



IDENTIFYING KEY WORDS FOR YOUR RESUME & COVER LETTER

- Prepared by the CTC Staff

More and more employers are requiring job seekers to submit online their cover letters, resumes, and other documents required for an application. The employer places or receives these documents in a recruiting database or applicant tracking system. There is a big market now for recruitment management software which employers of all sizes can use to sort through job applications. Most of this software is designed to search through a resume database for “key” words.

The recruiter or the hiring manager will determine the key words for each specific job. Certain key words can be classified as mandatory and others as desirable. Some software can produce a list of applicants ranked by the number of key word “hits” or the greatest key word “density” found in each application and other more advanced software can even weigh the importance of each key word to the job criteria.

Identifying the Key Words

Key words are words that are commonly used in your profession or industry now. The majority of key words are nouns or noun phrases that relate to professional skills and experience. They may pertain to “hard” or “soft” skills.

Key words for hard skills are usually very precise and job specific. These are the key words with more weight. They may refer to technical expertise, typical industry services, job titles, and proper names of products. They may also relate to educational courses, degrees, and institutions as well as professional affiliations, certifications, and licenses. They could even include geographical sites or regions and -- believe it or not! -- zip codes and telephone area codes. You can find a list of key words for hard skills in a few professions on the University of California Riverside Career Center website (www.careers.ucr.edu/Students/JobSearch/nouns.html). Example: the qualifications on the job advertisement include experience working with compensation and benefits. You took Compensation and Benefits 101 in college, but have no practical experience in it. The course name alone may score you a hit and put you in the running for the job.

Key words for soft skills often pertain to transferable skills, skills that are applicable in many professions and industries. These are the less weighty key words. They include interpersonal, communication, plan, organization, design, innovation, and listening.

“Words are the soul’s ambassadors, who go abroad upon her errands to and fro.”

- James Howe in Of Words

Use current jargon and key words only if you understand fully what they mean and they apply to your experience. Be sure to avoid outdated jargon -- like “personnel” instead of “human resources.”

Make the job advertisement for the position you are targeting the center of your search. Compare all other key word research to the words in that advertisement.

Try to find other ads for similar positions with similar job titles. Read all these advertisements carefully and you may begin to see the same words repeated. Those could be the key words.

Other ways to identify key words include:

- Peruse the employer's website, including the annual report and mission statement
- Look up the profession and the job title in The Occupational Outlook Handbook and the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (www.bls.gov).
- Network with others in your field (in person and online) and keep your ears open for professional jargon and the latest buzzwords
- Keep your reading up-to-date on professional and general business publications
- Conduct information interviews
- Ask HR professionals and recruiters

There are also books and websites specifically devoted to key words, such as:

- 1500+ Keywords for \$100,000+ Jobs, by Wendy S. Enelow
- Peterson's The Job Hunter's Word Finder, by James Bluemond
- Words to Get Hired By: The Jobseeker's Quintessential Lexicon of Powerful Words and Phrases for Resumes and Cover Letters, published by Quintessential Careers Press
- Babylon.com (www.babylon.com) has glossaries for specific industries
- Web Access Employment Network (www.waen.org) offers connections to many other web resources on the subject of key words

Many career counselors recommend that, although you may find the same key words in many advertisements in your field, you should still perform the key word search exercise for each job you apply for and tailor the key words in your resume for each specific job application.

Using the Key Words

If your cover letter and resume are to be scanned by the employer for key words, use the key words in both.

You won't get more points for repeating the same key word, so use synonyms. Example: design, plan, and proposal. You can also use various forms of a key word. Example: manager and management. Commonly used acronyms can increase the number of key words as well. Avoid using keywords for jobs you don't want or duties you don't want to perform.

Our Government job titles are frequently different from private sector titles -- General Services Officer, for instance. So, be sure to include key words in your explanation of what your duties were and what your reporting (supervisory) relationships were in a job. Use the language of the prospective employer to describe your government work if that language fits.

Try to be as specific as possible in detailing your qualifications for the targeted job. Instead of stating that you are fluent in several African languages, list all of the languages. Instead of stating that you have practical experience in spreadsheet software, list the software programs (e.g., Excel). Make sure to tie the key words to your accomplishments and include key words in your accomplishment statements.

You may want to include more of your professional and educational history than you would in a traditional resume. As a result, resumes that are going to be scanned for key words are often longer

than a traditional resume that you would hand to a private sector recruiter at a job fair. The more key words included, the better your chance of your resume emerging from the database. But, remember, the resume will (hopefully!) end up in the hands of the company's recruiter, a real human being. You have to strike a balance between detail and readability. Let's say that the computer has spit out the 12 resumes with the most hits for a specific job. The recruiter only wants to interview three candidates for the job. He will read quickly through the stack of resumes and pull out the three who look like the best candidates to him. If your resume is four pages long and includes too many details to make it an interesting read, then he probably won't select it for the interviews.

