

Resume and LinkedIn Profile Keywords and Key Phrases

Resume keywords and key phrases are words (or strings of words) used to identify applicants for a position that are worthy of further review. Keywords help recruiters and employers to screen and search through an assortment of resumes and select from the applicants a list of candidates. Companies, search firms, and job boards often use Applicant Tracking System (ATS) software to automate this process.

In the last decade, applicant initial screening has been relegated to computers and software. The online application process for employers is one of screening or filtering for keywords. If the right keywords are not found on the resume... the applicant is excluded. By applying the right keywords to a resume and to online application screening questions a job seeker can increase the probability of receiving a telephone, video or in-person interview.

Two key questions:

Firstly, what words are keywords and what words are not keywords?

How to determine what keywords to select and include for a general resume, in a résumé for posting online and for a LinkedIn profile vs. selecting keywords for optimising resumes/applications for specific online employer job postings?

Keywords are nouns that reference Core Competencies

Keywords and key phrases are typically nouns that refer to core competencies

The new standard on résumés, and the one I advocate, is the competency-based approach. Using this approach you evaluate the employer's or the decision-maker's needs first (you do the research) and then the resume is written to demonstrate how your competencies match up with the job-specific needs and the organization's needs.

In human resources circles today, the determination of your compatibility for a job centers around determining your actual past performance based on performance indicators called competencies.

Keywords and key phrases are usually words that pertain to competencies such as: skills that are recognised as central to the targeted job, company, or industry. Soft skills (people skills) and hard skills (technical, mechanical, or

hands-on skills) are typically very important keywords. Keywords are more than specifically associated with skills. These words also often refer to job titles, degrees, training and certifications. Keywords and keyword phrases can be names of associations, companies, schools, specific brand of hardware or software, systems, processes or other products. Abbreviations, acronyms, initials, also need to be considered as keywords and it is recognised as a best practice to also **include the long hand form of the abbreviation or acronym**.

What keywords are not:

- Adjectives such as the word *dynamic* are not keywords.
- Adverbs such as *effectively* are not keywords.
- Verbs such as *organized* are not keywords.

An ideal keyword is a technique, trade, or talent that is highly desirable by a potential employer, enhances job performance, and is reflective of the candidate's abilities. Some examples:

- Soft Skills: Problem Solving, Customer Service, Team Management, Conflict Resolution
- Hard Skills: Inventory Control, Report Writing, Policy Development, Mechanical Design
- Job Titles: Store Manager, Marketing Consultant, Filing Clerk, Team Leader, Cashier
- Company Names: Hewlett Packard (HP), Tim Hortons, General Motors Company (GM)
- Associations: Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OPSE), Canadian Marketing Association (CMA)
- Schools: Milton District High School, McMaster University
- Certifications: Certified Community Service Worker (CCSW), Certified Resume Strategist (CRS) , Certified General Accountant (CGA)
- Software: Microsoft Office (MS Office), Wordpress (WP)
- Hardware: ASIC, FPGA, Circuit Boards, Laptops, Monitors
- Product: Office Supplies, Designer Apparel, Phone

Look Beyond Job Postings and Towards Actual Needs

Job seekers often include competencies solely based on their background. However, for a resume to be effective, **it must include elements required by the employer in our current market.**

Typically, keywords and key phrases are found by looking at job postings, and then incorporating these into a General Resume which is used over and over by job seekers for all applications. Because most job seekers use this standard approach, it does not generally help distinguish one applicant from the next. A better approach is to dig deeper and find less known competencies, or specific keywords, keyword phrases and competencies that a recruiter or hiring manager might key into their Applicant Tracking System (ATS), the software that scans resumes for specific to the employer keywords, keyword phrases and competencies.

In addition don't just include keywords from the specific job posting when optimizing your general resume. Do your research and select a few, meaningful words instead. Think about the language a potential employer might use. There is nothing wrong with using industry or technical jargon in a resume – as long as the recruiter needs that competency. By incorporating meaningful keywords that others do not use, the chances of being selected increase significantly.

Consider words that might be typed into an automated resume search system when someone is looking for the ideal candidate. Think like a recruiter. Recruiters are more likely to search for nouns than verbs. Rather than entering managed, the recruiter might be looking for a manager.

