

# Brain Dump and Brainstorm Your Way to a Resume

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**If you're not a professional writer, writing about yourself is hard, but brainstorming techniques can get the ball rolling and the creative juices flowing.**

By Lisa Vaas



The woman was blinking back tears. She was one of a group of realtors learning how to write their resumes and bios. She'd just started as a realtor, she told the woman teaching the class. "I don't have much experience," she said. Hence, she had "nothing to write about."

Anyone who's worked with a professional resume writer has been asked to provide a short bio and a synopsis of her career. Most job seekers balk at this step or struggle to provide a complete history. Most people feel uncomfortable writing about themselves; Lynda McDaniel knows. Our minds go blank. We blush. We freeze up. But McDaniel - who is director of the Association for Creative Business Writing and author of "[Words at Work](#): Powerful business writing delivers increased sales, improved results, and even a promotion or two" - can read people when they don't even know how to read themselves, and the gray streaks in the woman's hair told McDaniel volumes.

So McDaniel suggested that the fledgling realtor brainstorm using a process she calls "brain dump." She instructed the woman to write down every skill, paid or unpaid, she'd developed over the years. Then, she told her to sort through those skills to see how many applied to her new career.

Within one hour, the woman's spirits soared "from dejected to confident," and she even hugged McDaniel before she left.

How can you perform your own resume brain dump? First, stop weeping. Stop staring blankly at the questionnaire your professional resume writer has asked you to fill out. Most of us have ample skills and qualities that can shine in a well-done resume. TheLadders spoke to professional writers for their tips on how to mine that gold and brainstorm your resume.

## Brain-dump prep

Professional writers recommend job seekers take these steps before sitting down to brainstorm resume writing:

1. *Analyze the job posting.* What specifically is the employer looking for? This will come in handy when a job seeker analyzes which of his own skills and qualities will match the job description.
2. *Get organized.* Before tackling your resume, Heather Rothbauer-Wanish advises job seekers to make a list of previous employers, dates of employment and job duties. Know the official names of schools and dates of graduation. You'll use all this information when you sit down to write the resume, said Rothbauer-Wanish, a professional resume writer and owner of [Feather Communications](#).

## Brain dump

McDaniel's brain dump is a simple technique that should take about 15 minutes but "yields incredible results," she said.

1. *Brainstorm* First, set a timer and write without stopping for a minimum of 5 minutes. The key to success is to keep your pen flowing without stopping; just keep writing, no matter what garbage you cough up, even if it's, "This is stupid," or "I don't know what to write," MacDaniel said. The technique, familiar to creative writers who've worked through the Zen techniques Natalie Goldberg teaches in her book "[Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within](#)," breaks down your internal filter, "opening the way to fresher ideas and deeper insights," MacDaniel said.

If this is too loosey-goosey, try this exercise from Rothbauer-Wanish: Ask yourself, "What did I *really* do at that job?" Many times, she said, people don't give themselves enough credit for the tasks and responsibilities they've had in the workplace. Detailing a typical work day and writing down your activities "may spark ideas and help you recall additional job duties," she said.

2. *Find the nuggets.* Next, McDaniel said, set the timer for 5 minutes again. Go over what you've written, and sift out the key points. If most of it is chaff, don't worry: "Even the rejects are part of the process and lead you from one point to the next."

3. *Outline.* Assign each key point a number. Make the best information No. 1. That's the material that you'll feature at the top of the resume. Go through and label the rest of the key points in this manner, from most to least important. This form of outlining is "organic," McDaniel said, because it evolves from the material and "helps to cut down on procrastination."

4. *Write.* Using the key points from the outline, start adding to the meat of the resume. Make sure you prove your worth in quantifiable ways. Amanda Collins, chief of staff for [The Grammar Doctors](#), suggests using the CAR (Challenge, Action, Result) formula.

She provided this example:

Sales were down (C), so you implemented training and employee recognition programs (A), which boosted sales 25 percent in six months (R).

"Of course, quantitative results are best, but qualitative are great too," she said. "Consider things like increasing revenue, decreasing costs or improving customer service/employee relations."

*Lisa Vaas covers resume writing techniques and the technology behind the job search for TheLadders.*