

Resume Writing for Freelancers

By Beth Podrovitz and Jiri Stejskal

A recent survey showed that freelance translators who are also ATA members derive 60% of their income from translation companies.¹ This article provides insight into what translation companies in the U.S. expect from resumes they receive from freelance translators or interpreters. The following information is loosely based on a presentation made by Jiri Stejskal at the September 2005 annual meeting of the Northeast Ohio Translators Association (www.ohiotranslators.org), a very active ATA chapter headed by Jill Sommer.

First, let us clarify our definition of a resume. Unlike a curriculum vitae (CV), which is more detailed and includes publications, presentations, awards, and other professional achievements, a resume is a one- to two-page summary of relevant skills, experience, and education. A resume must be brief because the reader typically spends less than a minute reviewing its contents.

You need to make sure your resume is concise, well written, and that it contains the information translation companies are looking for, and, by the same token, that it does not contain anything that is irrelevant or unnecessary. The suggestions below can serve as a guideline for writing an effective resume that makes the first cut, and can be used as a basis for a successful business relationship. Use the list of “do’s” and “don’ts” below to ensure that your resume goes on file and not in the recycling bin.

Resume To-do List

Here are some suggestions on how to make your resume stand out.

- **Keep the document to one or two pages.** Remember, this is a resume, not a CV. As such, it is important to

summarize the most significant highlights of your professional skills that are relevant to the position you are applying for. A project or vendor manager’s time is limited. They spend only a few seconds looking at your resume to see if it is worthwhile to keep reading.

- **Indicate your source and target languages.** This information is important and having it clearly visible at the top makes it easier for project or vendor managers to

“...It is the content, not the form, that is important to the project or vendor manager...”

find when they go looking for a specific language pair among the many resumes they have on file. If you translate more than one language, include it, but differentiate your strongest language pair from the others.

- **Indicate your specialization.** It is likely to be the second thing a project or vendor manager looks for on your resume. When looking for a particular area of expertise for a project, many translation companies use indexing and key word search tools to help them sift through the resumes on file. Having your specializations listed will help ensure that a word search leads to your resume. For example, if you are a German medical translator, make sure you list the words “German” and “medical.” If you are just starting out, you may not have substantial experience in a particular field, but it is still a good

idea to indicate something you would like to specialize in and that you are actively pursuing.

- **Submit your resume online, preferably in PDF format as an e-mail attachment.** A PDF file looks professional and can be viewed on different platforms without altering the fonts you use. It also indicates that you know how to create a PDF file, which many translation companies see as a valuable skill.
- **List complete contact information.** Make sure you include your mailing address, phone number, fax number, and an accurate e-mail address that you check regularly.
- **When saving your resume on the computer, use your last name for the filename.** Don’t name your resume something generic like “U.S. resume” or “translator1.” This just makes good sense, especially when submitting your resume online, since translation companies will typically file an applicant’s material under their last name.
- **Indicate your educational background in the proper place.** If you graduated recently and do not have much work experience, make sure you emphasize your education. If you are an experienced translator or interpreter, you can move the education information to the end of your resume and emphasize your work experience instead.
- **Provide relevant information only.** For a freelance position, it is not necessary to show that there are no gaps in your employment history. You don’t need to write down that summer you spent

pouring concrete or waiting tables, unless perhaps you were waiting tables at a cafe in Paris or Madrid.

- **Indicate your experience with computer-aided translation (CAT) tools and whether you use such tools on a regular basis.** Do you own and are you proficient in the use of a particular tool, such as TRADOS 7 Freelance? If the answer is yes, make sure it is reflected on your resume. Make sure you list specific CAT tools, since this is another area where translation companies use indexing and key word searches.
- **Provide information on your desktop publishing (DTP) capabilities.** Skills in using DTP applications such as InDesign or QuarkXpress are good to have, as they might set you apart from other translators.
- **Proofread your resume thoroughly and have others proofread it.** This is particularly important if your native language is not English. Of course, even native English speakers are not immune to typos and poorly worded English. Remember, you have designed your resume as a tool for selling your linguistic skills. If a resume is not flawless, your capabilities will appear questionable.
- **Include relevant association memberships and credentials, such as ATA certification.**
- **Update your resume frequently.** Sending out an updated resume is a good excuse to make additional contacts with translation companies. This will also help to keep your name fresh in the minds of prospective clients.

