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HYPERMEDIATING THE RESUME

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INTRODUCTION

Popken (1999) suggests that the resume as a genre was codified in the 1920s and 1930s in various business communication textbooks, becoming part of technical writing textbooks in the late 1970s (95).[1] Today, resume writing is an assignment deeply woven into the technical writing curriculum. Most contemporary technical writing textbooks include a unit on letter and resume writing in some form, as do most classes.

The appeal of resumes (and letters of application) as a beginning assignment in a technical writing class is not hard to see. Many students approach such a course with a good deal of apprehension. Often they have done little substantive writing since first-year composition and have at best a limited sense of the role written communication will play in their professional lives. These students realize that resumes are important documents and are usually motivated to work on the assignment. The appeal to teachers is also not hard to see. A resume is an enormously flexible form. It is a brief, compact document that can be used to foreground virtually any theoretical or practical aspect of technical writing.

INNOVATIVE PRACTICES AND THE RESUME

Although the resume continues to be an attractive assignment, much has changed since the late seventies. Indeed, the technological and social contexts of resume writing have changed dramatically in just the last few years. The resume assignment in a technical writing course is in need of innovation to align it with current practice.

One of the goals of a traditional resume assignment has been to produce a resume that could be skimmed on a first reading by someone looking to separate candidates who clearly are not qualified from those who deserve a more careful look (McDowell 1987).[2] Traditionally, a job candidate could not count on more than ten to twenty seconds of a

human resource person's time during this initial screening.[3] Faced with a stack of two hundred resumes and a limited amount of time to identify a pool of promising candidates, what choice was there? Screening to eliminate candidates first was and still is a form of survival.

In the late 1980s, one of the attractions of desktop publishing technology was its ability to transform a typewritten resume into an easy-to-scan typeset document. Today, a visually attractive typeset paper resume is still an important component of a job search, but at the same time, students are increasingly asked to email resumes or to submit resumes using Web forms that strip out all formatting. In addition, in many large companies, computers now do the task of initially screening candidates. A large insurance company headquartered near my university routinely scans every print resume it receives using the software package Resumex. They place the scanned resumes into a database so that initial pools of promising candidates can be generated via keyword searches.

In preparing a print resume for Resumex scanning, less is no longer more. Because an overworked human resources (HR) person is no longer doing the initial screening, job candidates can cram their resumes with text containing the keywords that they hope are likely to generate hits and help them make the initial cut. However, these job seekers still need an attractive, traditional paper resume to share with the (for now) human manager who actually interviews them.

Finally, the World Wide Web makes it possible to produce a resume that can be both scanned quickly and linked to increasingly more complex detail about a job candidate. Such a resume/electronic portfolio can function at many different levels and meet a variety of purposes.[4]

HYPERMEDIATING THE RESUME

These changes suggest that a single print resume is no longer enough. In this postmodern world of fragmented identity, students need a hypermediated resume that exists in several different versions designed for different media and different purposes. The resume, of course, has always been a hypertextual genre. Its stylized, scannable, nonlinear nature invites multiplicity in the sense that Bolter and Grusin (1999) have defined it. The symbiotic relationship of a resume to a letter of application also reflects Bolter and Grusin's notion of "immediacy"—the idea that through media we strive to create the illusion that the reader/viewer is part of the experience rather than separate from that

experience. In a job search, the need for immediacy is filled by the letter of application in which the job applicant interprets the resume and attempts to make him or herself come alive for the reader, while the resume complements this immediacy with a nonlinear, selective, hypermediated explication of that background. The letter of application and the resume are deeply intertwined, just as immediacy and hypermediacy are intertwined, each depending on the other.

In the hypermediated resume assignment, not only do the print letter and resume play off one another, but different electronic versions of the resume further complicate the assignment. Specifically, this assignment repurposes the traditional paper resume into three (and sometimes four and five) different documents:

- A more or less traditional print resume that uses visual form, space, and typographic emphasis to create a resume that a human can scan in ten to twenty seconds to identify a candidate's strengths
- A text-only resume (with line lengths limited to sixty-five characters) that has no formatting and is suitable for submission via an email message or a Web-based form
- An HTML version of the resume published on the Web

In addition to these three required versions of the resume, students may optionally submit a scannable version of their resume, create an Acrobat PDF version of their print resume, and do a more complex, HTML-based portfolio resume as a project later in the course.[5]

The Print Resume

The initial document in this project is a print resume pretty much like the print resumes students have always produced. No innovation here. Large companies may be moving to Web-based forms and resume databases, but most small companies still sort through resumes by hand. A clearly written, attractive, effectively organized resume is as important now as it has always been. Scanning software may be able to process densely-packed resumes full of keywords, but managers will always prefer a lean, focused, attractive resume that tells a story.

