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The Resume Game: An Engineer's Approach

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Anyone who has been in an active job search recently knows how frustrating it can be. As job seekers, we are playing a very serious game, against thousands of other seekers, and we don't really know the rules the companies are playing by. We look for – we need – ways to ensure that every resume we send reaches the audience and makes an impact.

The Gatekeeper

Long ago, at the beginning of my career, the job search process was straightforward: you found a job listing in a newspaper classified ads, typed a resume to give your qualifications and appeal to the hiring manager, sent it to the address in the ad, and waited.

The significant shift came with the rise of internet job sites . These sites made it so easy to apply for jobs that companies were overwhelmed with the response. The same technology that caused the overwhelm was harnessed to filter applications so that only the most relevant or most qualified applications reached the humans.

This technology – the resume scanner, or Applicant Tracking System (ATS) – is the Gatekeeper that stands between you and a hiring manager. And it is used by 99% of Fortune 500 companies!

Like Gatekeepers of legend and lore, the ATS uses a riddle of sorts to determine if you are worthy to pass through its gates and onto the eyes of the hiring personnel. Does your resume answer the riddle?

The Strategy

- If you have brushed up on job search strategies, you know that the best approach includes: Being clear about your skills and competencies.
- Using your "dragon slayer" stories. You know – the ones that tell how the village was in trouble until you came along and slain the dragon.

- Tailoring the resume (and cover letter) for every position you apply is how you answer the Gatekeeper's riddle and are deemed worthy of passing.

IDOL Courses Academy alumni, Molly Parsons, created a comprehensive Resume Writing Guide with these and two dozen more strategies for playing the resume game.

Riddle Me This

As an engineer, I naturally try to make tasks easier and repeatable. This article describes my simple 3-step process to tailor my resume each time I apply for a position.

1. **Preparing the job description**

Each time I find a position I want to apply for, I start by creating an empty document named "JayLash-CompanyJobName-notes."

> **PRO TIP**: I use this "MyName-CompanyJobName-DocumentType" format for naming my job search documents. The format ensures that the name is unique for each position and ensures that the files for a specific position appear together in the file listing on my computer.

This document is my workspace - I copy the job description from the website and paste it into the document. I'm sure to get the job title, but I leave off the paragraphs (usually at the end) about the company, the benefits package, the non-discrimination policies, and so on.

There are two steps in preparing the job description:

Identify Skills

This step makes me think about the work required for the position and helps me quickly eliminate jobs that are not a good fit for me. I make notes about every aspect of the position – adding them as RED text at the end of each line.

I review the responsibilities section and make a note about the skills and attributes needed for each responsibility. It does not matter if I believe that I have the skill or attribute – making the notes forces me to think about what it takes to fulfill the responsibility and is especially useful to identify "transferable skills."

Here is an example of a position I recently considered:

Your Responsibilities

As an **Instructional Designer** for ███████████████████ you will design and develop training materials in support of ███████████ products, processes, and systems worldwide, including development of the ███████████ Product, Sales, and technical training globally. In addition, you will :

- Participate in instructional design and curriculum development for ██ products to ensure needs analysis gaps and enabling objectives are addressed using the ADDIE process for all training programs. *Big picture, design, adult learning theories, ADDIE*
- Oversee all design and developmental (graphics and communication) aspects in creating web-based training materials. *Organization, leadership, project management, communication, elearning development, graphic design*
- Proofread and approve all web-based training scripts - Work with various stakeholders to develop training assets in supporting products, processes, and systems. *Technical writing, giving feedback, elearning development, communication, collaboration, scheduling*
- Foster relationships with inter-and intra-departmental stakeholders to secure resources needed for development and obtain feedback on materials. *Collaboration, communication, working with SME, project management*
- Project manage web-based training, including approving design documents, scheduling, updating calendar(s), and rehearsing pilot programs. *Project management, giving feedback*
- Train and coach new hires on ADDIE process. *Coaching, communicating, design*

I review the skills section and make notes about projects or experiences where I used a particular skill. I might note a *TO DO* for something new that I could quickly create to demonstrate the skill. This helps to identify my dragon-slaying stories.

In this example, there is a submission instruction hidden in the skills - I highlighted it in CYAN, so I don't forget it.

What Skills You Need

- Effective graphic design or marketing communication abilities (provide online portfolio or enclosed PDF at time of application) TODO create a rock-star graphic job aid, review/refine portfolio
- Strong communication and (written and verbal) and presentation skills SceneSafety course design document and Forgetting Curve voiceover
- Experience being highly effective in team environments, demonstrating a collaborative attitude, problem solving skills, and a strong initiative Various trainings with staff of 20-30, engineering career, self taught ID
- Experience working with multiple functions or groups across a division show car integrations
- Proficient project management skills, including experience managing multiple projects current NYLT+SLC+career+IDOL redesign
- Willingness to travel up to 25%

I review the <u>qualification/education/experience</u> sections (whatever they are labeled) and note if I meet each requirement. I also note any relevant information, such as a specific software package with which I have the experience that meets a qualification.

