

# It's not "What did you do . . .?" It's "What did you accomplish?"

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Many job seekers think that a prospective employer is interested in "what you did" at company XYZ. And most interviews will ask somewhere near the beginning of the interview, "What were your duties at XYZ?"

So it is natural that when you create your resume and you are filling out the EXPERIENCE section you will list or describe what your duties were. The following excerpt from an actual resume is fairly typical, and may resemble your own to some extent:

## **EXPERIENCE**

**2005-2006**

***Fleet Manager/Facility Maintenance***

***BMD Defense, Cross Hill, SC, 29332***

***Job Description: Maintenance of a fleet of customized cars for a specialized government security driving training program. Job required responsibility for the diagnostics, repair and maintenance of BMD's fleet and facility.***

**1999-2005**

***GMC Service Technician***

***Baldwin Automotive, Laurens, SC 29360***

***Job Description: Work in a service department of a new/used car dealership as a service technician. Diagnose and repair automobiles and trucks. Use electrical and mechanical training, experience, and skills to repair vehicles. Organize work load in order to perform jobs efficiently, effectively, and completely.***

**1982-1999**

***Greenwood Mills, Greenwood, SC 29646***

***Loom and Warp Technician/Trainer/Maintenance***

***Job Description: Initially hired as a weaver technician. Later trained as a weaver technician trainer, loom technician, warp technician, and weaving maintenance. Team leader and trainer for all diagnostic and repair of problematic equipment. Jobs required extensive mechanical, electrical, AC/DC motor and hydraulic knowledge and skills.***

The problem with this resume' is that John Doe put in his time, and probably performed his duties as required, but doesn't tell us what is most important: What did he accomplish? Did he get any results? Did he achieve anything of importance beyond the routine duties required of him?

An interviewer (phone or in person) may ask "What did you do . . ." but they are listening for "What did you accomplish?" The same is true when an employer reads your resume – they are looking for things that you accomplished that helped the company fulfill its mission. Whether it

is improved profit, reliability, customer satisfaction, market share, public image, or product superiority, companies want to hire people who can get results that advance the company's mission. They are looking for people who can take responsibility and use initiative, going beyond the job description to achieve for the company.

John Doe's resume experience may as well have been a copy of the companies' job descriptions. There is nothing there to tell us if John Doe did, or can, get results or really accomplished anything noteworthy in his career. And, sadly enough employers will come to the same conclusion: John Doe bided his time and did the minimum to get by . . . on to the next resume.

I have read hundreds, perhaps thousands of resumes in my professional career, and still review several every month as a volunteer career counselor, and not one resume in 20 will describe the accomplishments of the candidate. This offers a terrific advantage to you if you can prominently include in your resume the results you have achieved in your career – even a college career – thus far.

## WRITING THE RESUME

Supposing John Doe had written his resume as shown in the example below. What a different impact it would have on prospective employers!

### **EXPERIENCE**

**2005-2006**

***Fleet Manager/Facility Maintenance***

***BMD Defense, Cross Hill, SC, 29332***

#### ***Job Responsibilities :***

- *Maintenance of a fleet of customized cars for a specialized government security driving training program.*
- *Job required responsibility for the diagnostics, repair and maintenance of BMD's fleet and facility.*

#### ***Key Accomplishments:***

- ✓ *Reduced per-vehicle maintenance costs and facility maintenance costs by re-evaluating suppliers and negotiating bulk-buy pricing.*
- ✓ *Improved vehicle reliability, down-time, and repair costs by establishing a rigid servicing schedule based on manufacturer's recommendations. Overall down-time was reduced by 23% over a two-year period.*
- ✓ *Initiated an in-house maintenance training program which improved vehicle service cycle times by 25%, resulting in \$24,000 annual savings.*

**1999-2005**

***GMC Service Technician***

***Baldwin Automotive, Laurens, SC 29360***

#### ***Job Responsibilities :***

- Service technician for a new/used car dealership. Diagnosed and repaired automobiles and trucks.
- Used electrical and mechanical training, experience, and skills to repair vehicles.
- Organized work load in order to perform jobs efficiently, effectively, and completely.

