

Resumes: Principles for Construction

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Ulla de Stricker MA, MLS



With experience since the late 70's in the information industry and in information related operations, Ulla de Stricker focuses in her engagements on strategic planning for an organization's information and knowledge management policies, practices, and delivery mechanisms including special libraries.

With a strong track record executing information audits and needs assessment studies and recommending approaches for dealing with information services and knowledge management challenges, she is a sought-after consultant and coach for library staff.

Prior to 1992, she held senior positions in the information industry in customer facing and product development roles.

Ulla de Stricker is known for her special attention to the impact of corporate culture and extrinsic pressures on the actual day to day practices of knowledge workers and frequently conducts strategic planning studies based on such practices.

Typical projects have focused on assessments of knowledge worker requirements, determination of priorities in terms of information support content and services, and structuring of underlying operations to deliver such content and services in effective ways.

Resumes: Principles for Construction



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Welcome

- We all face the DAUNTING task of fashioning a new resume from time to time:
- Oh no - how to distill into 2 pages?
- How can mine stand out from the other 200 resumes?
- I cringe at some of the advice I get!
- Resume advice is *conflicting*!
- But there is help



Preamble: Online Resume Banks

- Fill-in-the blanks approach: No format at all!
- Emphasis on substantive words the search engine will use to select a given resume
- Inverse of print resume: The more narrative, specifics, names of systems, etc the better
- Sometimes a challenge to "fit" one's information into the predetermined categories
- Have pre-written blocks of text ready



Capturing Professional Essence

- The challenge: How to *transpose* a factual life story into a compelling sales message "you really need me on your team - here's why"
- We need to position what we offer so as to engage the reader



Topics

- Common Beliefs to Challenge
- Elements of a Resume
- Visual Appearance
- Cover Letter



Reference:

Ulla's 10 tips at

[http://units.sla.org/chapter/ctor/
resources/resume.asp](http://units.sla.org/chapter/ctor/resources/resume.asp)



Our Task: Crafting a True and Interesting 2-page Distillation

- For starters, we ought not write our own resumes because ...
- We are often unable to "see" our own strengths
- We may miss opportunities to translate skills from one area to others



But in reality, we do write our own

- Rule # 1: Show the resume to several people you trust and ask:
- "Is the content a fair representation of my abilities, skills, and accomplishments?"
- "Is the appearance engaging, elegant, professional, and user friendly?"



1. Common Beliefs to Challenge

- Resume how-to books contain conflicting advice
- Resume reviewers may also differ in their opinion as to what is appropriate



Common Belief: 2 Pages

- Indeed, the resume must be concise
- Some cultures require more detail (e.g. academic)
- Some cultures have very specific requirements for content (e.g. government departments)
- Option to have 2-page resume with Appendix (e.g. publications, speeches, positions held prior to a date, etc)
- Better to have 3 easy-to-read pages than 2 cramped ones



Common Belief: Hide Data

- Some advocate hiding e.g. years not worked, very long experience, and other "uncomfortable information"
- I say: Those who have nothing to hide, hide nothing - let the employer be the judge!
- It could be awkward if potential employer finds out missing info from elsewhere



Tips for Awkward Truths

- Employment gap: "During the years yyyy to yyyy, I ... cared for my family, traveled in Asia, took time off for personal study ..."
- Very long experience: "Prior to 1985, I held several positions in the X industry."
- Seemingly odd job: "While this position was outside my intended career, I accepted it for personal reasons and benefited by ..."



Common Belief: We Owe Readers Info about Our Hobbies. Not.

- ONLY if personal pursuits are GERMANE to the job being applied for, show under heading "Relevant Volunteer Experience" how ...
- Volunteer work → skills in leading meetings
- Sports coaching → people skills
- Arts fair organizing → planning skills
- ... but avoid signaling political views or other potentially sensitive aspects ("canvasser in federal election campaign" is sufficient)



2. Five Elements

- 1. Tag Line
- 2. Key features
- 3. Professional experience
- 4. Education (formal and ongoing)
- 5. Anything else



(1) Tag Line

- Succinct, 4-7 word description to provide instant clue what we offer: Our "essence"
- Recent Graduate with Strong Web Skills
- Experienced Special Library Manager
- Library Systems Expert with Experience in Large Scale Systems
- Public Library Change-Agent Manager



(2) Key Features

- Sometimes grouped into e.g. technical vs. personal skills clusters
- "The enduring capabilities I offer regardless where I worked"
- Examples:



Key Features Example

Special Library Operations and Management

- Experience with client needs assessments and strategic planning
- Documented positive impact on knowledge workers' productivity
- Demonstrated success in vendor negotiations and budget management

Client Relations and Team Building

- Track record in building strong, positive client relations and aligning service priorities with client goals
- Innovator with achievements in coaching teams and staff members



Key Features Example

Public Library Operations and Management

- Extensive experience managing larger public libraries in mixed-demographic areas
- Track record of productive trustee relations
- Demonstrated success in developing programs aligned with user groups' needs

Marketing and Funding

- Significant achievements in boosting library visibility and traffic (in-person and virtual)
- Strong networking skills applied to building effective support in the community



Key Features Example

TECHNICAL SKILLS

- ☐ Accomplished web and systems professional (15 Years)
- ☐ Track record of delivering projects on time and on budget

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

- ☐ Experience in multicultural settings
- ☐ Strong rapport building skills to facilitate team work



What about Names of Systems or Tools?

