

Tips on Writing a Military-to-Civilian Resume

The following document will outline tips to avoid when translating military experience to a civilian resume and provides an example that highlights the differences and impact of terminology.

First, it's critical to know what employers are looking for in candidates. The job description will outline key qualifications and responsibilities of the job, and this is your chance to align your skills to their desires. In addition, employers are looking for [8 soft skills](#) deemed successful in the workplace. These include but are not limited to communication, teamwork, professionalism, and problem solving. Sound familiar?

Your mission when writing a resume is to highlight the aforementioned skills gained in the military and tailor your experiences to the job description. It's that simple.

Tips to remember:

- **Don't use military "jargon."** Civilians are not aware of the "jargon" used in the military and struggle to translate it. Therefore, it's important to translate it for them. For example, "non-commissioned officer" is a "supervisor" or a "squad leader" can become "team leader."
- **Avoid acronyms.** Regardless of being in the military or not, we encourage not using acronyms. Never assume that the reader knows what you are talking about. For example, write "Base" instead of "AFB."
- **Do not use military codes (MOS).** 88H means nothing to civilians. If you were a "Cargo Specialist" then you were a "Distribution Manager" to a civilian. There are plenty of MOS translators, we suggest using [O*Net Online](#).

Let's look at one example that used military language and then another that has been translated to civilian terms.

Standard military language:

(E-4) 88H Cargo Specialist, US Army National Guard, Harrisburg, PA, June 20XX-June 20XX

- Served in 13 Bravo and completed two tours in combat
- Received: Army Reserve Components Achievement Medal, Armed Forces Reserve Medal (w/M-device), Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, Driver & Mechanic Badge (with Driver-W bar), National Defense Service Medal (2nd award), Southwest Asia Service Medal (2nd award)
- Coordinated the administrative and logistical support of U.S. and allied forces deploying through the AFB

The example above is filled with military jargon and acronyms that are confusing to a civilian reader and only lists one true bullet point that explains the cargo specialist's responsibilities. It's common to want to share accolades but remember skills, responsibility, and impact are most important to employers. Now, let's take a look at how the veteran enhanced their experience.

Military-to-civilian language:

Distribution Manager (Cargo Specialist), US Army National Guard, Harrisburg, PA, June 20XX-June 20XX

- Led the coordination and distribution of \$2.5 million of cargo by land and sea across 13 countries following maritime laws and government regulations
- Supervised upwards of 250 personnel of diverse and multi-lingual backgrounds, achieving satisfactory or above on all evaluations, while never missing a shipment or deadline
- Created and facilitated over 15 training programs to over 1,000 personnel on policies and effective distribution techniques

This example does not only describes what the person did but, more importantly, it shows their impact on the job. These bullets also prove that this veteran has the skills employers seek. *It is recommended that you meet with your career coach in the Center for Career and Professional Development to discuss your unique experience.*

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