Use a Variety of Appropriate Keywords and Keyword Phrases It is not necessary to keep the keywords used to a minimum. For example, a recruiter looking for someone who speaks *French* might type in the keyword *bilingual*. If you incorporate both, the resume is even more likely to be selected. Later in this article you will be given instructions on a full-proof way of finding all the keywords and keyword phrases that are relevant to the specific job posting you are applying to.

Incorporate long-tail keywords – three to five words that are strung together to create a phrase that is very specific to the needs of the company. For example, the keywords *customer support* might be too broad,

but this 4 word string from the job description is a better choice to include *technical customer support specialist* and may hone in better.

Focus Keywords and Key Phrases on the Future

When writing a resume, focus on the future. Rather than selecting old skills that are no longer in demand, consider what the employer might need in the years to come. To determine these, you need to understand future requirements of the job, the company, and the industry. You also need to know about potential changes in the labour market and the external economic and social landscape.

When identifying keywords and key phrases for your resume or online profile/resume, it is a best practice to refer to competencies that are in high demand by employers. This list is from *The Panic Free Job Search* and identified as the core competencies most valued by companies in America and the UK according to Robin Kessler and Linda A. Strasburg:

- Results orientation.
- Initiative.
- Innovation
- Agility
- Change Agent
- Impact and influence.
- Team orientation.
- Communication.
- People management.
- Customer focus.
- Problem-solving.
- Planning and organization.
- Technical skills.
- Leadership.
- Business awareness.
- Decision-making.
- Analytical thinking.
- Conceptual thinking.
- Information-seeking.
- Integrity.
- Organizational awareness.

Incorporate Keywords and Key Phrases Effectively and Ethically

Keywords must penetrate ATS technology **AND** resonate with humans.

Don't scatter keywords haphazardly throughout the resume. Place competencies and keywords strategically for maximum impact. The final text should flow naturally and with ease. The document should be easily read and understood by all.

From an ATS selection perspective, it is not necessary to list your keywords together, but many people include an aesthetically pleasing keyword listing. One way to create a list is to categorize it under competency headings. For example, you might want to create a title such as Technical Skills, and then include a listing of keyword applications such as Windows 8, MS Office, and Outlook.

It is never a good idea to mislead a potential employer about competencies, talents, and strengths. Don't include any and all keywords, just because you think the reader wants to see them. You can include certain keywords and still be truthful. For example, when targeting a position in office management, rather than changing a previous position title, strategically include the key phrase in one or two other places such as in a headline:

Manufacturing Engineer | SMT | Fanuc | Process Engineering | Lean

When using this technique, don't repeat a keyword many times. This undesirable tactic is known as "keyword stuffing". A search engine only needs to see a keyword once. You can repeat important words, but don't overuse them. There is little benefit from repetition to an automated system, but a person reading your resume might notice it better.

Applying online customize resume for each application

When applying to jobs I prefer that job hunters use the customized approach to submitting their résumé and application online - that is to optimize each résumé, and answers to screening questions with the keywords and keyword phrases that are used by the specific employer (ex: car or automobile or vehicle etc) and those showing up in the job description.

Finding Keywords for LinkedIn Profile, One Size Fits-All Resume/Resume to Post Online

If you are creating a one size fits all résumé you can use over and over (I recommend you customize for each application to a specific posting or employer) or to post online on a job board or as a framework to build your

LinkedIn profile off of, you need to be able to select the right keywords with a “one size fits all” in order to attract the right audience to your LinkedIn profile or the right employer to your online resume. How do you SELECT the right keywords?

In Chapter 6 of the Panic Free Job Search, Paul Hill describes the process in great detail. Make sure to pay attention to synonyms and include them.

Here is an excerpt on keywords from The Panic Free Job Search:

How to Find the Right Keywords

Some of you may not realize it, but in most cases when applying to a large employer your resume will never be seen by a human until it is reviewed by a hiring manager. That is why it so important to understand the new hiring code. As mentioned previously, and this bears repeating, in order for your resume to get picked, the keywords on your resume get you selected by a computer for further review. You need to make sure your resume is written with the applicant tracking system (ATS) selection process in mind.

