

What this task does

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Extract Resume Themes and Keywords from Your Selected Job Postings

S2F Framework | FOCUS Stage

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By now you have collected three to five job postings that hang together: the same kind of role, overlapping responsibilities, language that starts to repeat. That alignment is your signal to begin.

In this step, you read those postings as a group and pull out the patterns. What are these employers consistently asking for? What words do they keep using? What capabilities show up across all of them, not just one? Those recurring patterns become your resume themes, and the specific language the employers use becomes your keywords.

This is not a mechanical exercise. It takes judgment about what is central and what is just noise. But it is not guesswork either. The postings tell you what employers actually want. Your work in this step is to listen.

Why this step matters

The themes you name here shape every choice that follows, because they are the organizing thread of the entire search campaign, not just the resume. Your story bank is built around them, and your base resume exists to demonstrate them. From there they carry into everything else: the cover note, the thank-you, and the follow-up you send, the way you answer questions in an interview, and the case you make for yourself when it is time to negotiate. Get the themes right and the rest of the work has a clear logic to follow. Get them wrong and everything after this is either muddled or pointed slightly off target.

When this step is skipped, the work stays reactive. You revise your resume again and again, reshaping yourself around each opportunity as it appears. You pour effort into being better at the game, sending more custom applications, trying to outsmart the AI screeners, sorting real openings from scams. That is the hardest and least reliable way to run a search. It also slows your interview prep, because you have no clear direction to prepare in, and it pulls you toward roles that don't really fit, or ones so crowded your odds start to look like a lottery.

It is tempting to skip this step, and instead just paste your resume and the job postings into an AI tool, ask it to tailor one to fit the other, and let it do the analysis for you. The problem is that the tool only knows what you give it. It can see the words already on your resume, but not any relevant experiences you never wrote down. So it matches keywords on the surface without judging whether they actually matter, and it cannot pull in the proof from your history that you did not think to include. What comes back is often a resume that looks polished but is still unfocused, or one that uses the right words for work you cannot actually speak to in an interview.

Every job posting is different, so there are countless ways you could write your resume or prepare for interviews. Chase all of them and you exhaust yourself trying to be everything to everyone.

Themes are how you narrow. When you pull the patterns out of a set of related postings and treat them as one composite ideal, you give yourself a few defined lanes to swim in. Because they come straight from the postings, those lanes reflect what employers are actually asking for, not what you assume they want. That focus does double duty: it tells you which stories belong on your base resume, and which ones to prepare for interviews.

Task	Extract resume themes and keywords from your selected job postings
Role	Job seeker (primary) Career coach (optional support for pattern validation)
What you need before you start	Three to five aligned job postings from Task B4A blank document or spreadsheet for capturing themes
What you produce	Four to seven named resume themes, each with a short description and a list of keywords drawn from the job postings

Step flow

Step 1: Read all the job postings together

Step 2: Mark what repeats

Step 3: Group the patterns into themes

Step 4: Name each theme and write a short description

Step 5: Collect the keywords for each theme

Step 6: Review and set your final theme list

Detailed steps

Step 1: Read all the job postings together

Before you mark anything, read all three to five job postings straight through. You're after the overall shape of the role, not the details yet.

After one pass through, a few things will already stand out. There will be responsibilities that showed up in nearly every posting. There will be language that is repeated almost word for word. There will be one or two requirements that only appeared once. You are not making decisions yet. You are getting oriented.

Step 2: Mark what repeats

Go back through each job posting and mark the responsibilities, skills, and language that appear more than once across the set. You can do this by highlighting in a document, copying repeated phrases into a separate list, or using any method that lets you see the patterns accumulate.

Focus on what the role requires, not what the company says about itself. The mission statements and culture sections are not relevant here. The specific capabilities and responsibilities are.

Look especially for:

- Responsibilities that appear in most or all of the postings
- Skills and tools that are consistently listed as required (not just preferred)
- Words and phrases that the employers use repeatedly to describe the same concept
- Qualifications that are central to the role, not outliers from one unusual posting

Step 3: Group the patterns into themes

Look at the patterns you have marked and group the related ones. Things that are all about how you communicate belong together. Things that are all about managing a process or project belong together. Things that are about analytical work belong together.

