

# Should You Use a Career Objective on Your Resume?

by Katharine Hansen

It's one of those sticky questions that divides career counselors. If you got 100 of them in a room, 50 would likely say yes, you should list a career objective on your resume; the other half would probably say no.

Those arguing against objectives say they are too limiting and usually poorly constructed. Those in favor say that employers want to be able to determine in just a few seconds what you want to do for the organization, and what you're good at. An objective can help meet that employer need. To some employers, the lack of an objective translates into a jobseeker who doesn't know what he or she wants. On the other hand, numerous employers say they rarely see a well-written objective.

There's no doubt that many resume career objectives are poorly put together. To avoid limiting themselves, too many jobseekers write objectives that are woefully vague, thus defeating the purpose of presenting an objective.

Jobseekers also tend to ignore the employer's need to know what the candidate can contribute, instead considering the objective as an invitation to list everything the jobseeker wants, needs or desires from the sought-after job. A typical self-serving objective is one along these lines:

*Career objective:* To obtain a meaningful and challenging position that enables me to learn the accounting field and allows for advancement.

Before we address the issue of vague and self-serving career objectives, let's look at the pros and cons of using them at all.

The argument against limiting oneself is not without merit. After all, if your career objective doesn't match what the hiring manager has to offer, he or she is not likely to give serious consideration to other niches within the company that you might fit into.

In this high-tech age, however, fear of limiting oneself need not be an excuse to leave a career objective off your resume. With your computer's word-processing program, there's no reason you can't have several versions of your resume with several different objectives. In fact, you might have two or three versions of your resume in which the *only* difference is your objective. You could even come up with a specific, tailor-made objective on your resume for each job you apply for. With technology, resumes and objectives need not be "one size fits all." Of course, if you go to a career fair, where it's impossible to tailor your objective as you move from booth to booth, or if you're handing out resumes in a networking situation, it may make more sense to leave your objective off.

In some situations, limiting oneself actually is a compelling reason *in favor of* using an objective. In one recent letter to the [Career Doctor](#), Dr. Randall Hansen, the job-seeker said he used his objective to state his desire not to relocate out of the city in which he was living. Although this limiting factor spoke more to the job-seeker's needs than the employer's, it could save a lot of time. Employers would not waste time interviewing him only to discover that he would not relocate. The job-seeker also had the option of mentioning his desire not to relocate in his cover letter instead of his resume objective.

One survey indicates that about 40 percent of employers want to see an objective on jobseekers' resumes. That 40 percent figure should give the "objecti-phobe" pause; it's a pretty convincing

argument in favor of using an objective. If 40 percent of employers would be annoyed not to see an objective on your resume, using one may be the safest choice. As someone who doesn't care much for objectives, I'm not annoyed when jobseekers include them (unless they are dreadfully and self-servingly written), and I suspect like-minded employers would feel the same way.

On the other hand, those still uncomfortable with committing themselves to an objective on their resume can use their cover letters to help them tailor their resumes to the specific jobs they're applying for. The cover letter can help bring the resume into sharper focus by elaborating on what the jobseeker wants to do and what he or she can specifically contribute to a particular job.

Increasingly, jobseekers are supplementing -- or replacing -- their objectives with a section called "Summary," "Skills Summary," "Qualifications," "Profile," or the like. Spotlighting skills can be quite appealing to employers, and the keywords used in such sections can be an important element of a resume that's electronically scanned.

Bottom line? Whether or not to list an objective on your resume is a highly personal decision, but a decision in favor of the objective is worth considering because many employers like to see them. Further:

- If you do use an objective, make it very specific, not vague and meaningless. Here's one I really like that one of my students wrote: "To manage people, interface with customers, and work with highly technical software or hardware applications." I like it because it's specific but not limiting. This objective could apply to many different jobs, yet the skills described are quite specific.
- Objectives should reflect the employer's perspective, not the jobseeker's, and should tell what the jobseeker can contribute. An objective should demonstrate the value the candidate will add to the organization.
- Objectives should be as concise as possible.
- Objectives may help sharpen the focus of your resume, especially if your experience is very diverse, or you are switching into a career not supported by the experience listed on your resume.
- If you choose not to list an objective on your resume, you may choose to discuss your objective in your cover letter.
- Whether or not you choose to include an objective, you may wish to present a skills or qualifications section on your resume.

Questions about some of the terminology used in this article? Get more information (definitions and links) on key college, career, and job-search terms by going to our [Job-Seeker's Glossary of Job-Hunting Terms](#).

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