Building Better Resumes the Open Source Way

Abram Anders
University of Minnesota Duluth

Genre
Web-based exercise (in-class or online), collaborative invention/revision, creating resume skills descriptions

The Assignment
"Building Better Resumes" applies open source production strategies and crowd sourcing principles to the task of creating better bullet points and skills descriptions for resumes and job applications. It not only provides a novel and engaging interface for student learners, but also overcomes a traditional pedagogical challenge. Although students readily recognize the difference between "strong" and "weak" resume descriptions, they often struggle to bridge the gap between the two in their own writing. By crowd sourcing invention and revision processes, the "open source way" interrupts single author inertia and helps students realize a wider range and more refined applications of available means of persuasion. Furthermore, the exercise leads to communally established values and standards which facilitate individual accountability and accurate self-assessment of effectiveness and quality.

The exercise takes place in a computer classroom or lab and employs a web-based collaborative writing environment (see suggested applications below). Students are divided into small groups and enter a shared group document via web-browser. Each student begins by posting an item (position, role, or experience) and drafting three bullet points describing the item. Students then perform a series of revision exercises on their peers' bullet points. Each round focuses on one of the three primary learning objectives: active verbs, concrete details, results and achievements. The instructor monitors the group documents and revisions in order to identify teachable examples for each learning objective. After each round, these teachable examples are reviewed and discussed by the entire class. Finally, an exit survey provides an opportunity for students to assess the overall strength of their group examples, reflect on the learning objectives, and make specific goals for future draft-work.

Target Learners
Upper-level undergraduates, resume-writers in general

Learning Objectives
Compose resume bullet points and descriptions:

1) Begin with strong, active verbs
2) Employ concrete details and quantify
3) Emphasize specific results and achievements

Time to Complete
25-40 minutes

Materials, Equipment, Special Considerations
- Computer classroom or lab with internet and a projector or shared screen
- Collaborative writing web-application: http://typewith.me, http://sync.in, http://www.twiddla.com, or http://docs.google.com
- Detailed instructions for students available here: http://goo.gl/3eA6w

Note: This exercise could also be adapted for small groups sharing laptops or editing with pen and paper, or even as an online synchronous activity outside class. Twiddla also supports web meetings and offers free upgrades for educators. Google Docs offers a full suite of office tools but does require accounts for all participants.

Evaluating Outcomes/Grading
1. Introduce learning objectives
2. Provide practical examples
3. Model revision processes
4. Establish community standards for quality

Author Bio
Abram Anders is an Assistant Professor of Business Communications at the University of Minnesota Duluth. He studied rhetoric and composition and received his PhD in English from Pennsylvania State University. His research interests include business communications, new media, open source, rhetoric, and professional communication technologies. Address correspondence to Abram Anders, University of Minnesota Duluth, Labovitz School of Business and Economics, Finance and Management Information Sciences, 335F LSBE, 1318 Kirby Drive, Duluth MN 55812; email: adanders@d.umn.edu

Support Materials
Instruction to Students: linked above in materials and attached as Word Document; would be embeddable on ABC site through Scribd.com
Short Documentary Video (for faculty): If my assignment is accepted, I plan to create the brief video providing an overview of the assignment, demonstrating the web applications, and include classroom footage of the exercise and group discussions. It would be easily embedded on the ABC website as a Vimeo or Youtube video.