

Translate MILITARY EXPERIENCE into a Job-Winning Résumé



TRANSLATING YOUR EXPERIENCE

Challenging Terminology

Some military terminology, while common to you, isn't familiar to the average employer. Less than 1% of Americans today serve in the armed forces—the lowest percentage since pre-WWII. There is a strong chance that the person reading your résumé will not understand terms like “reconnaissance” or “NCOIC.” So, you need to find terms that are interchangeable with military terminology to improve your résumé's readability for civilian employers.

Speaking the Language

Let's say you're a hospital corpsman in the Navy. Go to the O*NET Military Crosswalks Search (www.onetonline.org/crosswalk). Select the appropriate military branch from the dropdown menu and type Hospital Corpsman into the search bar.

Your search results will present a list of 17 civilian occupations that are closely related to hospital corpsman. Clicking on a civilian title shows you the details for that civilian occupation, including relevant knowledge and skills, tools and equipment, salary information, credentials and videos describing that job. Use this information on your résumé and during your interviews to describe your naval experience in civilian terms.

Omitting Irrelevant Information

It can be challenging to translate all of your military training and experiences into easily understood civilian terms. And when you can't translate, sometimes leaving out aspects of your experience is the best course of action.

Highlight the skills and qualifications that are most relevant to the specific job you are seeking, and leave irrelevant details out. Since the résumé needs to be as concise and to-the-point as possible, putting your “greatest hits”—and only that—in front of an employer's eyes is a strategy for success.

Position Titles on Your Résumé

When listing your military position titles on your résumé, do not use military terminology (unless it is a commonly understood title). Instead, use a descriptive, civilian-friendly title. By doing this, you'll help the employer better understand your experience and talents.

For example, if you were an LCAC operator, how would you list your title on your résumé? You must assume that the civilian reader of your résumé will have no idea what an LCAV is and what skills are involved in operating one. LCAC stands for Landing Craft, Air Cushion (LCAC). It's an amphibious assault hovercraft that flies a few inches above water or land. Operating one of these rare vehicles requires the skills of an aircraft pilot and marine boat captain. Instead of using “LCAC Operator” as your position title when pursuing, use a descriptive title like Water & Aircraft Pilot, then be sure to describe the complex systems encompassed in an LCAC and the skills required to operate one of these impressive vehicles.

THREE STEPS FOR SUCCESS

Step 1: De-Militarize Your Document

The military has its own language, acronyms, rank structures, service branches and jargon, which can often seem like a foreign language to non-military personnel. Even though you may be more comfortable “speaking military,” hiring managers may reject your résumé if it is written with language that isn't easily understood.

Step 2: Give the Full Picture of Your Experience

From Infantry to Logistics Management

Military Experience: An infantryman with 23 years in the Army (E-9/Command Sergeant Major) who operated tanks and weapons and dug ditches is having a hard time identifying skills or direct experience to bring to the civilian workforce.

Experience to Market to Civilian Employers: Trained and evaluated 40 personnel supporting 2,000+ troops in 4 countries, with an inventory list of 1,500 line items and assets valued at \$65M.

Functional Areas of Expertise or Core Competencies: Personnel management, logistics and operations. Strategic planning and tactical application.

Possible Employment Opportunities: Based on his experience this command sergeant major could market his skills as a logistics expert and apply for management positions.

Key Skill Areas to Highlight

Technical

Military careers such as a telecommunication technical, financial management technician, mechanic and health care specialist all have closely related civilian careers. The technical skills you develop in your military career should be included in your résumé.

Interpersonal

In the military, you'll work with a variety of people from high ranking officers to unit commanders, teammates and subordinates. Oftentimes, service members must master the art of interacting with supervisors, peers and subordinates in order to complete their missions. Interpersonal skills are valued in the civilian workplace, and should be detailed in your résumé to reflect your ability to work with many different kinds of colleagues to get the job done.

Leadership

Any leadership experience or training that you acquired in the military is also highly valued by civilian employers. Overseeing subcontractors is a leadership skill that can be valuable in the civilian world.

