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RESUME

How Verbs Make Your Resume Sizzle

Use the verbs that will inspire recruiters and hiring managers to pick up the phone and schedule an interview.

By Lisa Vaas

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ILLUSTRATION: Chip Buchanan



Verb: That's What's Happening!

By Matthew Rothenberg, Editor-in-Chief, TheLadders.com

READERS ROUGHLY MY AGE will probably remember this installment in the “Schoolhouse Rock” series of musical animations about grammar rules.

In the “Verb” sequence, a superhero uses action words to describe amazing feats. By the same token, resume writers can harness the power of grammar to convey memorably a job seeker’s career accomplishments.

To score you an interview, the modern resume must be tuned to survive challenges from multiple sources. As we’ve

described elsewhere, it needs to present the right keywords in the right context to satisfy basic screening requirements (often checked by software, not people).

At the same time, it needs to catch human eyes already strained by dozens of other, competing resumes.

As professional resume writers told Lisa Vaas, verbs can make it happen on the human side of the equation.

Get your thing in action! ■

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What did you think of this package? Got a story of your own to tell? Have ideas for future coverage? Please write Editor-in-Chief Matthew Rothenberg at matthewr@theladders.com.

▶ ACTION VERBS

THINK OF YOUR WORK HISTORY as a string of verbs. Any history, after all, encompasses a series of actions with corresponding results.

Resumes can describe those actions in two different ways: They can limp anemically across the document and put hiring managers to sleep, or they can jump off the page and grab the recruiter's attention, inspiring him to reach for the phone to schedule an interview.

If you'd prefer the latter scenario, your resume must summarize what, exactly, you've accomplished in your work history and present the string of actions in a way that leaves the reader with the impression of an energetic, results-oriented professional.

Active verbs can inspire recruiters and hiring managers to follow through with scheduling an interview. They can make your resume pop, letting employers know that you Addressed,

Advertised, Arbitrated, Arranged, Articulated, Authored, Clarified, Collaborated, Communicated, Demonstrated or Diagnosed.

Resume professionals told TheLadders about instances where spicing up the verbs transformed a bland resume. To show how verb makeovers work in real life, here are examples that show how common, weak verbs and verb constructions drain resumes of blood, as well as how professional resume writers infused new life with action verbs and active phrases.

Missing verbs

When it comes to the most common verb crimes she sees people commit when they write their own resumes, Mary Schumacher, a certified professional resume writer who works with TheLadders, points to verbs and verb phrases such as "was responsible for," "provided" and "assisted with." Stronger

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Resume Action Verbs

Action verbs to improve your resume performance by certified professional resume writers Steve Burdan and Mary Schumacher.

By Lisa Vaas



Schumacher

THERE'S NO SECRET LIST of verbs that will impress every hiring manager every time. Used in moderation, variety is the spice of a successful resume. However, a few workhorse action words can help get you started thinking about the implications of verbs in your resume.

Professional resume writers Steve Burdan and Mary Schumacher offer the following verbs to get you started:

Steve Burdan's action verbs:

- Collaborated: "It implicitly gets across that you work well with other people, and that's crucial in business, where the Lone Ranger approach doesn't work."
- Clarified: "That means you're taking something unclear and making it clear."

- Authored/Generated: Both denote the ability to make something out of nothing.
- Diagnosed: "That obviously means you're good at analysis, at tinkering with things, at unpacking things."

Mary Schumacher's action verbs:

- Enrich
- Fortify
- Forge
- Transform
- Galvanize

Other resources to energize your resume verbs:

For action verbs that are relevant to your particular work history, Quintessential Careers features a helpful [list of verbs categorized by skills](#). ■

Resume Verbs: Before and After

Certified professional resume writers Andrew Pearl and Tina Harlan use examples to explain how to improve your resume using the right action verbs.

By Lisa Vaas

ACTIVE VERBS CAN INSPIRE RECRUITERS AND HIRING MANAGERS to follow through with scheduling an interview.

Andrew Pearl and Tina Harlan, certified professional resume writers who work with TheLadders, provided these before-and-after examples of how to improve your resume using the right action verbs.

