

CAREER

REINVENTION

BOOTCAMP

Module 10:
Resumes and
Cover Letters

Audio + Transcript

Pamela: In this class, we're going to talk about the tools that you'll need in order to launch your career reinvention. Having your toolkit ready helps you to jumpstart the momentum of your search.

Having things like a resume, cover letter and elevator pitch all together will help you introduce yourself to contacts, tell prospective employers in your target career what you're all about, assist you in piquing the interest of a potential hiring manager, and help you respond quickly to an interesting job listing.

Preparing your reinvention tools ensures that you're able to quickly follow up on every opportunity that comes your way. Let's dive right in.

There are three main tools that you'll use to reinvent your career: a resume, cover letter and 30-second elevator pitch. Let's get started with the resume first.

The most important thing to remember about your resume is that it's a sales and marketing document whose purpose is to make people pick up the phone and call you. This is crucial because many people think that a resume is an exhaustive list of every job they've ever had since high school. Don't make this mistake.

Too many people put in far too many details. Understand that your resume is not meant to be a complete written history of all the jobs you've ever had. Just like with every good sales and marketing document, brevity is crucial. The goal is to have somebody be able to glance at your resume for 10 seconds and say, "Call this person back."

Keep in mind that your resume really is a sales and marketing document designed to make people want to pick up the phone and call you.

I'm going to assume that you know the basic structure of a standard, chronological resume. If not, just go online. There are a lot of good books and articles on the topic.

What I'm going to talk about in terms of the resume from a career reinvention perspective is the main question you'll need to think about, "If I want to make a change to a different career, how should I rework my resume?" This is really the key thing.

When it comes to career reinvention, here are the sections that you'll need to pay attention to. The first section is the objective. Interestingly enough, from a career reinvention standpoint, the objective is generally not helpful.

Why is that? It's because you're looking to make a change from what you've done in the past. If your objective doesn't match your background, it really becomes meaningless. Therefore, I recommend dispensing with this section.

If you consider that your resume is a piece of real estate, everything that's contained on it has value. You want to make sure that you use that real estate wisely. An objective, if you have something on there that doesn't match all of your job history, doesn't help you in getting where you want to go and isn't a good use of your real estate. Remove it.

The next section that is important from a career reinvention standpoint and some, but not a lot of, people use is the candidate profile or a summary of qualifications. This piece is really critical. I just can't stress enough how helpful this is from a career reinvention standpoint.

It's very valuable because you can use this section to provide a description of your qualities, skills and talents, and the summary can be shaped to target your new career. Because it really consists of about four or five bullet points, you have more room to demonstrate how what you've done, your experience, can be shaped and made relevant to where you're looking to head.

What you want to do for this section is use language that really creates a picture of you as a candidate, keeping in mind that the stronger the visual image, the more effective this section is going to be.

What does this mean? Let me give you some examples. A sample bullet point for a candidate profile could be something like, "Media professional with 15 years of experience." That's very clear and states the facts, but it's pretty boring. It does what it needs to do. It's utilitarian, but it doesn't excite us.

Try this one on for size. "Seasoned media executive who has built businesses from the ground up." It's the same idea, but now it creates an exciting, go-getter image. You have a visual picture of this person. With "seasoned media executive who has built businesses from the ground up," all of a sudden, you get a feeling of what kind of candidate this person is.

Given the difference between the "media professional with 15 years of experience" and the "seasoned media executive who has built businesses from the ground up," which person do you think the hiring manager is going to call? Obviously, there's no contest.

Think about the difference between those two and the visual, strong, active words that were used in the second example. Keep all of that in mind when you begin to think about what you want to put in your candidate profile section.

Here's a common trap that a lot of people fall into with this section. They end up putting job functions up in those bullet points, like "edits children's books" or "responsible for managing sales team." Don't do this. Your candidate profile is a section to highlight your skills and talents, not where you paste a list of every job function you've ever done.

On a side note, keep in mind that for visual presence, this list should be a bullet point list that catches the eye. It's best to have each bullet point be one line and really, at a maximum, one and a half lines. It should be no more than that. If it's getting to be longer than that, then you need to edit down.