Step 3: Excel in the Civilian Workplace

After you've translated your military experience and scored a job in the civilian workplace, it will be up to you to do a great job in your new career. It's important to remember that the military system is based on seniority and rank, but career advancement in the civilian workplace is a matter of excelling in areas that propel the success of the organization. To ensure your success, it will be important for you as a former service member to pay attention to three key differences that exist between civilian and military environments:

Communication Style

Former military personnel are formal, direct and to-the-point while civilian communication styles can be much more nuanced. Be sensitive to the communication styles of your civilian coworkers and remember to be patient, accept challenges with a positive mindset and always be willing to adjust.

Efficiency

The U.S. military has a top-down system for making decisions, while many private and public companies have bureaucratic processes that may be less efficient at times. Be patient and understand that although taking direct orders from the top works well in the military, civilian organizations often benefit from having multiple stakeholders contribute to the decision-making process.

Flexibility

Many companies today offer flexible hours, schedules and work locations. While the military benefits from having a rigid structure for service members to operate within, the corporate workplace often benefits by allowing its employees to have a flexible work-life balance.

Remembering these differences – and incorporating them into your everyday work life – will help you excel in the workplace.

EXPLAINING YOUR SERVICE

A Story about Telling Your Story

Over Thanksgiving dinner, Aunt Jane asked you to tell her about what you do in the military. You paused, then proceeded with the following dissertation: “I'm the staff NCO for the O-5 who commands VP-16 for Wing-11. I just got a NAM for preparing the squadron for our deployment work-up inspection.”

Aunt Jane nearly chokes on her stuffing and replies with, “That's great. I'm glad to hear you enjoy it.” The conversation ends and Aunt Jane has no idea what you just said or what you do.

Telling Your Story

Consider Aunt Jane's knowledge about the military before you speak. A better way to describe your experience would be to tell her that you work for the CEO of the aircraft squadron and that you received a personal commendation for your work in preparing the troops for a recent inspection from your boss's boss.

Like you should have “civilianized” your conversation with Aunt Jane, civilianizing your résumé helps recruiters understand how your skills translate into the needs of their company. Recruiters, who see thousands of résumés for any particular job opening, don't have time to translate. Like Aunt Jane's inability to understand your jargon-laden job description, a civilian employer will likely pass over your un-civilianized résumé.

Showcasing Communication Skills

Knowing how to translate and articulate effectively provides a glimpse into your communication skills. This is especially important when hired, because you will be communicating with your coworkers and you may be translating a company's products and services to outside customers and suppliers.

In converting your experience to civilian language, here are some examples of terms you can use in your military to civilian résumé.

TRANSLATING: THE DETAILS

It is also important to convert your education, medals and accomplishments into civilian language, provided that they are relevant to the position you seek.

For example, you would not use your marksmanship or your frontline experience on a civilian résumé, so don't worry about this. Also, an achievement such as meritorious promotion in a combat zone can be turned into a simple statement such as “*extensive managements experience in critical situations.*”

To explain the courses you have taken and the training you have completed, you can offer broad statements that are understandable in private sector employers. If you took classes in accounting, great! There's no need to translate this marketable knowledge.

However, if you took classes for officer ranking or for cavalry, you would need to translate. Say “leadership classes and training” instead of “officer training.” But keep in mind: in most cases, cavalry training is irrelevant to civilian positions (unless you are looking into a law enforcement career).

All in all, converting the military language into terms that are understandable to public sector employers will be one of the most important aspects of your military to civilian résumé writing. While you need to make sure that your résumé is focused, you cannot do this without first making sure that it is comprehensible.

Finding the right words isn't always easy, however. It becomes particularly challenging when the reader of said résumé is unfamiliar with the military way of life. You can interpret those camouflaged acronyms, ranks and course titles in a way that civilian employers will understand exactly what you have to offer.

The following common translations and tips can help you get your point across to just about anybody.