If there has been any change in the design of print resumes, that change has been toward more visually conservative forms. Because design elements such as graphics, rules, tints, and unusual fonts limit the effectiveness of OCR software, many students elect to avoid them.[6] A

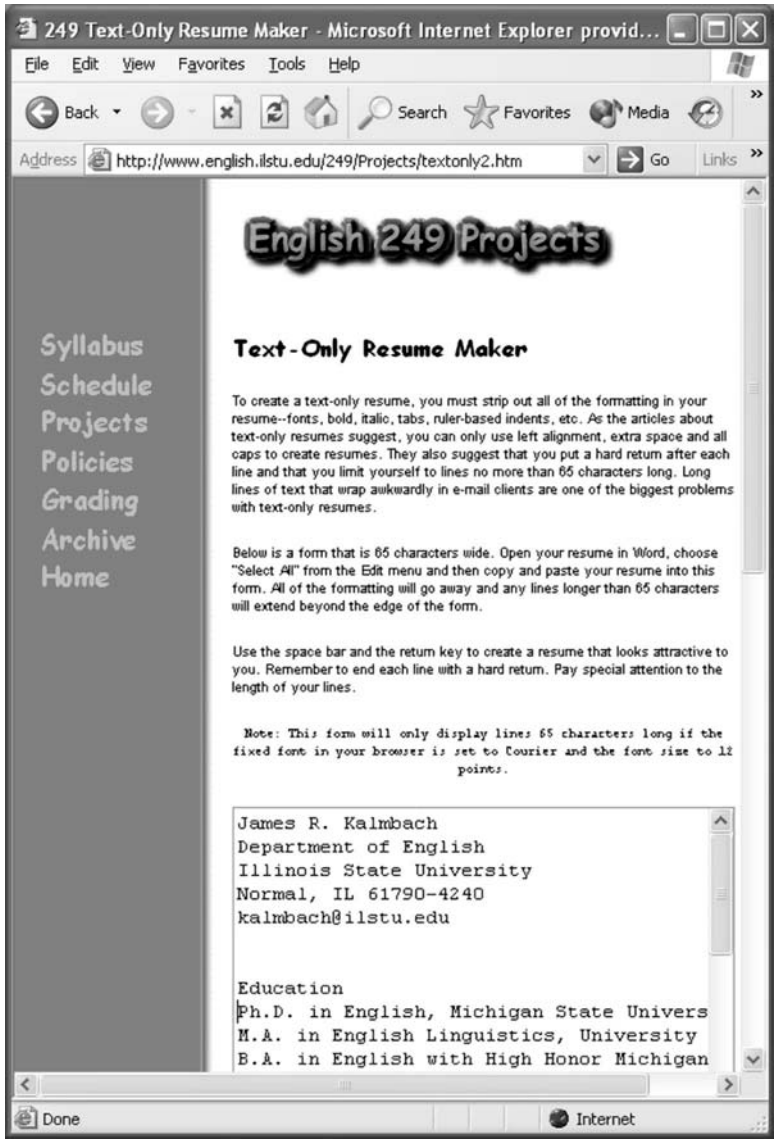

Figure 1. Web form used to create a text-only résumé. Lines that extend beyond the edge of the form will not wrap correctly when emailed. Available: www.cas.ilstu.edu/english/249/Projects/textonly.html

resume with a simple, straightforward visual design can, however, still be a complex rhetorical document; giving up fancy tints and rules does not mean giving up design.

