

Refining Your Resume: Making your non-OR experience relevant

I have clinical experience from my surgical technology program, but I have also worked my way through school. How can I make that experience look more relevant to employers?

Think about the skills you use in the hospital as a surgical technologist. Now consider what qualities are required to do those individual tasks. For example, you need to set up for an appendectomy. To do so, you need to be organized and think critically about the supplies and instruments needed. As you pull and set up the OR environment in a timely and efficient manner, you must be deliberate and diligent, following specific protocol.

Employers will be looking for proof of these qualities or skills and how you've used them in the past. When you describe your work on your resume, you'll want to highlight the same skills. (See the sidebar on Marketable Skills for Surgical Technologists.)

Tip: Review job advertisements online. Employers often outline desirable qualities in their employment ads.

Now think about your current and past jobs. In which other jobs have you used the same skills? Think creatively. Create a list of job skills you've used for or acquired from jobs in your past and compare them with what you would need to be hired as a surgical technologist. Now you're ready to write job descriptions for your resume, highlighting just the relevant experience. See the examples below:

Example 1: Fast Food

You worked for Big Burger for three years during school. You've had to stand on your feet for long periods of time. You've had to be reliable, organized, efficient and conscious of cleanliness. You worked as part of a team and worked your way up to a supervisor. How would that look on your resume?

Big Burger, Greenfield, Texas

Team Member: November 2012-August 2015.

- Worked counter shifts, taking and fulfilling orders from customers. Responsible for collecting payment, giving correct change, and reconciling the register's cash at the end of the shift. Always on time for my shifts. Stood for up to 10 hours per shift.
- Followed procedures to ensure a clean and organized work space. Suggested a change to my manager that resulted in a more efficient work flow for the team.
- Kept track of multiple orders at a time, and maintained a positive attitude regardless of circumstances. Trained in other positions to advance my skills and cover other shifts.
- Promoted to shift manager, where I had to react quickly to fill shifts, communicate expectations to employees, and manage stressful situations with customers.

Example 2: Retail Sales

You worked retail sales for a local shop, selling t-shirts and beachwear to tourists. In this position, you often had to work independently, opening or closing the store depending on your shift. You had to be friendly and respond to customers' needs. You worked the register, stocked and organized products on the shelves. During the summer tourist season, the store was often very busy and you didn't always have help.

Kaley's Kozy Kloset, Kingstown, California
Sales Associate

- Responsible for multiple aspects of running a small retail clothing store, including helping the owner do regular inventory and suggesting products that would sell well.
- Frequently opened or closed the shop and worked alone for most shifts. Had to be punctual and dependable.
- Managed the register, accepting payments, giving correct change and balancing the cash drawer at the end of my shift.
- Stocked and organized shelves. Kept the shop tidy.
- During the busy tourist season, set and juggled priorities based on customers' needs. Maintained a friendly, positive attitude with customers at all times.

Example 3: Teacher's aid

You helped two teachers in a preschool by doing a variety of tasks including: preparing crafts and activities, setting up and cleaning up after snacks, counting and tracking children, comforting upset kids, managing check in and check out paperwork, following cleaning procedures.

Peachtree Daycare, Atlanta, Georgia

Aide II

- Responsible for cleaning and sanitizing toys at the end of each work day.
- Set up and cleaned up after snack times, keeping food surfaces clean.
- Managed check-in or check-out processes and paperwork depending on the shift. Had to keep track of children and ensure their safety during parent pick up and drop off times.
- Followed direction of the daycare supervisor. Anticipated the needs of daycare teachers and responded accordingly. Actively supported the teaching team in whatever they needed.
- Planned and organized games or crafts for kids three days per week. Prepared materials accordingly and led students through the activity.

Example 4: Office work

You worked in the copy and mailing room of a medium-sized business, sorting and delivering mail, tracking packages, making copies, creating presentation booklets for meetings, answering calls and managing other general office work. You stood or walked most of the day.

XYZ, Inc., Fargo, North Dakota

Office Assistant II

- Answered calls and took requests for copy and mailing jobs for the company. Had to be an active listener and take detailed notes about each job. Also had to multitask and manage my workflow to meet daily deadlines.
- Entered copy job specifications and shipping information into various computer software systems. Had to troubleshoot computer and copy equipment as needed.
- Communicated the status of jobs and shipments back to the department contact.
- Organized and delivered incoming mail to departments by 1 p.m. daily. Ensured that outgoing packages were prepared and ready for carrier pickup by 4:30 p.m. daily.
- Worked with little or no supervision, anticipating and requesting additional help during busier periods. Had to remain positive and flexible when unexpected jobs came up or had to be turned around immediately.

In each of the three examples, notice how all the skills highlighted in the bullets correspond to similar skills in the operating room. Before your interview, practice talking about how you used these skills in your clinical experience as well as your prior work experience.

It's also a good idea to highlight qualities that all employers look for in a good employee, such as reliability, trustworthiness and a positive attitude. If there's not room on your resume for these, save those examples for the interview. Keep your resume to a single page, unless you have at least 10 years of relevant experience.

Always send a cover letter with your resume. Use the body of the cover letter to reinforce that you have developed the skills employers are looking for, both in the clinical setting and in your non-operating room positions. Use specific examples, like those shown in the examples above. (For more information about writing cover letters, read the story entitled "Have Cover Letter Success and Land That Interview" on page 3 of the Summer 2014 issue of ASTSA News.)

After you've written your resume, get a friend, former coworker or family member to proofread your descriptions. Have them check for errors, but also ask them if they can think of skills or qualities you have that you forgotten to include. Then work those into the resume as well. Remember to keep your examples relevant.

Finally, don't forget to check AST's Career Center for additional career resources and information: <http://careercenter.ast.org/jobseekers/>.

Sidebar:

Marketable Skills for Surgical Technologists

Hospitals and other employers of surgical technologists are looking for a certain set of skills when they evaluate prospective employees. Your resume needs to show that you already have many of these skills, even if you haven't used them yet in the operating room. Think about your past job positions and how you've used or developed the following abilities:

- Accountable
- Active listener
- Attentive
- Collaborative
- Communicates effectively
- Computer/tech savvy
- Counting and tracking skills
- Dependable/Reliable
- Detail oriented
- Eager to learn
- Efficient
- Flexible
- Coordinated (especially hand-eye)
- Multitasker
- Organized
- Problem solver
- Professional (image, attitude, conduct)
- Punctual

Resourceful
Respectful
Responsive
Safety conscious
Sets and juggles priorities
Solution- or goal-oriented
Stands for long periods
Stress management
Takes initiative
Team-focused
Walks, stoops and carries materials