Common Terms

You know it as:

NCOIC, Watch Captain, Petty Officer of the Watch

Commander, Chief

Executive Officer (XO)

Action Officer (AO)

TDY/TAD

PCS

OER/NCOER

MOS/MOC

Commanded

Battalion, Unit, Platoon

Mission

Combat/War

Headquarters

Subordinates

Service members

Security Clearance

Military Personnel Office (MILPO)

Personnel Action Center (PAC)

Regulations

Reconnaissance

They know it as:

Supervisor, Manager, Coordinator

Division Head, Director, Senior Manager

Deputy Director, Assistant Manager

Analyst (or Senior Analyst if applicable)

Business travel

Relocation

Performance appraisal

Career field

Supervised, directed

Organization, agency, department

Responsibility, task, objective, job

Hazardous conditions, conflict

Headquarters, corporate office

Employees, co-workers

Employees, co-workers, colleagues, personnel, individuals

Security clearance

Personnel office

Guidance, policy, instructions

Data collection, survey, analysis

Organizational Structure, material resources, manpower

MORE COMMON TRANSLATIONS

Awards

You might have a list of ARCOMs, MSMs, and AAMs- and that is a good thing. Clearly, you did your job well. Don't, however, fill your résumé with each and every one of them. Simply mention, where appropriate, that you received awards for outstanding job performance.

If there is something critical to mention about a certain award that propels your case for the job further, then it is fine to elaborate on that particular award.

Job Titles

Don't get caught up in making sure your positional military title (Captain, Major, Sergeant) translates. Focus more on communicating the functional area of your job title (Communications Technician, Emergency Medical Technician, Nurse). That said, here are some common translations that may be helpful:

<i>Warrant Officer</i>	Technical Manager/ Specialist Department Manager
<i>Senior NCOs</i>	First-Line Supervisor
<i>Sergeant Major</i>	Senior Advisor
<i>First Sergeant</i>	Personnel Supervisor
<i>Squad Leader</i>	Team Leader/Team Chief
<i>Supply Sergeant</i>	Supply Manager/Logistics Manager
<i>Operations NCO</i>	Operations Supervisor
<i>Platoon Sergeant</i>	Supervisor/ Instructor/Trainer

Training

Make your classroom achievements easy to understand. Feel free to edit course titles for clarity's sake. Here are some common examples:

<i>Basic Training</i>	Basics Skills Course
<i>Advanced Individual Training (AIT)</i>	Advanced Skills Course (mention career field)
<i>Primary Leadership Development Course (PLDC)</i>	Basic Leadership and Management Development Course
<i>Basic Non-Commissioned Officers Course (BNOC)</i>	Intermediate Leadership and Management Development Course Advanced Leadership and Management Development Course
<i>Advanced Non-Commissioned Officers Course (ANOC)</i>	Entry Level Officer Training Course
<i>Officer Advanced Course (OAC)</i>	Senior Managerial Leadership School Senior Leaders Program
<i>Combined Arms Staff College</i>	Senior Leaders Program
<i>Command and Staff College</i>	Executive Leadership School
<i>War College</i>	

NOW WHAT?

Get Started

Start by translating job positions such as “Company Commander” into “Operations Manager.” Spell out all abbreviations and acronyms and translate their importance. Translate OJT and military schools into the real meaning behind the school. If you attended the NERS (Navy Enlisted Recruiter School), show it on your résumé as an in- depth, three-week sales training course.

Showcase Your Talents

Your rank is important, but what's more important is the relative rank. If you supervised five people as an E-5, say that! Most civilians don't supervise five people until they have many years of experience. Did you make E-5 on your first try? If so, say that and indicate that only 20 percent of those in your field make E-5 on their first try. This shows superior performance relative to your peers and is a good indication of future success.

Get a Civilian Critique

When you have finished, visit the University Career Center, in Room 103 Union West, for a professional résumé review. Receive advice and helpful suggestions from staff who can tell you if your résumé is still “wearing too much camouflage.”

The job seeker who articulates and translates best will ultimately land the interview! Remember, it is not necessary to write everything on your résumé. Only mention the most recent and relative information