

Creating a “Scannable” Resume

Q. Recently I saw a classified ad for a non-legal position with the City of Seattle that looked perfect for me. Although I submitted my resume and cover letter, I never heard back. Because my qualifications appeared to be such a good fit, I couldn't believe that I didn't at least have an opportunity to interview. In discussing the situation with a friend, she asked if my resume was "scannable." Since I don't know what a scannable resume is, I can assume that mine probably wasn't. Please tell me what makes a resume scannable. And why is it so important?

A. Your friend is right to suggest that maybe you weren't called because your resume could not be scanned. More organizations, especially larger ones, are using document imaging technology, known as optical character recognition (OCR).

When a resume is received, an electronic scanner takes a picture of the resume, and it is then analyzed by optical character reading (OCR) software to convert it to letters and words that can be stored and viewed later by a computer.

If the print is too small or an unusual font is used, the OCR software may not recognize the letters, and the resume stored in the database will be garbled.

In his book *Resume Power* (Mount Vernon Press), Tom Washington outlines the simple steps to creating a scannable ("electronic") resume:

- Use sans serif typeface (e.g. Arial or Univers, not Times Roman).
- Use 12-point font in the text of your resume.
- Avoid use of italics and underlining.
- Limit your lines to 80 characters or less. (Spaces count as characters.)
- Avoid shading, columns, boxes or vertical lines.
- Do not compress spaces between letters or lines.
- Use white or very light paper for maximum contrast.
- Print your resume on a high quality laser printer.
- Do not bend or fold the resume.
- Send it in a large (9 x 12) envelope.

Following these guidelines should result in your resume being properly scanned and stored in most databases.

Just getting your resume into the database is important, but it is equally important that it contain the appropriate key words so that it will be easily accessed in the future. Imagine that a person will later be assigned the task of searching the database for qualified candidates. The search is generally done using keywords, in many ways resembling a Lexis search. Unless your resume includes the

requisite keywords, your resume will never show up in the search. Make sure to include synonyms and acronyms to ensure that your resume will not be missed.

How do you know whether an electronic resume is required? If the organization is identified, call and ask if they scan resumes. (While you have someone on the line, ask for the name of the person to whom the cover letter should be addressed. If you need a scannable resume, your cover letter should also be scannable.) If they don't scan resumes, send one that is visually attractive (electronic resumes are not pretty). If you don't know which one to send, send both and attach a note to the one that is intended for scanning.

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