**Key Accomplishments:**

- ✓ Persuaded the Service Manager to get me trained on multiple cars and multiple service areas (A/C, transmissions, electrical, brakes, steering/alignment) so that I could fill in for other techs and maintain a full daily schedule.
- ✓ Served as the “go to” guy in the service line for difficult cases to diagnose or repair.
- ✓ Volunteered to back up the Service Manager when he was on vacation or ill, as a possible stepping stone to promotion. Typically served in this capacity 3-4 weeks per year, and augmented the Service Writers on the line when my daily schedule permitted.

**1982-1999**

**Greenwood Mills, Greenwood, SC 29646**

**Loom and Warp Technician/Trainer/Maintenance**

**Job Responsibilities :**

- Initially hired as a weaver technician. Jobs required extensive mechanical, electrical, AC/DC motor and hydraulic knowledge and skills.

**Key Accomplishments:**

- ✓ Trained as a weaver technician trainer, loom technician, warp technician, and weaving maintenance.
- ✓ Team leader and trainer for all diagnostics and repair of problematic equipment. My team reduced weaver and loom machine down-time by nearly 25% through application of a rapid-response approach.

Now John Doe has become a formidable candidate and competitor in the job market. He gets results. He shows initiative. He works hard and smart to position himself for a promotion and more responsibility. And that is the way you can present yourself by focusing on your achievements and not just your duties.

How you weave your accomplishments into your resume can take many forms. You can cite a duty and indicate your results all within a single sentence. I prefer a bulletized format, since it is easier for a reader to scan and take in at a glance, and making your key accomplishments explicit by using a separate section for them (John Doe resume II) is more likely to be effective.

Often candidates will include a SUMMARY OF KEY SKILLS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS at the very beginning of the resume, to “set the hook” and grab the reader’s attention. This should be a very brief format, using bullets and phrases rather than sentences. Knowledgeable readers will be able to fill in the phrases and get the picture.

The following excerpt summarizes education, positions and skills, and key accomplishments all in about a third of a page, with some formatting to call attention to the summary, make it more interesting, and segregate it from the rest of the resume. Be creative – there’s no rule against it!

MEE Univ. of Florida	<u>HIGHLIGHTS</u>	BEE Univ. of Florida
	<p><b>Twenty + Years - Managing High-Tech Systems and Software Development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ E-Systems Director of Systems and Software Development</li> <li>▶ Honeywell &amp; General Dynamics - Software Development</li> <li>▶ On-time, on-target software for hard real-time systems               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Creation of disciplined software organizations</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
	<p><b>Nine Years -- Creation and transfer of software development methodologies and process improvement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Software Engineering Institute (SEI) - Software Acquisition CMM, SW-CMM, Lead assessor trained               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Software Productivity Consortium (SPC) - Process Improvement, SW Design Methods, Measurement</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
	<p><b>Consulting and Project Management</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Software assessments, Y2K embedded device analysis, Contingency Planning/Training, SW estimation</li> </ul>	

## SO WHERE DO YOU FIND YOUR “ACCOMPLISHMENTS”?

For each position you have held (not just each employer), think over your time there, the assignments you had, the projects you worked on, even the people you worked with. Now think about anything you did that made you feel good and gave you a sense of accomplishment, no matter how small. Write down everything you come up with, big and small. Maybe a co-worker or supervisor thought you did a particularly good job. Perhaps you improved office procedures, or factory processes. You beat a deadline, or you met a deadline under extremely difficult conditions. You participated in planning or decision making events where your suggestions were accepted and implemented. Great attendance and safety records are an achievement. A customer or client asks for you specifically when returning to your place of business because of a pleasant encounter with you. All of these things represent achievements and positive results.

Go through each assignment, project, or work station in each position you’ve held and write down anything that can be construed as an accomplishment or result. Now prioritize and pick those with the most business impact to include in your resume. Usually 2-5 is adequate unless you’ve been at the same company in the same position for many years. Never exceed 5 – it becomes boring to a reader trying to quickly decide if “you are the one” or s/he should go on to the next resume.

