KEYWORDS TO GET YOUR RESUME NOTICED

Learn how to use keywords that will strengthen your resume and get it noticed by recruiters.

"Abracadabra!" Unfortunately, saying magic words won't make a job offer materialize out of thin air. But you can place a few well-chosen words into your resume that greatly increase the chances that it will lead to a job interview. It's actually not magic at all – it's applying the power of keywords.

What are keywords? Keywords are specific words or phrases that describe skills a particular employer is looking for. They are often "buzzwords" or jargon words, typical of a given industry. They are used by job seekers to find jobs, and by recruiters to find eligible candidates.

Why does your resume need keywords? The reasons are simple: time and technology. Today, employers may get hundreds of resumes for a single opening. Manually sorting through each application is tedious and time-consuming. To save time, many companies are digitizing the resumes, placing them into keyword-searchable databases, and using software to search for specific keywords that relate to open positions.

The bottom line: Your resume needs to have the keywords the company is looking for, or else it may never be read. Even if you are a perfectly qualified candidate, you may never get an interview simply because your resume lacked certain keywords.

So, what are the 'magic words?' The tricky part is, there's a different set of keywords for every job opening. Your keywords must be specifically tailored to the position you are applying to. There's no way to know for sure what the words are. However, you can make some educated guesses, based on the industry you are entering.

Every profession has its own unique language, made up of technical terms, acronyms, and slang. These words are unique to and characteristic of professionals inside that particular industry. For example, "cold-calling" is typical of a professional in sales; "general ledger" is a duty specific to a person in accounting. If you don't know your industry's keywords, do some research by searching online for your target job, reading books, attending conferences, or talking to people who are in the industry.

Although not an exhaustive list, keywords can be:

- **Hard skills** ("Desktop Publishing," "Sales Forecasting," "Data Entry")
- **Soft skills** ("Problem Solving," "Self-Motivation," "Leadership")
- **Technical terms** ("JavaScript," "Quality Assurance," "XML")
- **Job functions** ("Strategic Planning," "Regional Sales," "B2B")

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- **Job titles** ("IT Manager," "Receptionist," Business Development Manager")
- **Certifications** ("CCNA," "CPA," "MCP")
- **Company names** ("Nike," "Xerox," "Microsoft")
- **Degree names** ("MBA," "BS in Computer Science")
- **College names** ("University of Southern California")
- **Descriptive terms** ("Fortune 500")

Most keywords are nouns. Job seekers have long been taught to use action verbs in their resume, such as "demonstrated," "supervised," and "implemented." While this is still good advice, the "what" that you did is now just as important. A good formula is to pair up an action verb with a keyword.

Look for keywords in the job description of the job ad. You can borrow some of the language and implement it throughout your resume. For example, if a job ad says, "This position requires high levels of interaction with all other team members," use the phrases "team members" and "teamwork" to describe any work experience you had in a team setting.

A well-written one-page resume should contain about 25 to 30 keywords. Try to beef up your resume with industry-specific keywords. However, do not randomly insert keywords just for the sake of having keywords. Your resume should still make sense to a human reading it and be relevant to your own skills and experience.

Use different variations of the same keyword in different places in your resume, such as its synonym, acronym, or an altered spelling. For example, "registered nurse" is also expressed with the acronym "RN," or "nursing," or simply "nurse."

Even if a hiring company does not use searchable databases, keywords will make your resume quickly stand out to the hiring manager or recruiter who only spends a few seconds scanning it over before making a yes-or-no decision.

Use the power of keywords to help your resume rise to the top of the employer's stack. It's like magic!

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