You are looking for the two to three word label that describes each cluster. Most people end up with four to seven themes. Fewer than four suggests either the job postings are very narrow or some themes are being collapsed that should be separate. More than seven is usually a sign that some themes are too granular and could be combined.

There is no single correct set of themes for any role. Two people analyzing the same job postings might organize them slightly differently and both be right. What matters is that the themes are grounded in what the employers actually asked for, and that they hold together as a coherent description of the role.

Step 4: Name each theme and write a short description

Give each theme a clear, short name. One to four words. Then write one sentence that describes what the theme means in practice.

The description is not a dictionary definition. It is what this capability looks like in action in this type of role. It should be specific enough that you could use it to decide whether a particular story from your history belongs under this theme or not.

Examples:

Theme name	Description
Stakeholder communication	Clearly conveys complex information to audiences with different levels of technical knowledge
Initiative	Identifies what needs to be done and acts without waiting to be directed
Program management	Plans, coordinates, and drives cross-functional projects from start to delivery

These are illustrations only. Your themes will come from your specific job postings.

Step 5: Collect the keywords for each theme

Once you have named a theme, go back through the job postings and pull out the specific words and phrases the employers use when they are asking for that capability.

The difference between a theme description and keywords is this: the description explains the concept in your own words. The keywords are the exact terms the employers used.

For a stakeholder communication theme, the keywords might include: written communications, presentations, facilitation, executive briefings, cross-functional collaboration, status updates. These are the words that should appear on your resume and LinkedIn profile, because they are the words the hiring manager used when they wrote the job postings.

This is not keyword stuffing. Keyword stuffing means putting words on a resume for words that do not reflect real experience. What you are doing here is making sure the language you use to describe genuine experience matches the language the employer uses to describe what they need. That is the difference between a resume that scans well and a resume that is actually honest about what you can do.

Step 6: Review and set your final theme list

Look at your theme list as a whole. Ask:

- Does this list describe the role I am going for, based on what those employers said they need?
- Is anything important missing? Check back against the job postings.
- Is anything here a minor or outlier requirement that does not need its own theme?
- Can I describe my own experience in terms of these themes, honestly?

Make adjustments until the list feels accurate and complete. This is the framework you will use to build your story bank in the next step, so it is worth getting it right before you move on.

Using an AI tool for this step (optional)

If you want to use an AI tool to accelerate the pattern-finding, that is a reasonable choice for the extraction work in Steps 2 and 3. Paste your job postings into the tool and ask it to identify responsibilities and capabilities that appear across multiple postings, grouped by theme.

Review the output carefully. The tool will find patterns you might have missed. It will also surface things that are not actually central to the role, and it may miss nuances that matter to your specific situation. Edit, combine, or discard anything that does not clearly belong.

Steps 4 through 6 require your judgment. The theme names, the descriptions, and the final list need to reflect your read of the role and your honest assessment of your experience. Those decisions cannot be delegated.

Supporting knowledge for this task

The following articles provide the conceptual grounding for this step. Read them before or

alongside this task.

- What is a resume theme and why does it matter?
- How a focused base resume protects you from burnout

Critical impact of failure

If themes are guessed rather than extracted from the job postings, every later step inherits the mistake. The base resume, the story bank, and each tailored application all rest on assumptions instead of on what employers actually asked for. Draw the themes from real postings and the whole sequence reflects real market demand.

Reference resources

Templates	Resume Theme Worksheet Job Posting Comparison Grid
Checklists	Theme Quality Checklist Focus Readiness Check
Tools	Keyword Highlighter

Learning resources

Articles	What is a resume theme and why does it matter? How a focused base resume protects you from burnout
eLearning	FOCUS Stage lesson: Extract resume themes and keywords (available in the membership)
Videos	[Link when available]

People resources

Coaching	Career coach or resume strategist
Peer review	Accountability partner or cohort member who can check your theme list against the job postings
S2F community	Office Hours: bring questions about how to extract or group your themes