Some applicants now include a key word section in their resume with a summary list of the key words. This section is sometimes "front-loaded" at the beginning of the resume, but most often placed at the end of the resume. One possible title for that section would be "Key Word Summary."

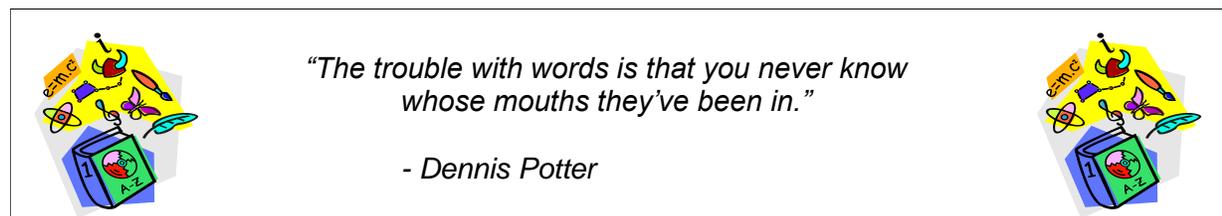
A more accepted technique is to incorporate a lot of key words in a resume section called the "Profile" or "Professional Profile" or "Summary of Qualifications." That section is usually placed directly below your name and address on the first page of the resume and provides the reader with a snapshot of you as a professional. A variation on this style is to include a list of skills and qualifications (i.e., key words) just below the profile. Here is an example:

<i>Financial Analysis</i>	<i>Financial Markets</i>
<i>Trade Issues</i>	<i>Commercial banking</i>
<i>Technical Assistance</i>	<i>Tax issues</i>

Key words should appear in the actual text of your resume, too – you must substantiate your claims!

If all or part of your resume is designed in the functional (as opposed to chronological) style, you can use key words as the functional headers (e.g., Management, Training, Marketing). Then, under each function, you list accomplishments that illustrate your incredible skill in that functional area and use more key words.

After you have done your key word research, check your resume by highlighting all the words in it that would probably be considered key words. Compare the highlighted words to the key words in the job advertisement and to the key words you have found in your other research. Have you included the most important ones in your resume (and cover letter, if it's going to be scanned, too)? Could you include more?



Practice Exercise One

Identify the 10 *most important* key words in the following job advertisement.

World Wildlife Fund

Manager, Multilateral Agency Relations

Job Type: Limited Term | Location: Washington, DC

Job Description: World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the global conservation organization leading international efforts for a living planet, seeks a Manager for Multilateral Relations. The candidate will oversee and manage relations with the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to identify, promote, and implement strategic policy and program initiatives, including funding opportunities. Requirements: Interested candidate should possess a Master's degree and familiarity with the GEF and one or more of its implementing agencies. Ten years experience in international conservation and sustainable development required. Five or more years experience in proposals management preferred.

"Words, when well chosen, have so great a force in them that a description often gives us more lively ideas than the sight of things themselves."

- Joseph Addison

Practice Exercise Two

Identify the 10 *most important* key words in the following job advertisement.

Sixth Star Entertainment & Marketing

Destination Speakers

A Destination Speaker's responsibility is to give a series of original presentations illustrating the culture and history of the ports of call on a given cruise itinerary. For instance, a Speaker on a cruise to Mexico may discuss the Mexican-American War, foreign policy between the United States and Mexico, or the culture of the country. The talks should not be a reiteration of what to see-and-do in Puerto Vallarta. Rather, they should provide the guests with insight into the ports that one would not be able to find in an average guidebook.

Destination Speakers that are placed by Sixth Star are offered the luxuries of a fine voyage in a passenger stateroom with full passenger privileges in exchange for their services and a small administrative fee of \$50 per day for each day of the cruise. The lecturer is welcome to bring a guest to sail in the same cabin free of charge. Please note that the daily administrative fee for Silversea Cruises and Radisson Seven Seas Cruises is \$100 per day due to the all inclusive nature of these ultra-luxurious voyages (gratuities included, etc.).

During a typical week at sea, Speakers traditionally deliver three to four 35-minute presentations, with 10 minutes at the end for questions and answers. Presentations should be very entertaining (or as we like to say, "edu-tainment"), and we highly encourage the use of professional presentation tools, including slides and Power Point presentations.

The Destination Speaker must be an excellent and experienced public speaker as typical audience size ranges from 50-300 passengers for each talk. However, good news travels fast aboard ships and excellent Speakers have been known to pack the house!

Practice Exercise One—Answers

1. Manager—manage—management
2. Global Environment Facility—GEF
3. Proposals
4. Program initiatives
5. Funding opportunities
6. Sustainable development
7. Strategic policy
8. Multilateral—international
9. Conservation—wildlife
10. Agencies

Practice Exercise Two—Answers

1. Speaker—speak
2. Lecturer-lecture
3. Presentation—present
4. Entertainment—entertain
5. Culture—cultural
6. History
7. Politics
8. Foreign—International
9. Audience—public
10. Guide

*“There’s a great power in words,
if you don’t hitch
too many of them together.”*

- Josh Billings