, providing phone coverage
- Learn vendor management systems and monitor time-lines and extensions via email

Eric M. Johnson

25682 Comstock Springs Dr., Urbana, IL 62501 | 217-243-5555 | johnsonem@outlook.com

Objective

To use my knowledge of business principles and human resource management and experience building relationships with external audiences to contribute to a thriving organization.

Education

BACHELOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION | GREAT STATE UNIVERSITY | EXPECTED MAY 2017

- Major: General Business
- Minor: Human Resources Management
- 3.4 GPA

Related Experience

HUMAN RESOURCES INTERN | ARCHER INDUSTRIES | 2015 – 2016

- Supported Human Resources staff in daily activities, including resource identification and collection for recruiting events, reviewing and vetting applicant materials, and conducting first round interviews
- Attended 2 recruiting events to network with potential employees
- Assisted in 3 lunch-and-learn training sessions for current employees

SALES CONSULTANT | BEST TECH | 2013 – 2014

- Engaged with customers to ascertain needs and desires and then provided a range of product options to fit customers' preferences and lifestyles
- Earned Sales Person of the Month in October 2013 by closing more sales than all other consultants
- Trained other sales consultants on features of newly released Microsoft products, including Surface devices

CIVIL AFFAIRS SPECIALIST | UNITED STATES ARMY | 2008 – 2012

- Coordinated resources to support relief activities for civilian populations
- Fostered and maintained relations with external audiences, including civilian populations and foreign organizations in occupied regions
- Recruited civilian leaders to support relief efforts and build relationships with diverse populations
- Prepared written and visual materials for use with external audiences during civil relations activities

Leadership and Organizations

MEMBER | STUDENT VETERANS OF AMERICA – GREAT STATE UNIVERSITY | 2013-PRESENT

LEADER DEVELOPMENT COMMENDATION | U. S. ARMY | 2009

References

Available upon request.

ERIN R. SMITH

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| OBJECTIVE | Recent Management graduate with strong understanding of management and human resources principles. Looking to bring knowledge and experience to an energetic company. |
| EDUCATION | BACHELOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION IN MANAGEMENT MID-STATE UNIVERSITY, MIDDLETON, ST – DEC 2016 <ul style="list-style-type: none">3.8 GPA |
| RELEVANT EXPERIENCE | LEASING AGENT NRT PROPERTIES, ALLTREES, ST – JUL 2013 - PRESENT <ul style="list-style-type: none">Submit and evaluate background checks for residential applicantsProcess and maintain resident payment recordsUpdate and maintain profiles for up to 50 propertiesPersuasively communicate with qualified applicants to secure long-term, responsible residents HUMAN RESOURCES VOLUNTEER PALACIOS AT ALLTREES, ALLTREES, ST – MAY 2016 – AUG 2016 <ul style="list-style-type: none">Update and maintain records for residents and employeesProcess new resident applications, including background and financial checksSummarize anonymous complaints and concerns for management’s review ASSISTANT EVENT COORDINATOR GLITTERING SIGHTS EVENTS, VILLE, ST – SEPT 2011 - JUN 2013 <ul style="list-style-type: none">Assist in schedule planning for up to 6 events per weekend during peak event seasonIdentify and collect resources required for each planned eventCommunicate with clients to ensure that desires and expectations are clear for the company and the clientResolve any on-site issues that arise during an event |
| PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS | Society for Human Resource Management Beta Gamma Sigma, International Business Honor Fraternity College of Business Administration Ambassadors |
| REFERENCES | Available upon request. |

Sarah E. Williams

3444 Pebble Bend Dr., Big Town, ST 78000 | 281-555-0897 | sarahwilliams16@gmail.com

Objective

Business graduate seeking opportunity to use field experience and coursework to begin a career in personnel development.

Education

BACHELOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION IN GENERAL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION | GRAND STATE UNIVERSITY | DEC 2016

- 3.4 GPA
- Relevant Coursework in Business Law, Management, Written and Verbal Business Communication, Foundational Business Software

Skills & Abilities

LEADERSHIP

- Designed and implemented specifications for analysis reports based on discovered needs of users and decision makers
- Managed up to 5 employees on a daily basis
- Developed weekly restocking orders based on customer purchasing trends
- Created 2 promotional menu items which earned regular menu status due to high customer purchase

COMMUNICATION

- Prepared correspondence drafts for 2 supervising officers for 2 years
- Produced annual reports on efficacy of systems reporting tools and made recommendations for improvement
- Coordinated with other offices to trouble-shoot and correct discrepancies
- Improved customer relations through genuine interaction and conversation

ORGANIZATION

- Maintained attendance tracking for personnel within the organization
- Reviewed and approved travel authorizations based on organization policies and regulations
- Efficiently served up to 15 customers while simultaneously filling drink orders of other servers

Experience

BARTENDER | SMALL BATCH GRILL | 2013-2016

MANPOWER INFORMATION SYSTEMS ANALYST | UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS | 2011-2013

PERSONNEL CLERK | UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS | 2009-2011

References

Available upon request

Morgan Wood

65 Darjean Dr
Big Town, ST 77000
713-245-9876
MWood@outlook.com

Objective

To assist an organization in identifying and developing a high quality workforce using my business management knowledge and experience.

Education

Expected May 2017 – Mid-State University, Middleton, ST

- Bachelor of Business Administration in General Business Administration
- Minor: Management
- 3.6 GPA

Work History

Fall 2016 – Recruiting Intern
Green³, Big Town, ST

- Sourced and reviewed résumés of qualified potential applicants for open positions
- Maintained an applicant tracking system and database
- Pre-screened applicants via telephone and face-to-face interviews
- Completed reference and background checks

2015 – 2016 – Student Assistant – Leadership Initiatives Office
Mid-State University, Middleton, ST

- Communicated with guest speakers to schedule and arrange a series of 15 leadership-themed presentations
- Organized needed resources for presentations to up to 100 student attendees
- Greeted and assisted student and faculty visitors to the Leadership Initiative office

2008 – 2012 – 1812 M1A1 Tank Crewman
United States Marine Corps, Camp, ST

- Prepared AAVs for tactical deployment of troops and equipment during missions
- Investigated & resolved gunner functionality errors during high-risk patrols
- Systematically tracked resource usage to ensure strategic implementations of all equipment
- Conducted preventative maintenance checks and services on AAVs

2006 – 2008 – Cashier
Urban Market, Big Town, ST

- Assisted customers in identifying and locating products that fit their needs
- Completed voluntary 2 additional trainings in Diversity and Leadership
- Assisted in on-the-job training of baggers and cashiers

Awards

- Earned 2 Meritorious Promotions
- Certificate of Commendation from Exercise RITX 4-15
- Billet of Guide and Squad Leader during Boot Camp Training

References

References are available on request.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF AUTHORS

Ashly Bender Smith is an Assistant Professor of Business Communication at Sam Houston State University. She teaches written, oral, and multimodal professional communication. Her research agenda investigates the effective strategies that business professionals use to negotiate and communicate their professional identities, particularly in their employment communication.

M. Douglas Berg is an Associate Professor of Economics at Sam Houston State University (SHSU) in Huntsville, Texas. He has published research in the areas of e-sports betting, oil and gas production forecasting, and other economic topics.