Four or five statements for this section is standard. If you can come up with five very visual, targeted statements, it will begin to create a very strong picture of you as a candidate.

Take a moment to go to your workbook to brainstorm some statements you could use for your candidate profile section. Focus on using active, exciting words and pay attention to creating the kind of visual picture we talked about. As writers say, show. Don't tell.

Let's move on to the next piece of the resume that's really important from a career reinvention perspective. That would be accomplishments. It's amazing to me, always, how many people forget to add their successes into each job listing. They really don't think to add in their accomplishments.

From a career reinvention perspective, accomplishments are crucial because they show potential employers that you have a history of creating positive and tangible results.

The other benefit is that when you identify your accomplishments and go through the process of looking at the particular jobs that you've had and identifying accomplishments for each one of those, you can analyze what skills and talents it took to achieve those accomplishments.

What that will do for you is help you identify the adaptive and transferable skills that we mentioned in the "Identifying Your Dream Career" session so that you'll know which accomplishments will help you demonstrate to potential employers that you have the skills and talents necessary to be successful in your target career.

Going through the process of identifying your accomplishments, you can take a look at what skills and talents allowed you to make those accomplishments happen. Then you'll identify the adaptive and transferable skills and know which accomplishments are going to be the most impactful to present to your target employers in your new career.

It can be a challenge, however, to come up with your accomplishments. This tends to be a very difficult spot for a lot of people because they're not used to thinking about what their accomplishments are. Using the acronym PAR to analyze each job can help you identify what your accomplishments are.

Let's talk about PAR. P stands for problem. This is where you identify the problem, opportunity or challenge of the position. By pinpointing one of those three things, then you can define the A, which is the action that you took to solve that.

First, you identify your problem, opportunity or challenge. Then you identify the action that you took to solve the problem, overcome the challenge or maximize the opportunity that was put in front of you.

Once you've identified the actions you took, you can then summarize the R. The R is the result. Your results show exactly what you accomplished in response to that problem, opportunity or challenge. These results then become your list of accomplishments.

Identify the P, which is the problem, opportunity or challenge. Then identify the action you took in response to each one of those. Then identify the results. The results become your accomplishments.

Keep in mind that your accomplishments must satisfy one of these three characteristics. One is that they should be specific.

I'll give you an example of a specific accomplishment. You could say "launched video product line in Europe." It's very specific. You know what kind of products were launched and where. It could be something like "implemented financial database for all branch divisions" or "created franchising guidelines for retail store division." They're very specific.

If your accomplishment is not specific, it should be identifiable. That's the second characteristic. Identifiable means having a name that people would recognize. It might be "managed accounts for Nike, Adidas and Reebok," for example, or "contributed articles to *Travel and Leisure*, *Gourmet* and *New York* magazines. These are identifiable accomplishments.

It might even be something like "presented internet sales tax recommendations to Congress in 2004." These are names that have an impact and your potential employer, in glancing at them, would say, "I recognize this."

If your accomplishment is not specific or identifiable, it should be quantifiable. That's the third characteristic. It could be something like "increased sales by 20% in the first year." That's very easy. There are numbers attached with it.

Instead of saying something like "put on a conference for outside distributors," which becomes a very bland statement, make it quantifiable by saying "over 50 outside distributors" or "brought in new client billings worth \$3.5 million in 2003."

Your accomplishments must satisfy one of three characteristics. They should either be specific, identifiable or quantifiable. Clearly, depending upon the job, you'll have one, two or three of these characteristics for each job.

You'll be able to identify an accomplishment that is quantifiable, perhaps, for one job and identifiable for another job. Maybe you had a list of very high-profile clients that you worked with. A third position might be specific. You might have one of each in one particular job.

Mix and match. Don't get caught up in, "I don't have any identifiable ones." Pull from each as it's natural to your background.

Another point, from a visual real estate standpoint, is that your accomplishments should always be bulleted. Bullets, from a visual standpoint, draw the eye.

You want to use them judiciously. It is not a good thing to have an all-bullet-point resume. Why not? It's because when you glance at that resume, it's nearly impossible to tell what's important and what's not.