Identify Keywords

The key to tailoring your resume is to use language directly from the job description. The second step of my process is to review the responsibilities, skills, and qualifications sections and identify the important words and phrases. I highlight these in YELLOW .

> **PRO TIP**: I highlight the job title in MAGENTA to remind me that a good match here is even more important than the keywords.

It is helpful to highlight words and phrases each time they appear. The Gatekeeper considers words or phrases that appear more often to be more important. For your resume to score well, your resume needs to use these words or phrases more often.

> **PRO TIP**: I highlight relevant phrases as phrases. For individual words that are adjacent but are not a phrase, I do not highlight the space between them.

For example, in this fragment

> design and develop web-based training scripts

I would treat "design and develop" and "web-based training" as separate phrases with "scripts" being independent of "web-based training." I could also treat them as "web-based" and "training scripts," depending on what the description seems to stress.

Here is how the example looks with the notes and the highlighting.

Primary Location: United States (US) ████████████

Function: Marketing / Sales

Title: ==Instructional Designer/Developer==

Your Responsibilities

As an **Instructional Designer** for ████████████████████ you will ==design and develop training materials== in support of ██████ products, processes, and systems worldwide, including development of the ████████████ ==Product, Sales, and technical training== globally. In addition, you will :

- Participate in ==instructional design and curriculum development== for ██ products to ensure ==needs analysis gaps== and ==enabling objectives== are addressed using the ==ADDIE process== for all training programs. Big picture, design, adult learning theories, ADDIE
- ==Oversee all design and developmental (graphics and communication) aspects== in creating ==web based training materials==. Organization, leadership, project management, communication, elearning development, graphic design
- ==Proofread and approve all web-based training scripts== - Work with various ==stakeholders== to develop training assets in supporting products, processes, and systems. Technical writing, giving feedback, elearning development, communication, collaboration, scheduling
- ==Foster relationships== with inter-and intra-departmental ==stakeholders== to secure resources needed for development and obtain ==feedback== on materials. Collaboration, communication, working with SME, project management
- Project manage web-based training, including approving ==design documents==, ==scheduling==, updating calendar(s), and ==rehearsing pilot programs==. Project management, giving feedback
- ==Train== and ==coach== new hires on ==ADDIE process.== Coaching, communicating, design

What Skills You Need

- Effective ==graphic design== or ==marketing communication== abilities ==(provide online portfolio or enclosed PDF at time of application)== TODO create a rock-star graphic job aid, review/refine portfolio
- Strong ==communication== and ==(written and verbal)== and ==presentation skills== SceneSafety course design document and Forgetting Curve voiceover
- Experience being ==highly effective in team environments==, demonstrating a collaborative attitude, ==problem solving skills==, and a ==strong initiative== Various trainings with staff of 20-30, engineering career, self taught ID
- Experience working with ==multiple functions== or ==groups== across a ==division== show car integrations
- Proficient ==project management== skills, including experience managing ==multiple projects== current NYLI+SLC+career+IDOL redesign
- Willingness to ==travel== up to 25%

What Makes You Stand Out

- ==Instructional design== or ==curriculum development== experience using ==adult learning theory== yes
- Experience using Adobe Creative Suite or other 2D graphic software PaintShopPro
- Ability to ==proofreading sales== and/or ==technical content== yes
- Knowledge of the ==systematic approach to training==, such as ==ADDIE== yes = ADDIE, SAM, Action Mapping
- Knowledge of the ==Enterprise Product Delivery Process (EPDP)== and/or the ==Customer Acquisition Process (ECAP)== no
- Experience working with ████████████████ and ==learning paths== or other ==learning management system== no
- Knowledge of ██████████████ ==sales== and/or ==technical practices==, ideally practices followed at ██ ████ dealerships no

Education (or equivalent work experience)

Ideally, you will have a degree or equivalent work experience in the following:

- ==Bachelor's degree== in an ==Instructional Design==, ==Education==, ==Graphic Communications==, ==Marketing Communications==, or equivalent discipline or, 3+ years of experience in the learning and development field. yes

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2. **Updating the resume**

With the description prepared, it is time to tailor the resume. I start with a copy of my generic resume that I name:

"JayLash-CompanyJobName-resume.docx"

I begin by updating the experience sections to include accomplishments (dragon slayer stories) that demonstrate the skills and attributes from the RED line-endnotes.