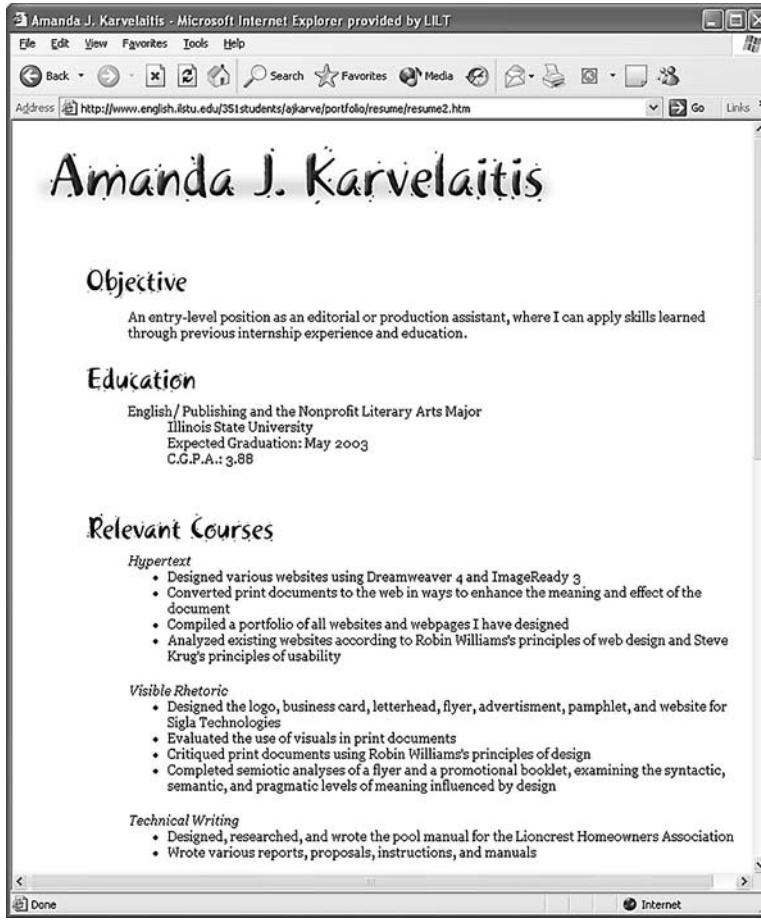

Figure 2. Screen-shot of an HTML-based résumé. Available: www.english.ilstu.edu/351students/ajkarve/portfolio/resume/resume2.htm

The Text-Only Resume

As more and more job recruiting takes place over the Internet, students are increasingly asked to submit resumes via Web-based forms that support only ASCII text, or they may be asked to submit a resume via email. Currently, the only reliable way to submit a resume by email is to paste a text-only version of the resume into the body of a message. Sending resumes via attachments to email messages can be a nightmare of incompatible word processing formats; the person processing the resume may not have the right fonts in his or her system to render the resume correctly; and the resume file may inadvertently carry macro viruses.

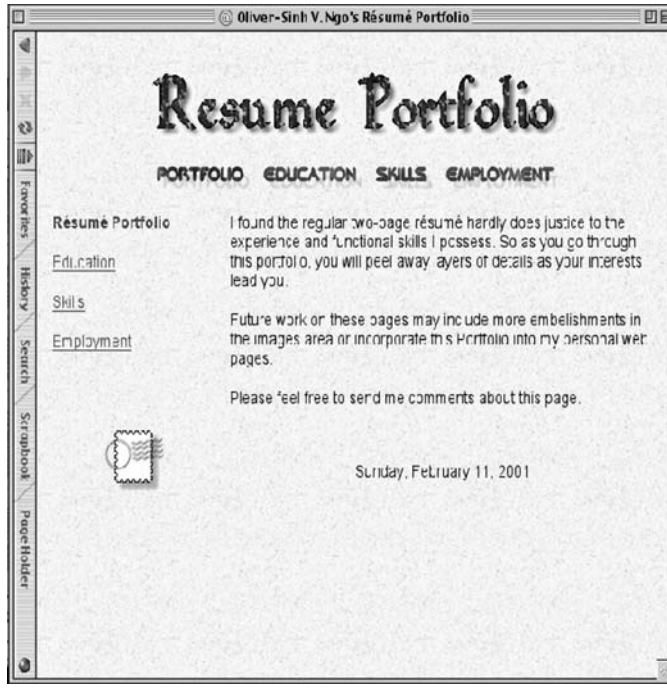

Figure 3. HTML-based portfolio résumé/portfolio. Available: www.ilstu.edu/~ovngo/portfolio.htm