The person really has to read through each of the bullets to find out what the good nuggets are. Something like "created filing system for the office" has the same visual weight as "won a Pulitzer prize in 2005." You can see the problem with that.

You're only going to get maybe a 10-second glance at a resume in order for the person to see whether or not they should read any further. They may have a stack of 100 resumes on their desk, and they're really just going through.

You want to be really smart and think about this from the hiring manager's perspective. What's going to make it really easy for them to immediately get the information they need and make you stand out?

This means that bullet points are used very sparingly and only for the most important things, your summary of qualifications and accomplishments. That will make sure that those will stand out. For your job description, use just a narrative paragraph for that. Do not waste bullet points on job descriptions.

Go to your workbook and take a moment to identify three or four accomplishments for your most recent job. If you've been there for less than a year, one or two is sufficient. For your previous positions, look to identify two or three accomplishments. That'll be enough.

Let's talk about some other reinvention resume strategies. Language is really an important piece of your reinvention resume. This is not something that is generally discussed in a

standard resume book. Each industry has its own language. It's important to identify the language of your target career and use it in your materials.

An easy way to become familiar with the language of your new field is by reading the trade publications. What you'll want to do is include the new language wherever you can.

The only exception to this rule would be with your job titles. If your current or past positions are called something else in your target career, don't change your job title. Just use the new language in the description of each job function. What you'll want to do is basically identify the key words.

For example, when I was making a transition from Wall Street to the entertainment field, my previous position on Wall Street was called "agency and reseller sales." Reseller sales meant that we went out and sold our content to third-party partners. Within the entertainment field, that is called "distribution."

I couldn't change my job title. That was what my job title was, but I made sure that in my description of what I did, I said "handled third-party distribution relationships." That's an example of using the language of an industry so that when a target hiring manager looks at your materials, it makes sense.

The same theory is when you go to a foreign country and want to make yourself understood, you learn to speak a few words of the language. It's the same thing.

This is a really important psychological point because part of getting somebody to take a chance on you is making them feel comfortable with the fact that you'll be able to make the transition. One of the ways that you do that is by speaking their language.

Another reinvention resume strategy is to use volunteer or other unpaid work to your advantage. If your current job doesn't provide you with the opportunity to develop the skills that you'll need for your target career, then you may have to draw on skills that you developed through volunteering or other unpaid work.

The way you'll want to deal with this, from a resume perspective, is to create an identifying section on your resume called "Volunteer Experience" or "Other Experience." If you're an aspiring writer, you might call this "Articles and Publications."

Then you'll record your relevant experience the same way as you would a job, including a summary description of what you did in a narrative paragraph format and a list of bullet-point accomplishments.

Also, realize that you can include the skills and talents that you developed through volunteerism and unpaid work in your summary of qualifications or candidate profile. If you're going to claim those skills and talents from the volunteer or other experience section, make sure that you have quantifiable, identifiable or specific achievements to back it up.

The most important thing regarding your resume, from a reinvention standpoint, is that you want to tell the truth. While it's good to be creative when you're reinventing your career, and in fact, it's necessary, be careful that you don't fall into the trap of being creative in a way that crosses the line.

In other words, you really want to be honest about your skills, talents and qualifications. Don't misrepresent or embellish what you've done.

A good rule of thumb to follow is this. Don't include any statements, accomplishments or activities that can't somehow be independently verified.

This is critical because if you claim to more than what you can actually support, one of two things will happen. You might land the job, but then it'll be difficult for you to actually succeed because you've extended yourself beyond what you can actually claim from your background.

The other thing that might happen is your target employer will learn, through checking, that you don't have the experience you've claimed. Then you've created a bad name for yourself in your target industry.

It's always important to be truthful and never cross the line. Make sure that whatever you claim to can be independently verified. If an employer picks up a phone, calls somebody from your old life, and says, "Does this person have this skill, talent or quality?" that person will say yes.

Let's talk about the second reinvention tool that you'll need, which is your cover letter. What's the goal of a cover letter? A cover letter, like your resume, is a sales and marketing document that's designed to make people want to call you.

It is not a long dissertation on why you're looking for a new job, nor is it a repeat of all the content on your resume. These are two common areas where people make mistakes.

