Translating Your Military Experience into a Resume

The experience you have gained in the military has equipped you with many highly desirable skills and characteristics, including discipline, integrity, teamwork, a positive work ethic, leadership skills, and the ability to work well under pressure. Learn how to set yourself apart from other applicants by featuring your acquired military skills in your resume. Follow the tips below to begin marketing yourself as an asset to employers.

Essential information to include in your federal resume:

1. Contact Information
The first section of a resume should include your contact information, such as:

- Name
- Address
- City, state and zip code
- Preferred phone number
- Personal email address (make sure it looks professional; for example: "firstname.lastname@example.com")

2. Work Experience
Your most recent experience or position should be listed first, followed by each prior position held from present to past. Experience typically includes the company or agency you worked for, the position you held while there, the dates you worked there, and highlights of your responsibilities while in that position. Unless you have not been working for very long, you have no reason to go into detail about the jobs you held early in your career. Focus on your most recent and/or relevant jobs.

3. List of Technical Skills
Technical skills in methodologies, software and hardware do not often require explanation and can be listed by name; however, it is critical that you qualify your experience in each so that recruiters know your level of understanding of these skills.

4. Education
Your education information should only include pertinent facts for each institution, such as:

- The name of the institution where you earned your highest degree
- The city and state of the institution
- The date you graduated or received your degree
- Specific degree that you earned (i.e., master's or Ph.D.)
- Any minors and/or double majors

If you attended college or a technical school but did not receive a degree, you should state how long you attended along with your field of study. If this is the case, remember to clearly state that you did not receive a degree. If you did not attend college or a vocational school, then you will want to include information about your high school education or GED. List your most recent degree first. If you are still enrolled in an institution, be sure to list it along with your anticipated date of graduation and the degree you will receive upon completion.

5. Job-Related Training

You have most likely had a significant amount of job-related training in the military. This is your opportunity to provide details on the training and courses that you took throughout your career. List only the training that has enhanced your experience and skills and that will be of significant value to the position for which you are applying. If the course title is not descriptive or is unfamiliar, summarize or briefly describe the course so recruiters can clearly understand what the course entailed.

For example:

Warrior Leadership Course, Fort Bliss, TX, February 2012

- ◢ Two-week course that used experiential learning to teach valuable skills in leadership, teamwork and critical thinking
- ◢ Recognized as "Soldier Leader of the Class" for outstanding physical and academic performance

6. Languages

If you include languages on your resume, state your level of fluency (such as "intermediate" or "advanced"). If your fluency is very limited, it is probably not worth listing the language on your resume.

7. Affiliations

Your professional affiliations can relate to your past work and your current job profile if you are working in the same field. Listing professional affiliations on your resume informs recruiters that you have professional interests beyond your day-to-day job. Emphasize current contributions and provide some details to explain your abilities within specific areas. If you choose to include a political affiliation, be tactful in describing your involvement. Consider including only the most relevant ones or splitting them into career-related and community-related categories.

8. Professional Publications

List only those publications that relate directly to your career goal or the position for which you are applying. List publications from present to past. Potential employers may attempt to track down your publication, so make sure the titles and your authorship are verifiable before including them.

9. References

References are typically people who can verify your employment and vouch for your performance. A potential employer always assumes that a resume is up to date. If your references are no longer applicable when the resume is reviewed, your out-of-date list may harm your credibility or frustrate your recruiter.

10. Honors & Awards

Awards can tell a potential employer that previous employers or other organizations valued your accomplishments. The fact that you or your team received formal recognition for your efforts is a good indicator of your skills and work ethic.

Create a Resume That Speaks to the Needs of the Department of Veterans Affairs

Now that you have all of your key elements in place, you are ready to create a winning resume. Consider a resume's purpose: To answer the Department of Veterans Affairs' question, "What can this person do for me?" A great way to start thinking about employers' needs is to research your target job. Search for jobs, explore VA's website, and read as many job postings as possible. What types of skills and experience is VA seeking? What aspects of your background are most relevant?

Any information that does not relate to your target job should be eliminated or de-emphasized in your resume. This includes unrelated military awards, training, and distinctions. For example, that medal you won for rifle marksmanship does not belong on a civilian resume. This is often the hardest step for ex-military personnel, which is why it is so common to see military resumes five pages or more in length. As you decide which information to include, ask yourself, "**Will a potential employer consider this experience valuable to the job?**" Only include information that will help you land an interview.