Your goal is to get the right keywords in your resume that are pertinent to the job you are targeting. How do you know what keywords to put in your resume? *The best place to find keywords is with existing job descriptions populating the internet.*

The two methods I recommend are to use a *visual keyword map* and a *word frequency counter* to analyse these job descriptions.

Create a Word Cloud and Get a Visual Keyword Map for Your Resume

You may have seen something similar on Websites, usually in the margin, where you see a jumble of words. This is usually referred to as a tag cloud. By glancing at the cloud you can quickly ascertain the subject matter of the site or blog by the prominence of the keywords. I have adapted this same quick-scan approach to keyword research and selection for your resume.

A **resume research word cloud** is a visual weighted depiction of the words from a document; the document consists of a number of similar job descriptions from different employers, where the weight or importance of a keyword is represented by font size. The clouds give greater prominence to keywords that appear more frequently in the source text. One of the great

free tools available to you is TagCrowd.com. Here is an example of a how to create a Tag Cloud from TagCrowd, for a manufacturing engineer in the automotive industry:

- Go to www.indeed.ca an automated job aggregator.
- In the search box enter words that are representative of your profession, in this example, *Manufacturing Engineer Automotive* and enter these words in the search box. (Do not worry about entering a location.) Run the search.
- Select the 10 first job descriptions that are relevant.
- Copy and paste each job description, one after another (don't worry about how it looks) into ONE Microsoft Word or similar text-based, word- processing software program document, and save it as a plain-text document. ONLY copy the job relevant information-NOT the description of the company or the part about how to apply or the company being an equal opportunity employer
- Open your text file, select all, copy it, and go to TagCrowd.com
- Paste your text in the window and click "Visualize."
- Review the TagCrowd Word Cloud you created.
- Adjust the number of words between 30-50 and any other adjustments you like under Options:

A word cloud should bring up the most important words but not give you the total frequency of words nor does it give you keyword phrases. Customise your resume to include these keywords.

Selecting Keyword Phrases:

A phrase is defined as 2 or more words –it is important to find the 2 word and 3 word keyword phrases that repeat in the job descriptions.

To do this go to WriteWords Phrase Frequency Counter and paste the same text you pasted into TagCrowd, and search for 2 word phrases and then do 3 word phrases (just to make sure do a 4 word search also) by adjusting "Select number of words in a phrase to check". Scan the results visually and select the appropriate key word phrases to include in your resume.

Keyword Frequency- Hand selecting each word is worth the effort

Although the visual cloud is a good start, I recommend that you go even deeper and review the specific word frequency or specific word count. This guarantees that you won't miss any valid keywords. Although this is tedious it allows you to review each keyword for actual numerical weighting as well as the opportunity to review each word in the document for acronyms, synonyms or similar words so you do not miss an important keyword, that may not have not have been depicted as important in the visual representation. **Some of the words that show-up less frequently are very important and need to be hand selected by combing through the results one word at a time.** Employers may use different names to represent the same meaning, such as automotive, automobile, car, auto, vehicle, and so on.

You can use the [Word Frequency Counter](#) here just do the same paste and visualize scan the results of the less frequent words to find any that are important that the TagCrowd may have missed. These are not frequent but may be important synonyms especially for your LinkedIn profile or if sending out a general resume not customize for a specific job posting.

Competencies:

Get the list of [core competencies](#) for engineers and add to your resume

Getting an Interview:

To guarantee being called for an interview, make sure the keywords are populated throughout your resume, most importantly surrounded by context or proof of use by doing a **job description breakdown** as taught during the [Transition to Hired](#) Resume workshop and including the keyword phrases and keywords in in your most recent jobs work experience section using the formula described for accomplishments that demonstrate execution with results and metrics.

You now have one of the most powerful tools to make sure your resume is the one that gets picked. You will rank high in resume database searches and if you add the context relative to the job description, that is accomplishments that will impress a human you will get your resume put on the "to call" list.

Remember, however, that the most effective way to ensure that your

resume gets picked is to customize it for every submission you make and also to take action by creating and sending a DMAL as taught in the Resume workshop.

Thanks to Sharon Graham Canada's career strategist for her excellent blog on the subject as well as Career Press for excerpts from the Panic Free Job Search by Paul Hill.