Some other sources of accomplishments are:

- Sales/profit/volume reports for those in a profit/loss management position or a sales position.
- Awards by the company to you or to the company by others (E.g. J.D Power Quality award) based on you or your team's performance.
- Improved efficiency of a process or a department attributable to your contribution.
- Improved customer satisfaction.
- A record of promotions within the company.
- Performance reviews.
- Performance bonuses.
- Training achieved on your own or through company-sponsored training.
- Papers or tutorials presented at trade conferences – demonstrates expertise.
- Patents granted.
- Projects finished on-time and within budget.
- Employee suggestions accepted by the company.
- A new product or service that you originated.
- Improvement in productivity
- Improved cycle-time for a process or product.
- Being selected for a special company task force to improve productivity, efficiency, employee morale, etc.
- Winning a new contract based on your contribution
- Being the fastest at whatever your job is, from sweeping the floor to writing complex computer programs, to auditing the company's books.
- Being the best at whatever your job is, from stock clerk to department manager.

In all these cases, it is best if there is some documented evidence that corroborates your “claim to fame”. However, it is permissible to cite cases where the commendation was verbal, so long as you are accurate and truthful. Never fabricate credentials.

## BACK TO THE INTERVIEW

You receive that call you've been waiting for – a phone interview. It's time to apply the principle “It's not what did you do . . . ? It's what did you accomplish?”

The interviewer offers you coffee and you both make some small talk to get the conversation going, and then he (or she) says “Well, tell me about your work experience”. The interviewer has your resume in front of him, so he's not looking for what he already has . . . he wants to gauge how you respond. Do you sound enthusiastic about what you did? Do you sound like you can help his business? Did you go “above and beyond”, or just do what was asked of you?

This is where you can employ your accomplishments. You should explain your title and describe your duties and responsibilities, and then delve into your accomplishments and results. By writing them into your resume, you have prepared for this interview and should have them “at the tip of your tongue”.

Suppose you are a waitress interviewing for a similar position. Your response might go something like this”.

INTERVIEWER: “So, tell me about your last position”.

YOU: “I currently work as a waitress at Smokey Joes Barbeque restaurant down on Highway 44. My duties are pretty standard waiter duties: I greet new customers once they are seated, take their drink orders and make sure they have menus. If we have any food specials, I’ll tell them about those. “

“The manager doesn’t really do many discount specials since we keep prices low all the time, but I got his permission to offer customers a ‘feature item’. The price is the same, but I wanted to see if I could steer the customers to some of our best food items, which were usually a little more expensive but worth the extra cost. I know people will be pleased, because those items are so good . . . which makes my job easier. It also helped a lot of indecisive people make up their minds, so I could cover more tables instead of standing there while they read and re-read the menus. The owner said he could see an increase in sales of the feature items, and was very pleased. “

“After bringing the drinks they ordered, I check if they are ready to order their food, usually asking if they would like to start with an appetizer. I like to recommend an appetizer that is our house favorite, because most people don’t really read the appetizer section much.”

. . . And so on. You finish with “The restaurant business has been hurt pretty bad with the recession and all, so I’d like to move to a national chain restaurant where the business is still good and there are more opportunities for advancement”

In this fairly typical hypothetical interview engagement, here are the places where “you” scored points:

- Showed initiative by coming up with the “feature item” concept and selling the idea to the owner.
- Used the “feature items” to upsell to more expensive food, while improving customer satisfaction with the food, and avoiding delays so you could handle other customers (and make more money).
- “You” improved sales, according to the owner.
- “You” recommended the house favorite appetizer instead of just saying “would you like to start with an appetizer”. A lot of people just need a simple suggestion, and since you can say “this is a favorite with all our customers” that may be just the incentive they need to decide. Sales of appetizers is a way to raise sales . . . something every employer would like to do.
- “You” finished with a very positive statement about why you are looking for another position – a plausible reason for leaving and a desire to advance.

Just remember, no matter how they ask, or what they ask for on an application form, employers really want to know what you have accomplished at the places where you have worked.

It's not "What did you do . . .? It's What did you accomplish?"