



# Keywords: Key to Better Résumés

Keywords are critical in helping employers find your résumé.

## “Matchmaker, Matchmaker, make me a match.”

In job searches, keywords are crucial in establishing a match between employer and candidate. Optimize your résumé and cover letter with keywords; you'll gain an advantage over job applicants who don't.

Keywords are words or phrases used by recruiting software at companies to screen job candidates. Increasingly, companies are using technology to sift through vast résumé databases and streamline search results. Tracking software first scans for keywords, then ranks résumés accordingly. The higher the percentage of desirable keywords, or keyword density, in your résumé, the better your chances of making it past the initial cut. Without keywords, your résumé may not even show up on the radar screen for consideration.

Translation: If you want an employer to find you faster, speak his language. Use keywords.

### Key to success: The right words

**Identifying keywords.** Keywords are generally nouns that are job specific. They include school names; degrees or certificates; education; job titles: “Assistant Manager,” “Technician”; company names; hard and soft skills: “IT Audits,” “Customer Service”; technological terms; industry buzzwords, jargon, and acronyms; type of job: “Full-time,” “Internship”; products and services; descriptive terms: “Emmy-winning,” “Fortune 500”; software applications: “Excel,” “Photoshop”; computer terminology: “Java,” “HTML”; and more.

**Keyword sources.** Begin with the job posting and description; hiring managers determine mandatory and desirable keywords to reflect company culture and job qualifications. Compare a number of similar listings for repeated terminology and buzzwords. Research annual reports; company and competitor Web sites, including mission statements and About Us; industry trade publications; the government's *Occupational Outlook Handbook* for industry overviews; O\*NET Online; HR; news reports. Consult your career center for resources and guidance. Review your own local and national

search engine results. Also, attend association meetings and network with industry professionals.

**Using keywords.** Keywords are more than search words; they speak to your qualifications and interest in the job. Include keywords from job listings, but don't copy the ad itself word for word. Highlight keywords and compare ads for frequency patterns. Pair keywords with action verbs for greater impact. Also, include variations for better résumé scanning results:

- “Thrive in detail-oriented environments”
- “Analyzed data for green building design and energy conservation”
- “BA, Bachelor's, Bachelor's degree”

When crafting your résumé in CCN's Résumé Builder®, use keywords early on under Objective, load up in Summary of Skills, and embed them throughout your résumé under Education, Experience, and any other sections you add. The more you include, the sooner, the better.

**Reuse keywords.** Don't limit keywords to résumés and cover letters. Include them in interviews, emails and other forms of communication, and when networking with professionals. Talk the talk so you can walk the walk.

### Avoid interview lock out.

Be relevant, be specific. Target your résumé; use only meaningful keywords that pertain to the job you're applying for, or risk hurting your chances. Plus, no two postings are identical, so revise your choice of keywords as needed. Don't try to sound smart with obscure jargon or acronyms. Avoid slang and clichés. “Résumé” is more formal; “resume” is acceptable and sometimes easier to scan.

Choose your words wisely. Keyword-rich résumés help you pass the screening firewall for the interview stage. After all, 90% of success is just showing up.



### i n a nutshell:

Make it easy for the employer:

- **Be relevant; only applicable keywords improve your odds**
- **Borrow keywords from job listings; don't copy the employer's ad**
- **Pair keywords with action verbs for greater impact**
- **The more keyword matches, the higher the résumé ranking**
- **Use keywords in cover letters and emails to impress readers**
- **Repeat keywords and spell out acronyms, degrees, titles, etc. to increase hits and ranking**
- **Avoid obscure terminology, slang, and negativity**

Ask yourself what would a hiring manager look for. Then include those vital keywords for greater visibility.