The cover letter is a prime opportunity to set yourself apart, and if you take the time to craft an interesting and compelling letter, you're going to greatly increase your response rate.

A lot of people don't send cover letters, especially in this day and age with the advent of email. People just email their resumes and send a little line, like, "Here's my resume."

Here's the thing. The cover letter is your opportunity to show that you are a standout candidate who has really relevant experience.

If you take the time to demonstrate that to a target employer, you will stand out above 98% of the crowd that just sends a resume. This is about making yourself stand out so that you increase the chances of a callback. Use the cover letter to your advantage.

Your cover letter, when you are reinventing your career, must explain how your background is relevant to your target career. That is such an important point.

Do not leave this for your prospective employer to figure out. If you can't explain how what you've done applies to their situation, they're certainly not going to be able to understand it themselves, and they're not going to take the time to figure it out. This is a quick way to end up in the "no thanks" pile.

What does this mean? A reinvention cover letter should really clearly describe how your skills and talents are going to be useful in helping your prospective employer achieve their goals. This is what it means to say that your background is relevant to their situation.

You want to describe how your skills and talents that you developed in your previous career are going to be useful for helping your prospective employer achieve what they need to for their business.

To do this, you're going to describe your background in a different way. You list the job functions that are relevant to what your target employer is seeking, and you'll use the PAR acronym to identify an accomplishment or two from your past that highlights the adaptive or transferable skill that will translate to your target career.

What you're doing is pulling out the relevant job functions that are similar to your target career and the accomplishments, after you've analyzed them using the PAR and identified those adaptive or transferable skills that are relevant in your target career.

You'll highlight those so that it will show to your target employer, "I have the skills and talents and a record of success that shows that I have them. They're applicable in your role."

Here are some other things to remember when you're crafting your cover letter.

First of all, keep it short: no more than one page maximum. Prospective employers get stacks of resumes. They don't have time to read a long treatise.

Second, close the deal. This means asking for the interview. If it's not a blind posting, tell the prospect that you'll follow up with them. You should be driving the process whenever

possible. Do not make the mistake of saying, “I’ll just wait to hear from you,” unless it’s a blind posting.

If it’s a blind posting, then say, “I’m confident and look forward to an interview.” Be very positive and proactive in all ways.

Another point to remember when you’re crafting your cover letter is to stay away from opinion statements. Do not make statements about your work that are basically a matter of opinion.

For example, don’t say, “Wrote witty and hilarious copy for 10 websites.” “Witty” and “hilarious” are terms that depend upon your viewpoint. They are opinion statements. “Wrote copy for 10 websites,” is a statement of fact. Stay away from these types of opinions and value judgments that are open to interpretation. Just stick to the facts.

Another point that we mentioned earlier with the resume piece is to use the language of the target industry. As with the resume, include the terms that are commonly used. If you are responding to an advertised position, include some of the language of the listing. It’s called “mirroring.”

Don’t, however, just copy every phrase from the posting in your letter. This is going to make you look unimaginative. What you’re going to want to do is take a few key phrases. Look for what seem to be their hot buttons and weave them into your letter.

The last and most important strategy for crafting a reinvention cover letter is to make your letter about them and not about you. I’d have to say that this is the number-one error that jobseekers make, across the board, career reinvention or not. They make the letter about themselves rather than thinking about the employer and making the letter about what they can do for them.

This is a very subtle problem, making your letter about them and not you. Because you’re pitching them on yourself, you really can’t avoid talking about yourself. What you have to watch out for, though, is that you don’t fall into the “I” trap, where your whole letter is focused on what you want.

Red-flag danger statements might include, “I’m looking for a change,” “I would love to work for your company,” and “This position sounds like a great opportunity for me.” These types of sentences are danger phrases.

They really wave big red flags to the hiring managers because they indicate that the candidate’s more concerned about getting their needs met than helping the company achieve their goals.

The bottom line is, no matter why you're making this career-reinvention move, in order for somebody to hire you, you have to demonstrate that you're there to meet their goals. They're not there to satisfy your personal needs.

To avoid this trap in your reinvention cover letter, you'll need to change your phrasing to statements like, "I'd like to discuss how my skills and talents can help you," "I'm confident I can add value to your team," or "I'd like to make a contribution to your mission."