Sample 1: Senior-Level Technology Management Professional

Resume writer: Andrew Pearl

Section: Skills Summary:

Before: I am a bilingual, seasoned business executive who **successfully incorporates IT into the strategic mission of an enterprise.** As a passionate leader I **have engaged enterprise technology to maximize a strong return on assets. I have hands-on financial, project management, technical and operational experience that has resulted in successful IT capital planning and budgeting,** disaster recovery and IT security procedures and policies.

The verbs deliver the message that the candidate has had a long history of success and profitability, but the passage uses passive language and too many words. For example, this candidate noted that he had “engaged enterprise technology to maximize a strong return on assets” — a long-winded way to say that he improved the bottom line. He also used the passive voice when he stated that his experience “has resulted in successful IT capital planning and budgeting”— a construction that separates the candidate from the positive result.

After: Strategic and results-driven executive **commanding** 20+ years of progressive success within technical environments. Hands-on and resourceful professional **providing track record of incorporating IT into strategic visions while maximizing return and improving operations.** Diverse and customer-focused manager who demonstrates unique combination of technical, business, and financial savvy.

Pearl paired strong action verbs, including “commanding,” “maximizing” and “improving,” with results-focused language about profitability and a history of success: “maximized returns,” “20+ years of commanding success” and “improved operations.” Potential employers are always alert for these words, which suggest that applicants are savvy about the bottom line.

Sample 2: Professional Sales Representative, Pharmaceutical Industry

Resume writer: Tina Harlan

Section: Work History

Before:

- **Sold** Avinza for chronic pain and Skelaxin for acute pain to both primary care physicians and pain specialists in North Texas and Southern Oklahoma.
- **Made an immediate impact** on prescription volume after only being in the field for three and a half months.

“Sold” is brief and to the point, but it probably doesn’t account for all the candidate’s responsibilities. The verb construction “made an immediate impact” is bogged down by a passive voice.

After:

- **Responsible for selling and promoting** Skelaxin and Avinza to pain specialists, surgeons, neurologists, and primary care physicians in the North Texas and Southern Oklahoma territory.
- **Managed annual educational and entertainment budget** averaging \$70,000.

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▶ ACTION VERBS

would be “spearheaded,” “steered” and “influenced,” Schumacher said.

But worse yet, many amateur resume writers simply ignore verbs. “Some people don’t even use verbs when they write resumes,” she said. “Their bullet points start off with verbs [turned into noun phrases], saying something like: ‘Project management and process improvement’ or ‘Implementation of process controls and standardization procedures.’”

Those who write their own resumes also have a tendency to overuse a perfectly good word, such as “develop,” Schumacher said. “People need to really mix up their verbs.”

No magic list, but a magic fix

Steve Burdan, another certified professional resume writer who works with TheLadders, said his clients often have the idea that there’s a common list of keywords or verbs that will work in every resume situation, but there’s no such magic list.

Verbs must fit into the context of a specific resume, he said.

But, he said, there is a magic technique that will work on every resume: Start sentences with a verb or an adverb to keep the reader hooked as their eye runs down the page.

“Keep them tight; stack them up,” he said. “Keep the verb(s) on the left-hand side. As the reader’s eyes run down the page, there are the keywords, the buzzwords, one after another — you hit them like a nail gun. Give them the verbs right at the start. These verbs are the hooks at the beginning of each sentence.”

And as far as action verbs go, Burdan prefers forceful verbs that imply progress. “I probably wouldn’t start a sentence with a verb like ‘addressed’ or ‘articulated.’ I would say ‘advertised,’ ‘authored,’ ‘clarified,’ ‘demonstrated.’ Those kind of verbs have more movement implicit in them.” ■

“Keep the verb(s) on the left-hand side. As the reader’s eyes run down the page, there are the keywords, the buzzwords, one after another — you hit them like a nail gun.”

— Steve Burdan

▶ BEFORE AND AFTER

- **Increased prescription volume** despite being in the field for less than four months.

The phrase “responsible for selling and promoting,” while longer than the original “sold,” expands the responsibility of the applicant to include promotion, which creates the impression of greater responsibility. “Increased prescription

volume” is a slight change that infuses the description with action, turning the applicant into the catalyst for pumping up volume instead of simply being someone who “made an impact.”

Harlan also paired the verb “managed” with a dollar-specific budget to strengthen the message. ■

Career Advice from TheLadders

- [Your Layoff, Your Brain: How to Get Out of Your Own Way](#)
- [Networking for Introverts](#)