Next, I update the resume to use keywords that are highlighted in the job description. I try to use the same tense and form of the keywords, i.e., develop vs. developed vs. developing, project manager vs. project management. Use both the long-form and abbreviations for phrases to ensure the Gatekeeper counts them. Don't worry if the language in the description is not what you would use – the resume is not for you.

> **PRO TIP**: For the first draft, I do not keep track of words or phrases that I've used. I find the first draft is very dynamic and frequently changes as I experiment with the wording.

For a second draft, I review the job description and the resume together. First, compare the title of the new job with the title in the resume header and the title of the past jobs. Highlight all matching titles in MAGENTA – more matches are better.

For each keyword highlighted YELLOW in the description, find a place where it is used in the resume. If it is not used precisely, I find a place where a variation is used. Highlight the keyword GREEN in the resume and change the description highlight also to be GREEN – this indicates that the keyword has been "paired up" with the other document.

> **PRO TIP**: If I have more occurrences of a word/phrase in the resume than in the description, I highlight the extras in the
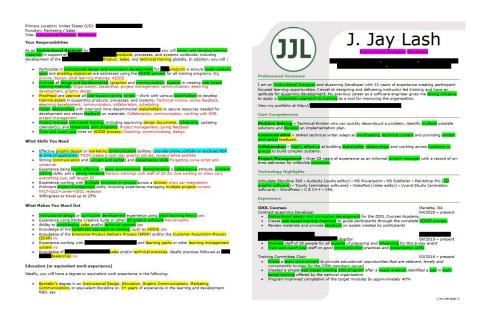
The highlighting gives a visual indication of which keywords have not been used enough (the ones that are still YELLOW in the description). Remember, keywords that appear in the description multiple times need to appear in the resume often to score well with the Gatekeeper.

The lack of highlighting indicates portions of the resume that might not be relevant for the current position. Review these sections carefully and eliminate them if possible. Remember – the resume is not for you, don't keep something simply because you like it.

> **PRO TIP**: If eliminating a section would create an employment gap, leave the section but minimize the entry to only the company name/position title/dates with a very basic summary of results you achieved.

> **PRO TIP**: The cover letter can also be used to incorporate keywords and essential phrases.

Here is a description and a portion of my resume with the highlighting. You can see there are several phrases that I have not yet matched.

3. Scoring the resume

Remember - the purpose of this highlighting and matching exercise is to get your resume past the ATS Gatekeeper. To see how you are doing, upload the resume to a site such as JobScan or ResumeWorded for "practice" scoring against the job description, and understand where you can improve.

> **PRO TIP**: Copy the job description from the original website, DO NOT use the version that you have been marking up. The scanner will read your line-endnotes as part of the description and give you a lower score for not using those words in the resume.

> **PRO TIP**: The highlights in your resume do not cause problems for the scanner; you can leave those in when you upload the document. Obviously, you will remove them before you apply for the job.
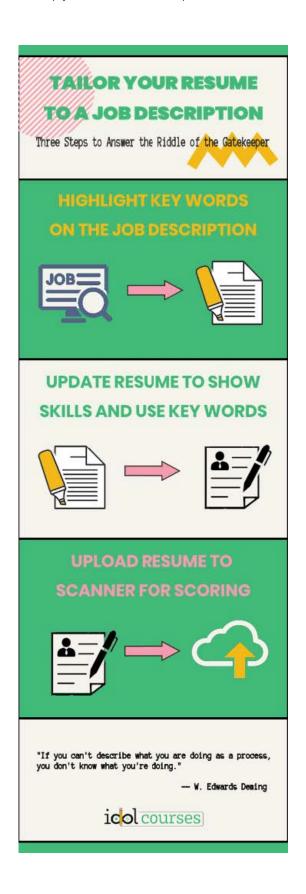
The scanner will give suggestions for formatting and language updates to help improve the score. They also identify the critical keywords and indicate how well you have used them. Update your working copy of the job description to highlight keywords that you did not originally mark.

Refine and rescan the resume as many times as you like (or as the site allows) to continue improving the score. Be sure to review the site's information about how different parts of the resume are weighted in the score and what score you should work toward.

Summary

This is how I tailor my resume for each position and ensure that I have done the best I can to answer the Gatekeeper's riddle. There is a quick job aid below to help you remember the steps.

Here is Jay's process:

Written by: Jay Lash

Connect with me on LinkedIn.

I was an accidental trainer for many years before I pivoted to a second career as an instructional designer and eLearning developer. I have a passion for training and the purpose of serving others. As a former engineer, I view training as a tool – it is a way to help people grow and achieve more for themselves and their organizations. My servant's heart loves delivering ILT to see the growth in people, but my engineer's mind loves the logic of eLearning.

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