You can see that even though you might start off with the word "I," you always end up with them. Your "I" is in the context of what you can do for them. Make your letter about them, not about you.

For your workbook exercise, what you want to do is go online and find an interesting job posting.

Take some time to write a draft cover letter using the techniques that we spoke about: mirroring the language, making your letter about them and what they're looking to achieve for their role and not about you, using the PAR acronym to identify accomplishments, skills and adaptive talents that are transferable and going through all of that.

Let's talk about Reinvention Tool 3, your elevator pitch. What's an elevator pitch? It's a 30-second story that tells people about who you are and what you do. It's 30 seconds because that's the amount of time that you have to impress a hot prospect when you're riding in an elevator, hence the name.

The goal of an elevator pitch is to provoke interest so that your target, a potential client, hiring company or prospect will keep talking to you. From a career-reinvention standpoint, you don't tell people what you used to do or what you're currently doing. You must craft an elevator pitch that reflects the story of where you want to go, your new career, rather than where you've been.

The way around this is to start by saying, for example if you're a lawyer, "I'm a lawyer, but I'm making a transition." You acknowledge that you've done something, but then you immediately move into where you're headed rather than only focusing on what you're currently doing.

From a career-reinvention standpoint it's about piquing interest for where you want to head rather than what you're currently doing.

An elevator pitch is usually one to three sentences long. It always contains the following four elements.

1. What you do: just a quick summary of yourself as a candidate.
2. Who you do it for: the types of firms or individuals that would find your services helpful, or your target.
3. What value you bring: the benefit that a potential firm would experience by hiring you.
4. How you want to be perceived by the target. These are the qualities that you want to be known for.

Any elevator pitch that you craft must be able to pass what's called the "So what?" test. This means that your story must be interesting, compelling or useful enough that your target prospect can't say, "So what?" in response to it. They feel compelled to ask and say, "Tell me more."

Let's look at an example that I created when I wanted to leave Wall Street for the entertainment industry. My elevator pitch went like this: "I'm a top-level deal negotiator for high-profile media companies. I'm a specialist in identifying and closing multimillion-dollar joint ventures in overseas territories."

Let's break this down to the four components of an elevator pitch.

The first point is what you do. What did I do? I was a deal negotiator. That is how I identified myself.

The second component is who you do this for? In my elevator pitch, who I did that for was high-profile media companies. Even though I was on Wall Street, the parent company of my Wall Street firm was a well-known media company. This was an attractive point to entertainment firms who often owned media outlets.

I shaped my background in a way that was attractive to my target market. I claimed the media piece because I was doing deals with media firms and we were owned by a media company.

The third component of the elevator pitch, which has to do with value, is that I brought the value of being able to identify and close multimillion-dollar joint ventures. It was very clear to any entertainment firm that valued the ability to close and identify joint ventures. I was putting myself right there in front of them.

The fourth component of how I wanted to be perceived was two qualities that I wanted to be known for: top level and specialist. This elevator pitch contained the four components of what I did, who I did it for, the value I brought, and how I wanted to be perceived. It was

crafted in a way that was interesting and compelling to the identified target market, which was entertainment companies that wanted to do overseas deals.

That elevator pitch did, in fact, capture the attention of entertainment companies that wanted to work overseas, and I did end up landing the gig.

It's an important piece and a very useful piece to be able to craft a very compelling elevator pitch.

Take a moment in your workbook to think about what kind of elevator pitch you could craft for your target career. To identify the kinds of things that will be interesting to your target market, you will have done some research on what they want by looking at job postings and those kinds of things.

You'll have analyzed your background using the PAR to come up with accomplishments, skills and talents that you have. You will pull all of this together to craft an interesting and compelling elevator pitch.

In closing, it's important to craft an effective reinvention tool kit, but keep in mind that this is a process that takes time. Don't stress out or feel that everything has to be perfect before you get started, because it doesn't. This is a process that will evolve, and you will continually work on your materials.

As you begin networking and testing the market, which we are going to talk about in the next course, you are going to learn more information. As you learn this information, you are going to use this to polish your tools.

