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## How to beat the resume machine

More and more employers are using scanning software, but an expert has tips to help land you on their desk.

BY KARLA A. MILLER  
Special to the Washington Post

Question from readers, everywhere (paraphrased): How do I write a resume that will get me hired?

Answer: I have a confession: The shame of my first resume — savaged by an academic adviser for its bloated, clumsy prose — haunts me to this day. Also, it has been years since I submitted a resume with a blind application or reviewed any to fill a position. So while I know the basics, I have no idea what makes a resume stand out today.

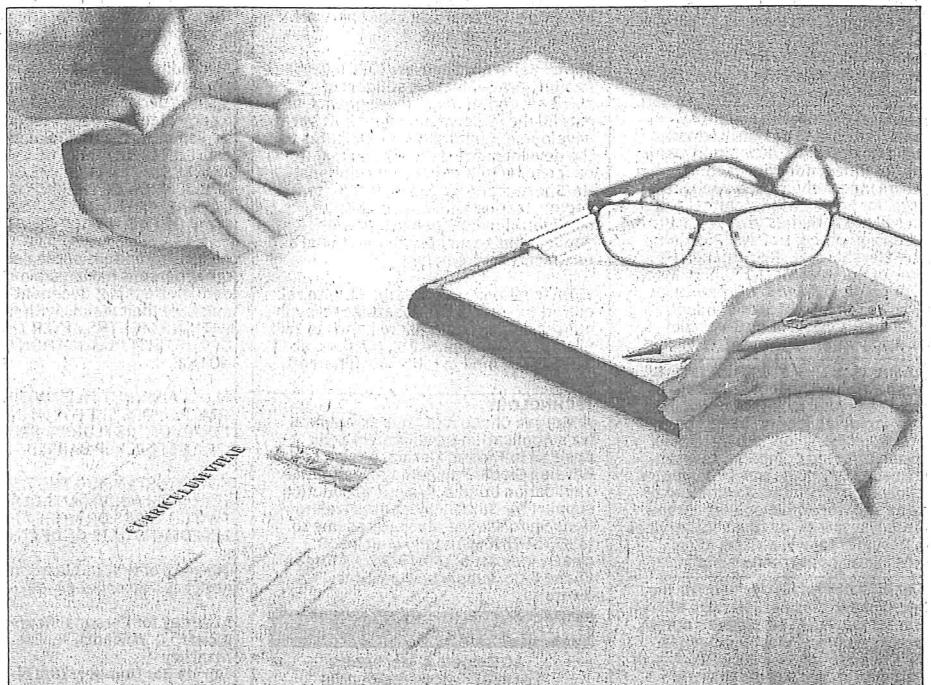
But after five years of dodging your resume questions, I have finally decided to bite the bulleted list and seek out professionals who live, breathe and love this stuff.

“Oh my gosh, I hate resumes,” laughs Diana Funk, senior consultant with Human Capital Strategic Consulting in Washington, D.C. “They’re so stressful to write ... and they do not receive the same level of scrutiny that you have to put into (writing) them.”

But, she adds, “there’s no other way” to present your bona fides to prospective employers.

Even Lauren Milligan, who makes a living writing resumes as chief executive and founder of Chicago-based ResuMay-Day, says the goal is to need no resume at all: “Network, network, network so the resume and application become nothing more than a formality.” But even as a formality, it has to represent your best face: “There’s no time when you can skate by with a subpar resume.”

In most cases, before your resume even reaches a human, it will have to pass muster with a machine. An increasing



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number of employers are using applicant-tracking software to winnow hundreds or thousands of applications down to a qualified handful. According to Milligan, a surprising number of resumes are kicked out for reasons that have nothing to do with the applicant’s suitability for the job.

Milligan lists three factors to help keep scanning software from rejecting your resume:

- **Keywords:** Applicant-tracking software is programmed to select resumes that contain certain keywords relevant to the job opening. Milligan recommends you brainstorm for those keywords, including software and skills — the job ad itself probably contains clues — and write your resume around them.

- **Format:** Not only should you submit your resume in the requested file format, says Milligan, but you should also make sure it has a scanner-friendly layout. Text

boxes — including page borders — may be eye-catching, but they can also cause the software to overlook your carefully curated keywords.

- **Headings:** Stick with the standards the software has been programmed to recognize, Milligan advises: “Work History” and “Education,” rather than “Milestones” and “Matriculation.”

Those tips will help you get past the robot guardians. Tune in next week for tips on impressing the humans.

**PRO TIP:** If you are writing a resume for a sales job, Milligan says, one vital keyword to include is a dollar sign. Awards and client testimonials are great, but employers want to see that bottom line, too.

Ask Karla Miller about your work dramas and traumas by emailing [wpmagazinewashpost.com](mailto:wpmagazinewashpost.com).