Indeed many companies routinely delete without opening any resumes sent to them as attachments (Nemnich and Jandt 1999).[7]

Teaching students to create a text-only resume is harder than one might think. Even when students save their resume as text-only files in Word or use a program like Notepad, they still have access to fonts and characters not supported in Web forms. In addition, most word processing applications use word wrap, resulting in lines of text much longer than the sixty-five- character lines displayed by email programs. As a result, a text-only resume might look fine when viewed on the screen or printed from Notepad but turn into an unreadable jumble when pasted into an email message.

Creating a text-only resume in a mail program can also be dicey. Although Web mail clients tend to be safer choices, mail clients such as Eudora, Outlook, and Outlook Express support HTML formatting within mail messages. As a result, students can add formatting to their email without being aware that they have done so, and the resulting resume

will be filled with HTML code that at best makes the resume hard to process and at worst makes it incomprehensible if a reader's email program does not support HTML encoding and instead shows the message with its underlying code.

My solution has been to use a Web-based form for converting Word documents into text- only resumes. The form in figure 1 is set to a width that displays sixty-five characters of a normal-sized nonproportional font.

To use the form, students open their resume in Word, copy the text, and paste that text into the text area. All non-ASCII formatting disappears, and any line that extends beyond the edge of the form must be shortened because it is too long to display properly in an email program. Students use returns to shorten those lines, and they add space between sections and upper-case headlines to create more emphasis. They then email me the text-only resume, and we go through several rounds of revision.

HTML Resumes

Because I also teach my department's Web-authoring class, I have always been on the lookout for ways to incorporate more Web-based publishing into my other classes. I began including an HTML resume in technical writing courses as a way of doing more with the Web and to give students the confidence to attempt a Web-based project later in the class, but I discovered that an HTML resume can also be part of a job search. Many students report receiving inquiries as a result of having their resume online. Moreover, the Web is a medium in which students can experiment with design elements such as color, line art, and even photos, not typically available in print resumes (see figure 2).

Publishing on the Web can also expand students' notions of what is possible in a resume. An HTML resume can both tell a story in ten to twenty seconds and provide links to more detailed information in different topics. For example, in the HTML resume pictures in figure 3, the links along the left side of this resume lead to levels of increasing detail about the student's education, skills, and work experience. This sort of resume is both scannable by a human and packed with information should the reader wish to know more.

Whereas the text-only resume is an exercise in minimalism (students explore just how much formatting they can strip away from their resume) the HTML resume is an exercise in expansion. Students experiment with the different ways they can use digital media to add design elements to their HTML resumes while still telling a compelling story.

INTEGRATING THE HYPERMEDIATED RESUME INTO THE TECHNICAL WRITING CLASSROOM

Teaching so many different forms of the resume has also meant innovating the ways the assignment is sequenced. Instead of teaching a single unit in a three-week block of time, I teach the unit in two parts: at the beginning of the semester and again after midterms. The initial week is spent introducing the assignment, workshopping first drafts of letters and resumes, and talking about formatting issues. After this week, we turn our attention to writing first a report and then a manual. While working through these projects, students turn in a new draft of their letter and resume each week until those resumes are clearly written, attractively formatted, and error free.

After this period away from the project, we return to the hypermediated resume. We spend one day converting print resumes to text-only resumes and the next five class periods converting text-only resumes into HTML resumes.

Using a discontinuous structure has been particularly helpful in this assignment. It gives students the time to work through various writing and design issues as they create an effective print resume. Once that resume is done, they can turn to repurposing it in other media.

Although the assignment as described here is closely tied to my particular institutional context and my style of teaching with technology, the hypermediated resume can be used in a variety of pedagogical contexts. Successfully incorporating such an assignment will depend on three issues: the nature of your students, the technological resources available, and the pedagogical goals that you bring to your courses.

The Nature of Your Students

The single most important factor in deciding whether to teach the hypermediated resume in a technical writing course is the nature of your students. A resume project works best with students who are just beginning or are in the early part of their major coursework. These students are often in their third or fourth year of college. They are beginning to take their major courses and may have completed or are about to begin an internship or co-op experience.