Just like all top craftsmen know, the highest quality tools get better over time. This same principle will be true for your reinvention tools. Your resumes, cover letters and elevator pitch will get better over time as you gather information, shape them and craft them.

If you use them to see what works and do more of what works, then over time you will end up with a very effective tool kit that will help you land your dream job.

Let me ask if there are any questions?

Participant: When do you actually use the elevator pitch?

Pamela: You use the elevator pitch when you are out networking and somebody asks you what you do. Let's say you are out to dinner and somebody introduces you to someone new, or you're at an event. Any time you are out speaking to people, you will want to use your elevator pitch.

This is an important thing because it helps you to start shifting your image in the marketplace. Instead of being known for what you formally do, you start to change people's minds and move them towards where you are headed. It's always something verbal.

You can also use your elevator pitch as a very effective opening for your cover letter. You can say something like, "If you are interested in a top-level deal negotiator that can close multimillion-dollar joint ventures in overseas markets, then we should talk." It's a great opening statement to a cover letter as well. That was a great question.

Participant: I know you talked about the summary of qualifications and accomplishments being the only parts that are bullet points. How are you meant to describe your job and the actual day-to-day activities that you did?

Pamela: The way you describe your day-to-day job is in the form of a narrative paragraph. You take two, three or four sentences for each job and describe what you did. Underneath that paragraph you have two, three or four bullets that pull out your accomplishments.

What this does is that when you are glancing at the piece of paper, you will see a paragraph, but you will see three bullets. Now those three bullets will be very impactful. They will say something that really stands out, which will then make the person want to read the paragraph.

You are playing with the psychology of somebody that doesn't have a lot of time and only has a minute to glance, and you're drawing them in to wanting to read your resume.

If all you have are bullet points and the first things they see are, "Created filing system and managed three salespeople," they will move on to the next one because there is nothing that makes you stand out. There is nothing special in those three bullet points, and they've got a stack of 100 resumes. They're just going through.

It's this myth that people actually read a resume. They don't. They glance at it to see if they should read the resume. You are playing with that psychology.

Participant: Would you actually do bullet points for the summary of qualifications, the accomplishments and then also within each job paragraph?

Pamela: No. You would do bullet points for your summary of qualifications. Then for each job you would have your job title and the place you work. Under that you would have a narrative paragraph that consists of three or four sentences that describe what you did. Then under that you would have three or four bullet points for the accomplishments for that job.

Participant: I see, so it goes under that way.

Pamela: Yes. Then what happens is that they glance at your summary of qualifications and you've got this strong, powerful series of statements about the kind of candidate you are.

Then they glance at the bullet points that are all accomplishments, and they see some impressive accomplishments. Mentally, everything that they've glanced at creates a very strong picture. They say, "This is a person I want to read about further." Do you see how that psychology works?

Participant: Absolutely. My question is, is it not going to overlap with some of these qualifications that are actually your accomplishments as well?

Pamela: No, because your accomplishments are identifiable, specific or quantifiable. Your summary of qualifications is the skills and talents that it takes to achieve those accomplishments.

You wouldn't say up above, "Negotiated 25 deals in one year." You would say, "Accomplished deal negotiator who has opened markets overseas." Then down below you would say, "Researched and closed 25 deals to bring in \$1.5 million in one year."

One up above is the skills, saying you are an accomplished deal negotiator. Then down below you have the specific accomplishment that reflects it. Now they know, "This is a person who closed 25 deals in one year. Yes, they have to be an accomplished deal negotiator."

Participant: I see now. Thank you.

Pamela: It's very subtle. These are good questions, because it is just as subtle, but most people don't do this. When you take the time to do it this way, it's the difference between reading a book and a work of fine literature.

It just draws you in. You are saying, "This is amazing," versus a book that just got thrown out there. That's the psychology that you are playing with. Those are the kinds of things that really do bring results.

A person in one of the courses I taught that did this for their resume emailed me and said, "Oh my god! I got a call back right away."

These are the kinds of things that when you pull it out, do it this way and are targeted about where you are heading, the other side says, "This is the person that I need to speak to." They respond quickly, because it's so targeted for what they need, and it's so clear how you can help them that they feel they absolutely have to speak to you.