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The Functional Resume

The vast majority of job seekers use the familiar chronological resume (which lists employment history in reverse order, beginning with the most recent experience), and with good reason. It's the tried-and-tested format most preferred by HR professionals and hiring managers nationwide. However, the chronological resume isn't a perfect fit for everyone. It's up to you to decide if it's appropriate for your current professional situation and the circumstances surrounding your job search.

When to Consider a Functional Format. If you've held a number of different or unrelated jobs during a relatively short period of time and are worried about being labeled as a job-hopper, the functional resume (also known as a "skills-based format") could be the answer for you. This format can also work well for those entering the workforce for the first time or after a long absence (such as recent grads with no prior formal work experience, stay-at-home moms or dads now seeking outside employment, or caregivers who have spent a year or more treating an ill or aging family member). It could also be a good choice if your prior work experience is more relevant to your current job target than what you're doing presently.

What Makes a Functional Resume “Functional.” Functional resumes rely on strategically grouping key skills into different categories to demonstrate a candidate's qualifications and expertise for a particular job. This skills-based focus allows you to emphasize your strengths and soft-pedal a flawed or absent employment record. For example, if you're applying for an international sales management position, you might choose categories such as "Sales and Marketing Experience," "International Business/Foreign Language Fluency" and "Team Building and Leadership Expertise" for your headings, listing appropriate skills and accomplishments beneath each one.

The actual "Employment History" section of a functional resume is typically brief with a simple list of positions held, company names and employment dates at the bottom of page one or on page two to de-emphasize their importance. Occasionally some of this information is even intentionally omitted altogether.

Weigh the Pros and Cons. If a functional resume sounds like it could be a good fit for your situation, be aware there are a few drawbacks to this approach. Leaving off dates or titles can raise hiring managers' suspicions that you're trying to hide something, which, in all probability, you are. It can also be a little frustrating to readers who are trying to figure out where you performed a particular accomplishment, since these details are listed under skill categories instead of job titles.

The best strategy is to carefully evaluate your situation, weighing the pros and cons of this format. If the advantages of the functional design outweigh the drawbacks, go ahead, defy tradition. A new skills-based format could be just what your resume needs to present you in the best possible light. An example of a functional resume is on the back of this document.