- "Expert level search skills in major commercial services" vs "Dialog, Factiva, ..."
- Mention special expertise requested in the job posting: "Extensive experience with the Unicorn ILS" or "extensive experience with typical ILS"
- Web related job applications may call for a list of the tools mastered
- Microsoft Office skills are assumed, but might e.g. say "Go-to person due to advanced skills in Excel; programmed numerous routines reducing by 80% the departmental time needed for tracking usage statistics, analyzing traffic patterns, and creating staff schedules accordingly"



Key Features: No

- No "strong communication skills"
- No "superior organization skills"
- No "excellent team player"
- Why?



Key Features: No

- No "strong communication skills"
- No "superior organization skills"
- No "excellent team player"
- Why? Because such phrases could mean anything and therefore mean nothing (waste of space)
- Test: Would this phrase appear on 90% of resumes?
- Test: What's the proof?



(3) Professional Experience

- Opinions differ re: Chronological vs. Functional
- Purpose is to show how we acquired and demonstrated our key-feature skills
- Without simply replicating job descriptions
- We need:
 - Institution, title, dates
 - ACCOMPLISHMENTS!



Examples: Accomplishments

- "What was different when I left" vs "I did X function"
- Outcomes (not duties/activities) with measures where possible
- If "achieved / reached / exceeded" etc verbs are awkward, consider "I gave the department the capability to ..."
- Test: Does every bullet have an outcome indication?
 - Managed circulation and recall operations to achieve a 95% ontime return (from 65% in [year started])
 - Pioneered Amazon-style "readers like you also chose ..." program to boost loans by 50% year over year



Tip: Be Brief

- Resume readers are familiar with typical library/web ops and need only hear about the innovations and special impacts/solutions
- Seeing 14 bullets underneath a past position is uninviting. Consider 5 key bullets and then (if absolutely necessary) in much smaller type the remaining 9.
- If appropriate, list a "Key Career Learning" bullet



(4) Education

- Some claim the degrees/universities info must go at the top of a resume
- I disagree because attending University of X says nothing about your ability to deliver what the employer needs!
- Put that info on page 2 unless the resume is for an academic position, in which case be brief and elaborate on page 2



MLS-Courses-Taken Info?

- Unless courses in library school are directly relevant for a position, do not list them
- Recent grads do have a challenge because they may lack work experience
- *Projects* undertaken during the MLIS program may be good information if specific skills can be pointed to



Continuing Education

- List significant certificates and "meaty" courses
- Half-day or one-day seminars may best be covered by a generic statement:
- "Regularly attend seminars and conferences to keep my skills current and expand my horizon - approximately 4 per year"



(5) Anything Else

- "Goodies" portion: In addition, I ALSO ...
- Serve on the board of ...
- Speak at conferences ... (URLs)
- Write for professional publications (titles, URLs)
- Served as local arrangements coordinator for ...
- Work with [community group - must be germane]
- Can add "member of" list of professional associations - but best to show activity



General Reminder

- Accuracy: Zero errors
- Care: Zero spacing/bullet inconsistencies
- The care you took in preparing the resume signals the care you will take on the job!



General Reminder

- Consistency: Pick a convention, stick to it. Example: Punctuation in dates
- 2007-8
- 2007 - 2008
- '07 to '08
- September 2008
- Sep 2008
- 09/2008
- 08/09 problematic – which is the year?



General Reminder

- Consistency: Decide on nouns/verbs
- Executed ...
- Facilitated ...
- Vs
- Execution of ...
- Facilitation of ...



General Reminder

- No unnecessary words!
- Served both faculty and students ...
- Provided reference service in both French and English ...
- Vs
- Served faculty and students ...
- Provided reference service in French and English ...



3. Visual Appearance

- Resume readers may be wearing glasses - font size matters
- Could we *please* banish Times Roman ?
- Help the reader through clear, pleasing design with lots of white space
- Do not waste space with a 5-line address taking up an inch!
- Align everything to the left - hard for the eye to recognize
e.g. "floating" right-aligned dates



Visual Appearance, General

- Fear not - use modern visuals like color, tables, etc for print/pdf resumes
- Stand out and make the reader think, hm, the skill in this layout speaks well of the candidate
- Consider: Job 1 is grabbing attention. Job 2 is to prove the attention was worth it [the content].



Visual Appearance, Typical

- Many resumes I see look like this

Firstname Lastname

Address information

in big type

Sometimes occupying
multiple lines

EDUCATION

Degrees and Universities



- At 40-50% down the front page I have *no clue* what the person can do for me!

