

Stand Out with Your “Summary of Qualifications”

In issue #6, *Executive Career Strategies* presented insights from resume expert Alesia Benedict. Here she highlights what NOT to do with the essential lead-in to your resume, the Summary of Qualifications statement.

Do not make a claim without substantiating it. The Summary of Qualifications is a synopsis of you, the candidate. Get in your strengths, and make them meaningful by substantiating the claim. Don’t just say “strategic thinker,” but back it up with “Turned around company from loss to profit in 16 months.” Say how the characteristic is evident by your performance. Empty claims are a waste of time for the reader.

Do not write in the third person. This is a very common problem for executives, who are used to corporate biographies describing them in this way. For example: “John Doe is a strong candidate with proven expertise in...”. This reads like you are introducing yourself for a presentation or incorporating a section of your executive profile. Third-person detached voice is not the way to start off an energizing resume.

Do not say the same thing as everyone else. What employers look for changes over time, so be sure to include relevant *en vogue* experience. The current buzz is for anything having to do with international or multicultural experience, or other languages spoken; these qualifications are in demand and the Summary of Qualifications is the place to highlight them.

Do not focus on yourself, but on value for the employer. This problem is more prevalent in “Objective” sections than in the Summary of Qualifications, but bears an important point: The resume is a sales document written for the reader, and should focus exclusively on the bottom-line value you have contributed to employers in the past and have the potential to contribute in the future. See the “Before” example below for more on this topic.

Do not waste time. Most people include a full run-down of their professional background in the Summary of Qualifications, way more information than the reader can skim if the whole resume will be reviewed in under 20 seconds. Give yourself a title – such as “Senior Financial Executive” or “Business Turnaround Specialist” – and then augment with a specific list of keywords to let the reader see, at a glance, where your expertise and areas of interest lie.

Do not think only one format is acceptable. The Summary of Qualifications section allows for creativity in formatting and text structure. Both bullets and paragraphs are acceptable. The most important thing is to spec out the key areas of your candidacy, and let the formatting support the verbiage.

The introductory sections of this aspiring marketing executive’s resume, shown in the “Before” example below, fall into many of these traps. The “After” example shows how a lukewarm introduction can be transformed into a powerful Summary of Qualifications.

BEFORE

Career Objective

To use my skills as a marketer to effectively communicate the unique selling proposition of a company’s product and to efficiently grow the market share for that product. To build lasting relationships which promote team unity and forward thinking.

Related Skills

Over ten years of experience in marketing communications strategy including on and off-line mediums, collateral creation, public relations strategy, product promotion and launch, brand management and messaging, project management, media buying, budget management, and team building.

AFTER

SENIOR MARKETING EXECUTIVE

Traditional & Web-based Marketing • Domestic & International Branding Marketing Communications • Product Promotion & Launch • PR Strategy

Expertise lies in increasing market share and brand recognition. Track record of streamlining operations, reducing costs, increasing productivity, and reengineering departments using a technological approach. Proven ability to design highly effective traditional or online marketing messages. Outstanding prioritization and project management skills.

ANALYSIS

The “Before” example hits several of the “Don’ts”:

- No substantive information to back up claims
- Wastes time by having reader go through the Objective and beginning of Related Skills before getting to the candidate’s qualifications
- Objective focuses on the candidate rather than the employer
- Does not demonstrate value to the employer

In contrast, the “After” example tells the reader instantly who the candidate is and what he/she can do. It uses a title, subheading, and lead-in paragraph to grab the reader’s attention. Qualifications are far more specific and focused on employer benefits than in the original (e.g., “Track record of increasing market share” vs. objective to “efficiently grow the market share for that product”). Language is aggressive and direct, enabling the reader to skim in minimum time; it also avoids the pitfalls of both first- and third-person.

If an employer is only going to grant your resume 15 to 20 seconds on an initial scan, why waste time with a Summary of Qualifications that doesn’t do you justice? Avoid the “Don’ts” and your resume will pack a punch that makes it stand out from the crowd.

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