

Step 2: List of Keywords for Your Resume

In today's job market, your resume is apt to go through at least one keyword search before it lands on an employer's desk. In order to pass that search, you need to have the right list of keywords for your resume. And you need to know how and where to put those keywords on your resume.

Resume Database Secrets

Job boards and companies use resume database systems to store and manage the many resumes they get. These systems have built-in search engines (much like the search engines you use online) that can search thousands of resumes in just a few seconds. What are they searching for? Keywords that define job openings.

The keywords in a resume give important info about the job seeker. Things like:

- Technical expertise
- Management skills
- Industry know-how
- Education and training
- Where he or she lives
- Work history

Once the search engine is given a list of keywords, it:

- Pulls up all resumes in the database that have any of the keywords.
- Counts the number of keywords per resume.
- Ranks the resumes by how many keywords on the list it contains.

More sophisticated systems use a synonym search to find similar as well as exact keywords. For instance, if a search engine is asked to find the keyword "writing," the engine may also find words such as "documentation," "report," and "proposal" — all terms that are close to "writing."

Some systems allow recruiters to give a keyword more weight in the ranking system, based on how relevant the keyword is to the job opening. For example, if leadership is more important than technical knowledge for a job, the recruiter can tell the system to give more value to leadership (compared to technical knowledge) when ranking job seekers' resumes.

So, if your resume has the right keywords in it, the search engine will pull it up in its search results. That's what you want, right?

What Are the Right Keywords?

"Sounds easy," you say. "Just tell me the keywords employers want and I'll put them on my resume."

It's not that simple. You see, there's no set list of keywords that works for all jobs. The list varies from one job opening to the next, depending on what the job requires.

Each list of keywords is determined and entered into the engine by the recruiter or hiring manager who's looking for a job seeker to fill a job opening. She, of course, makes that list based on the job requirements.

Because keywords are so important to the success of your resume, let's go over some tips for good keyword placement.

On a sheet of paper or separate word processing document, list 20 or so terms that describe your qualifications for the job you want. These terms can be both technical and nontechnical.

For example, you can list the computer applications you know (let's say, Photoshop and WordPress) as well as your management skills (such as conflict resolution and negotiations). If there's a choice between forms of the word (noun, verb, adjective, or gerund; for example, manager, manage, management, or managing), include all forms so the computer will find the one it's looking for. It's fine to place adjectives with keywords (for example, "team management").

To be sure your qualifications are found by the search engine, list acronyms and their spelled-out versions. You don't want to take a chance that an acronym could be ignored by a search engine because the hiring manager forgot to ask the engine to find either the acronym or the spelled-out meaning. For example, if you put only NFL on your resume and the manager asks for National Football League, the search engine may not pull up your resume.

[Job posts](#) are great for finding keywords. A good job post will tell you exactly what the employer's looking for. You can even print out a post, highlight keywords, and use it as a checklist of keywords for your resume.

Keywords in the Text

Weave your keywords into the statements in your resume. For example, you could talk about your management skills in one of your Summary statements. ("Skilled at contract negotiations, conflict resolution, benefits administration, and internal communications.")

Also, look for ways to make lists of your keywords under logical headings. For example, you could put all of your computer applications under a "Computer Skills" heading.

Case in point: Here's the list of keywords for Tina Juan, followed by a portion of her resume that contains those keywords.

Sales	MS Word	B.S.	Management
Marketing	Microsoft Word	Bachelor of Science	Business administration
Leads	Training	Internet	Trade shows
Analysis	Seminars	Business plan	Projections
National	Promotion	Events	Sales representative
International	Support	Speaking	Product development
Research	Excel	Product launch	Business development
Displays	PowerPoint	High-tech	Client relations

The keywords in Tina's resume are highlighted here so you can see them. On the resume she sent the employer, of course, they were not highlighted.

Tina Juan
 123 5th St.
 San Francisco, CA 12345
 123-555-1234

Objective: A sales/marketing position in the high-tech industry

Profile

- Eight years as a top-ranked sales representative, known for the ability to quickly acquire new product knowledge.
- Highly skilled in business development, client relations, and sales projections.
- Computer skills include MS Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Internet, and customized applications

Got Your Keyword List in Hand?

Now you know how to make a list of keywords for your resume. Keep this list handy as you write each line of your resume.

When you're ready, click **Next>>** (below) to go to the next step in writing your job-winning resume.