Modify Military Jargon

After being in the military for a long time, sometimes you may not realize that you are using language that civilians do not understand. Try to avoid using acronyms, technical terms, or jargon in your resume. Be sure to ask someone who does not have a military background to check your resume for confusing terms. Here are some common cases of military-speak that find their way into resumes:

Acronyms: Spell them out and consider simplifying them

For example:

◢ Use "Non-Commissioned Officer" or "Supervisor" rather than "NCO"

◢ Use the word "Base" rather than "FOB" or "AFB"

Occupational Designator: State your job title rather than the MOS/MOC designator

For example:

◢ Use "Aircraft Loadmaster" or "Cargo Manager" rather than "1A2X1"

◢ Use "Infantry Squad Leader" rather than "11B"

◢ Technical terms: Put them into the simplest possible terms

Use Action Verbs to Market Your Military Skills

Serving in the military gives you many great experiences and skills. But which ones should you include in your resume? Highlight any accomplishments that will be interesting and/or relevant to the position, such as those that:

◢ Required extra effort

◢ You completed by yourself

◢ You enjoyed doing

◢ You did well

◢ You are proud of

◢ You received an award for

Provide specific statements describing how you used these skills, why you used them, and for whom. For every skill, accomplishment or job described, use the most active, impressive verb you can think of. Begin the sentence with this verb, except when you must vary the sentence structure to avoid repetitive language.

Here are some examples of action verbs that would be valuable in any job position:

◢ Led

◢ Communicated

◢ Trained

◢ Facilitated

◢ Planned

◢ Improvised

◢ Motivated

◢ Adapted

◢ Organized

◢ Inspected

◢ Supervised

◢ Evaluated

◢ Used critical thinking skills

◢ Worked under pressure

◢ Worked on a team

◢ Multi-tasked

◢ Managed

For example:

◢ Trained over 20 soldiers in first aid techniques, which facilitated deployment readiness for the unit

◢ Used critical thinking skills on a daily basis to ensure communications equipment functioned properly

◢ Worked on a diverse team of five people for three years, succeeding through stressful work conditions

Showcase Your Accomplishments by Quantifying and Qualifying Your Experience

Your military career has offered you excellent opportunities for training, practical experience and advancement. Tout your accomplishments in your resume so the average civilian understands the importance of your achievements and their measurable outcomes. Quantify and qualify your experience to provide context for the employer; this helps them to understand the importance of your previous role. Emphasize the results you achieved, dollars generated or saved, percentage improvements in performance, the extent to which you exceeded goals in the past, or efficient organizational turnarounds you produced.

For example:

▲ Increased employee retention rate by 16 percent by focusing on training, team building and recognition programs

▲ Earned reputation as one of the most progressive and innovative IT organizations in the Army's communications and IT community

▲ Received Army Achievement Medal for completing over 400 medical evaluations and developing patient database using MS Access. The database improved reporting functions and tracked patient demographics, records, medications, appointments, and statuses.

Resume Checklist

Before you complete your resume, run through this checklist to ensure that you have done everything possible to market your skills:

▲ Include all of the information required in a federal resume:

    ☑ Contact information

    ☑ Work experience

    ☑ List of technical skills

    ☑ Education

    ☑ Job-related training

    ☑ Languages

    ☑ Affiliations

    ☑ Professional publications

    ☑ References

    ☑ Honors and awards

▲ Create a resume that speaks to the Department of Veterans Affairs' needs

▲ Modify military jargon. Ask someone without military experience to check your resume for confusing terms

▲ Use action verbs to market your military skills

▲ Showcase your accomplishments by quantifying and qualifying your experiences and contributions

Remember these additional tips:

DO

DO use the electronic resume format provided by USAJOBS

DO place your name in bold at the top of the resume

DO try to convert any documents you submit to PDF format to make the files smaller and preserve the formatting

DO list only one phone number and one email address

DO include your name and a page number on each page (if it extends past one page), so that recruiters can keep any loose pages together once printed

DO include a summary of your experience at the top of your resume (below your name) to highlight the skills and traits of most interest to the recruiter for this particular position

DO focus on the "requirements," "skills" or "qualifications" sections of a position description to pick out "buzzwords" your application should include or address

DO use numbers to highlight your accomplishments and define their effectiveness by time and money when possible

DO tell the truth

DON'T

DON'T use the same resume for all jobs to which you apply (instead, customize it for each job)

DON'T create a fancy resume format that is stylish but hard to read

DON'T decrease the size of your margins to make room for more content—it may not print properly

DON'T write long paragraphs that recruiters have to wade through to get to your main skills. Use short lists whenever possible

DON'T leave misspellings on your resume. Some recruiters will eliminate candidates for these errors

DON'T list salary requirements unless the job or listing requires it

DON'T give unnecessary personal information, such as Social Security numbers, driver's license numbers or birth dates

DON'T assume the recruiter will know what your acronyms mean—spell them out