Visual Appearance, Typical

CAREER HISTORY

Braxton College Library, Milltown BC

Collection Development Librarian

2002-

- ◆ Responsible for development of collections policy
- ◆ Assisted Faculty in developing opening day collection for new degree program

Vancouver Public Library, Vancouver BC

Branch Librarian

1999-2002

- ◆ Managed three suburban branches
- ◆ Developed special collection for speakers of English as a second language

The dates "slopped" to the right force reader's eye to jump



Improvement

CAREER HISTORY

Braxton College Library, Milltown BC

Collection Development Librarian, 2002-present

- ◆ Responsible for development of collections policy
- ◆ Assisted Faculty in developing opening day collection for new degree program

Vancouver Public Library, BC

Branch Librarian, 1999-2002

- ◆ Managed three suburban branches
- ◆ Developed special collection for speakers of English as a second language



Visual: Please

- Make your name readable from 8 feet away
- Minimize address to one 9-point line under name
- Bring visual attention to your Key Features
- Focus on readability
 - No "slopped" dates to the right (unless in a frame)
 - No repeated city/province/state names
 - Use **bolds**/*italics* to differentiate location from job title - but don't use 4-5 different styles



Visual: Conservative

JOAN SHANNON

Experienced Special Library Manager

123 Oak Road North York, ON M5N 3W7 jshannon@rogers.com 416-123-4567

Professional Profile:

- 12 years of varied experience in special libraries, including library management, research and reference, and subscriptions management
- Proven ability to develop excellent client relationships through outstanding customer service
- Demonstrated ability to function effectively under extremely tight deadlines, with demanding clients
- Highly effective team leader, known for long-term staff retention through the creation of a supportive and collaborative team environment

Employment History:

Manager, Library Services, 2000-present: **Regional Bank**

- Bullets describing specific accomplishments and areas of responsibility
- Bullets describing specific accomplishments and areas of responsibility
- Bullets describing specific accomplishments and areas of responsibility



Visual: Getting There

Gretchen Cory, MLS

567 Morley St. Montreal, QC H6K 2T6 g.cory@gmail.com (514) 789-1234

Sales & Marketing Professional, Corporate Markets

Profile

- Successful, achievement oriented information professional with a proven track record delivering consistently over-quota results
- Consistent delivery of team results based on leadership and communication skills
- Appreciated by customers as a dedicated, proactive consultative resource with specific expertise in their information management challenges

Business Experience

New Company Montreal, QC April 2004 - Present

VP, Sales and Marketing

- Bullets reflecting specific achievements
- Bullets reflecting specific achievements
- Bullets reflecting specific achievements
- Bullets reflecting specific achievements

Industry Leader Toronto, ON January 1997 - April 2004

National Director, Corporate Accounts (2002-2004)

- Bullets reflecting specific achievements
- Bullets reflecting specific achievements



Visual: Use of Simple Boxes

Robert Williams, MLIS ***Seasoned Library Operations Expert***

12 North Avenue, Toronto ON M6H 1B3 416 345 6789 rwilliams@sympatico.ca

Energetic, passionate professional with a track record across the full gamut of technical library operations. Multiple successes in procurements, implementations, and upgrades of integrated library systems. Highly developed skills in planning and project management and vendor relations. Holistic and constructive approach to library systems challenges and talent for finding and developing innovative solutions.

SUMMARY OF SKILLS

Project Management

- Progressive experience with the RFP-to-implementation process
- Track record of on-time, on-budget deliveries
- Demonstrated success in coordinating technical teams (library and vendor)

Technical Expertise

- In-depth knowledge of the ABC and DEF integrated library systems
- Successful customizations of OPAC interfaces
- Website construction and management

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

University of Cityname: Systems and Web Librarian	Jan 2005 - present
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Developed RFP and managed vendor procurement process▪ Implemented and customized the ABC system for network of 16 libraries	



Visual: Somewhat Bolder

111 Harmer St, Toronto, ON M5S 3L1
(647) 300-1111 alicekuda@hotmail.com

Alice Kuda, MLIS

Recent graduate - exceptional programming skills - Japanese speaker

Summary of Skills

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Software Applications: Names of applications• Programming: Names of programs• Operating Systems: Names of operating systems	Technical
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Educated in Japan and the UK - understanding of multicultural matters• Undergraduate degree and MLIS in Canada	Multicultural
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to grasp complex detail quickly• Successful in creating positive, productive team dynamics• Dedicated to project success no matter what it takes	Personal

Recent Programming Projects

Web-Based Japanese-Language Music Training Tool

- Built an interactive website teaching music to Japanese speaking children



4. The Cover Letter

- Keep it brief and free of tired cliches:
 - "I believe my qualifications match ..."
 - "I look forward to an opportunity to discuss in more detail ..."
- Go for the sale: I am your ideal candidate, bringing to the table significant accomplishments and experience in ...
- Here is how I can specifically address the opportunities and challenges typical of [environment]
- Highlight pertinent detail not already in the resume
- Opportunity to "drop names" and indicate who would be happy to receive a reference phone call




Thank You

- Thank you for your attention
- I am happy to respond to email
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Thank You

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