A letter and resume project tends to be much less useful in classes where most of the students are beginning their college careers. Writing an effective resume means conceptualizing one's major in terms of a

professional community that lies outside the classroom and telling a story that communicates strengths as a potential member of that community. A student taking mostly general education courses (and who may not know what his or her major will be) is usually not ready to think about a professional identity within a professional community.

I have also had less success using a resume project with graduate students, adult learners, or students in their last semester who are actively involved in a job search. Although such students may need help with their resume, they often have so much invested in that resume (they may have used that resume successfully in several job searches) that they resist the rhetorical rethinking and remediation required of a hypermediated resume.

Available Technology

In most cases, access to technology is not a problem in a hypermediated resume project. Most students have or can get access to a quality word processing application and an ink jet printer. Similarly, most students come into class knowing how to use email so the process of creating text-only resumes tends to go smoothly once students make the conceptual leap of removing formatting to create rhetorical emphasis. Only for HTML resumes does technology continue to be an issue.

Mauriello, Pagnucci, and Winner (1999) have written about the difficulties of incorporating Web-based writing assignments into their classes. These difficulties start with the software used to create HTML resumes. Six years ago, when my students first started doing Web-based projects, I taught them how to use code-based HTML programs such as Home Site or BBEdit; it was an enormously time-consuming and intellectually exhausting process. In recent years, however, the quality of Web-authoring software has improved dramatically. Programs such as Macromedia Dreamweaver, Microsoft FrontPage and Adobe Go Live have all but eliminated the need for students to work with the HTML code underlying their Web-based resume. After trying out a variety of these programs, I have standardized the Web-authoring program that comes with Netscape: Netscape Composer. It is simple and straightforward for creating a simple, one-page document like a resume, and any student who has Netscape has Netscape Composer on his or her computer.

Once students have created HTML resumes, they can visit clip-art sites on the Web (such as www.clipart.com) for backgrounds, rules, and

other graphical elements, and they can use online tools (such as www.3dtextmaker.com) to create graphical headers.

Of course, creating an HTML resume is one thing. Getting that resume on the Web is another. In the past, using an FTP program to transfer files over the Internet has been a stumbling block. Learning the grammar of transferring files over the Internet was more technology than many students were prepared to learn. In response to this problem, my university instituted a set of Internet services, including a common WINS-based logon process so that students, faculty, and staff can use the same user id and password to log on to computers and access their mail. In addition, each student has been given a ten-megabyte Web folder on an Apache Web server, and the University computer labs are configured so that these shares are mounted as networked volumes when students log on. Anything a student saves to his or her Web share is published on the Web.[8] These changes have eliminated the need to FTP files. Instead of mastering a new program, students publish to the Web using the same grammar of "Save/Save As" that they use to save all of their files.

Even if your institution does not offer a similar "Save As" Web-publishing process, many Web sites offer free Web publishing via simple file upload forms or DAV file sharing. From Web authoring to graphics to Web publishing, appropriate technologies to create HTML resumes are available to anyone with access to the Internet.

Supporting Pedagogical Goals

The final issue to think about when considering a hypermediated resume project is how such an assignment can support your pedagogical goals. You need to reflect on why you are using the resume if you want to integrate the assignment effectively into your course. Here are some of the many different pedagogical goals a hypermediated resume can support.

The Resume and the Writing Process

The resume can be used to foreground the importance of revision. For me, the core experience in learning to write well is revising a text you care about over and over again until it is as good as you can make it. The resume is a form brief enough and a topic important enough to merit repeated revision.

The Resume as Negotiated Social Space

In writing a resume, students get advice from their technical writing teacher, from members of their department/profession, from on-campus

career services, from their roommates, and from the companies they are applying to.[9] Students may have already prepared a resume in one or more other classes. The many different voices heard in the process of creating a resume—the resistance, the conversation, and the negotiation—can be used to talk about the social nature of writing as students negotiate a form for their resume in a manner that will satisfy many different interests.

The Resume as Rhetorical and Narrative Form

One of the appealing features of resumes to teachers (and frustrating features for students) is that there is no one correct format. The resume is a most highly rhetoricized genre. There are broad principles of resume writing for students (for example, entry-level people almost always lead with their education), but within those broad principles, the range of possible rhetorical forms is enormous.

