

Translating Military Experience for Civilian Employers

Some civilian employers have a limited understanding of military life and the specialized language that goes along with it. It is important to know how to describe your military experience to a prospective employer to show that you have the right skills for the position you want.

Here are four tips to help translate your experience into “civilian-speak:”

Avoid Acronyms

Hiring managers may not know what MOS stands for or what it means to have worked at CENTCOM. It can be frustrating for them to figure out shorthand acronyms. Write the words out instead and put the acronym in parentheses.

Include and Explain Relevant Awards

It is natural to want to highlight your service record and the honors you earned. However, many civilian employers will not understand either the meaning or the significance of a Defense Meritorious Service Medal or a Silver Star. Therefore, follow two rules:

- Reference the highest-level award that pertains to the position you are applying for.
- Summarize what you did to earn your award.

Translate Your Rank

In the military, ranks are clear and understood by everyone. They indicate position in the chain of command and, to some extent, responsibilities. The civilian workforce also uses titles, but they are mostly job descriptors and, in some cases, indicators of rank. Different companies often use different titles to describe similar positions. Explain your basic duties and focus on the skills and responsibilities that can be applied to the position you are seeking. You may need to explain the level of responsibility that your rank and position required. It is good practice to provide the skills developed instead of just the number of people under your command.

Interpret Your Training

A civilian hiring manager may not immediately understand what it means to go through Specialized Undergraduate Navigator Training or Basic Combat Training. If the skills and knowledge you gained in a training course are relevant to the job you are applying for, include it on the résumé with a simple summary of its value.

Extra Materials and Activities:

In addition to your Mentor and your ACP Point of Contact, there are a few resources that can make translating your language easier.

- *Skill Translators* - These sites offer a way to look up your MOS and identify civilian equivalents. They are especially useful if you are looking for civilian positions you are qualified for based on your MOS. Some of our favorites include [Résumé Engine](#), [Military.com](#), and [CareerOneStop](#).
- *Community Feedback* - You can log on to our free online forum, [ACP AdvisorNet](#) and ask other volunteers to review your résumé. Here is a link to a sample résumé-review question: [Résumé Critique](#).
- *Discuss Your Skill Set* - Speak with your Mentor about the skills you developed during your military service. Your Mentor will be able to give you advice on how to present those skills effectively. You can use [Translating Military Experience to Civilian Employment](#) from RealWarriors.net and [Soft Military Skills That Deliver Hard Results for Military Veteran Careers](#) from LinkedIn to start the conversation.
- *Job Sites* - These sites can offer suggestions in terms of formatting, wording, and structure of your résumé. One of our favorites is [Job Hero](#), which finds sample résumés that other applicants submitted for different positions.
- *Veteran Service Organizations* - In addition to ACP, there are several veteran service organizations that help with skill translation. You may want to take a look at tools from organizations like [Hire Our Heroes](#). We think their [Résumé Engine](#) is particularly useful.
- *Career Fairs* - These events can be great for practicing how you are describing your experience and refining your elevator pitch. Check out [Recruit Military](#) for a veteran job fair in your area.