Things to Avoid

To further enhance your chances of getting a translation company to put your resume on file, we suggest you steer clear of certain practices that are quite common.

- Don't use colors, photos, word art, and graphic images unless you have a good reason to do so (such as using your logo).
- Don't state your date of birth, number of children, marital status, or other similar personal information. This is a common practice in other countries, but is not advisable for U.S. resumes.
- Don't include an objective that is too broad. It is not necessary to state your objective at all if it is clear from your cover letter (which will typically take the form of an e-mail message that you send with your resume attached) that you are a freelance translator or interpreter who wants to work with a translation company as an independent contractor. If you choose to include an objective, be sure to be concise. Do not make sweeping statements such as "To gain experience as a translator" or "To use my foreign language skills."
- Don't provide a list of your dictionaries. You can provide this information if requested, together with other resources you are using.
- Don't describe your hardware and don't list standard software applications such as MS Office. It is assumed that you already know how to use these programs, and the reader will wonder why they are listed. *However, you might want to mention which platform(s) you are using, especially if you are a Mac user.*
- Don't leave the Track Changes feature on in Word. This may seem obvious, but the number of resumes submitted with tracked changes visible is surprisingly high. Though it is a good source of office ridicule, it is not a good way to present yourself to a potential client. Check your view settings and make sure you see what you want everyone else to see. This blooper can be easily avoided if you submit your resume in PDF format as suggested earlier.
- Don't leave unused generic fields when using a template. Resume templates are fine to use, though they are fairly obvious to a reader who has seen hundreds of resumes. There is nothing wrong with using a template, provided it is appropriate for your purpose and is correctly customized to suit your needs.
- Don't submit your resume in non-standard applications, such as MS Publisher.
- Don't include your rates. Of course, it is important that the project manager knows what you charge, but your resume is not a good place to provide such information. *It is a good idea to submit a separate document containing your rate information, or to include such information in an accompanying message (or cover letter).*
- Don't use silly or unusual fonts. Use a common font like Arial, Helvetica, Times, or Times New Roman.
- Don't use acronyms. Most of us know what ATA stands for, but standard resume writing suggests you spell out all proper names. *If the name occurs more than once on your resume, it is fine to* ➡

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use an acronym for subsequent occurrences.

- Don't write "references available upon request." You can provide references in a separate document or in your cover letter.
- Don't submit hard copies. While a paper resume can be printed on fancy paper and look impressive, it is the content, not the form, that is important to the project or vendor manager. More importantly, a digital resume is searchable and does not take up physical space.

- Last, but certainly not least, don't make things up—be truthful and accurate.

Most translation companies receive resumes on a daily basis and have thousands on file. Because your resume is one of many, you need to make sure you use other marketing tools, in addition to providing a resume, to establish a relationship with a translation company. Examples include follow-up communication and networking at events attended by translation companies, such as a social function at a professional seminar hosted by ATA or

another industry association.

Having a professional resume is an absolute must for a freelancer who wants to do business with a translation company. Investing time and effort in getting it right will lead to new business and a successful career.

Notes

1. Racette, Dorothee, and Jiri Stejskal. "Survey of Corporate and Freelance Members Regarding Payment Practices." *ATA Chronicle*, June 2005, pages 11-17.

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herring of the "just doing his job as a translator" defense, and if they neglect to read the jail interview transcriptions, they will never correctly understand the basis for the ATA/NAJIT joint statement, and will not know what it means to say that "we do not take a stand on guilt or innocence." Mr. Yousry may be guilty or innocent of the criminal charges brought against him. We do not know and probably will never know what his intentions may have been in this respect. His lack of professionalism,

however, quite surely had a serious impact in increasing the dangers to which he exposed himself. As members of the interpreting and translating community, that is what ought to concern us most.

Judith Kenigson Kristy
Director

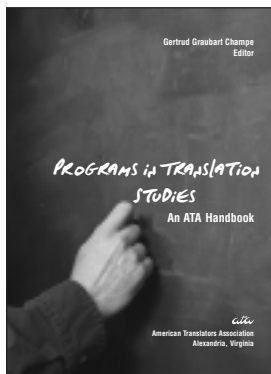
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