A resume is not a neutral display of a student's life history; it is a selective look that should be tailored to each student's strengths as a job candidate. Consequently, the nature of the categories a student includes in a resume, the names a student gives those categories, and the sequence in which those categories appear all depend on the student's unique background. One student may have a particularly strong sequence of course work and course-related projects, another student may have impressive extracurricular activities, another may have co-op or internship experience, while another may have a particularly impressive work history. Each student must decide what story their resume will tell and what sequences of topics and content can tell that story effectively. If you teach the report or the manual as narrative forms, the resume can be used to introduce the idea of narrative in technical writing to the class.

The Resume as Visual Form

The resume is also a very visual form. Content and purpose are shaped by choices in layout and typographic emphasis. Visual issues do not, however, have to be only about aesthetics (making it look pretty) or about usability (making the resume scannable for someone taking ten to twenty seconds to decide whether to toss your resume in the trash). You can also talk about how the visual choices students make in a resume mark them as members of a particular professional community. Thus, the resume can be a starting point for talking about (and getting students to experience) the interplay between the visual, the aesthetic, the cognitive, the political, and the social forces that pull against one another in the shaping of a document.

The Resume and Correctness

The resume can be used to reinforce the importance of proofreading and spelling checking when producing final drafts and to foster an appreciation for the role of correctness in documents written for real readers. I tell the story of a student who was turned down for an internship at a major corporation and the reason that they gave us was that she had misspelled the name of the company in her letter. The rapid transition from early to late drafts in resume writing, the briefness of the form, and the obvious importance of its appearance make the resume a natural place to talk about the difference between reflectively reading early drafts for organizational and conceptual issues and meticulously and obsessively reading late drafts to eliminate error.

The Resume and Overlapping Projects

I have found that most of my students are used to sequential projects in their classes. They work on one project, get a grade, and then work on another project; or they study material, take a test, and study more material. Most professionals, however, must juggle many different projects at once (paying more or less attention to each project as it matures) rather than finishing one project and starting another in a sequential manner. The discontinuous nature of the hypermediated resume assignment (starting a project, going on to other things, and then returning to that project) can be used to introduce the conception of nonsequential writing projects.

These various goals and purposes really just scratch the surface. Technical writing teachers need to be clear about what they value and why they want to include a hypermediated resume in their class if they are to use the assignment effectively.

REMEDIATING THE RESUME

Inevitably, a hypermediated resume assignment like the one described here leads to remediation: "the representation of one media in another" (Bolter and Grusin 1999, 45). Each of the different versions of their resume students create represents and appropriates the forms of the others. Each critiques and informs the other. The ultimate value of a hypermediated resume assignment may well be the reflection and the critique such an assignment encourages.

Reflection should not, however, be limited to students; the hypermediated resume invites teachers to reflect on our practices as well.

Quoting from Marshall McLuhan, Bolter and Grusin (1999) argue that "the 'content' of any medium is always another medium" (45). So, too, the content of any pedagogical activity is always another pedagogy. Innovation in teaching is a form of remediation, a form of representing and appropriating old practices in new. What we learn in teaching the hypermediated resume ultimately emerges out of this remediation, out of the conversations between approaches.

I have argued elsewhere that the history of teaching with technology is a history of remarkably similar patterns (Kalmbach 1997). What teachers did with typewriters in the 1930s and the arguments made for the use of that technology are virtually identical to what teachers did with computers in the classroom in the eighties and the arguments that we made for this technology. From these patterns, I developed the slogan: "Technology changes, pedagogy stays the same." This slogan suggests that the fundamental role of technology in the classroom may well be to create new spaces in which students and teachers can revisit old arguments, old conversations about teaching.

From the perspective of the hypermediated resume, however, we might better argue that teachers use technology not to duplicate but to repurpose and remediate past practice, to revisit and make those practices our own. The versions of the resume I present here will probably change, perhaps dramatically, in the next few years. Technology will provide us with new ways of understanding this genre and its social consequences. No matter; we will create new forms and new practices. As teachers we will repurpose and remediate. That is what we do.