

MAKING YOUR RESUME SHINE Handout 1



Top 10 Resume Mistakes

Avoiding the Most Common Pitfalls of Resume Writing

Summarizing an entire life into a succinct and attractive resume has always been one of the major challenges facing job seekers and prospective post-secondary students. Along with your cover letter, your resume is one of few tools at your disposal in your competition against hundreds of other qualified applicants. In order to grab the reader's attention, it must clearly portray you in the most favorable light: as the most appropriate choice for the opening.

In order to craft a compelling resume, you must be sure to avoid these all-too-common mistakes:

1. **Poor or Inappropriate Formatting**

The first impression a resume makes on its reader is generally the most lasting — and sometimes the only chance you have to sell yourself. Large blocks of uninterrupted text, small margins, tiny fonts, or excessive formatting (bold, italicized text or stylish "designer" fonts) make documents difficult to read. Only one font (preferably Times New Roman or Arial) should appear on your resume, and never smaller than 11 pt. Bolding should be restricted to the header information (name, address, phone number, email) and subheadings within the resume (Profile, Work History, Education, etc.). A candidate's industry or field will determine whether the resume format will be conservative (for physicians, teachers, accountants, graduate students, and the like) or more stylish (for marketing professionals, artists, performers, and other creative occupations).

2. **Lack of Focus**

An effective resume indicates in no more than seven seconds the candidate's targeted position and relevant qualifications. It's not enough to list schooling, work history, and other activities throughout the document. Admissions directors and hiring managers will not thoroughly read a resume to cull needed information — candidates must provide this data quickly and effectively. A Qualifications Summary at the top of your resume should include information about what you seek (a position or entrance into a university program) and how your qualifications relate to that goal. Employment History, Accomplishments, and Education sections should then build upon what is provided in the Qualifications Summary.

3. **Self-Serving Objective Statement**

Those seeking a job, take note: in today's market, hiring managers are not interested in what a candidate wants (e.g. "Seeking a position that will fully utilize my education and provide for sufficient advancement within the industry."). Rather, they seek candidates who clearly state what they can do *for the targeted company*: cut costs, increase profits, and enhance productivity. Hiring managers take note of applicants who place the company's needs above their own.

4. **Poor Data Prioritization**

A resume should reveal the candidate's academic and career-related background *as it applies to the targeted position or program*, and in reverse-chronological order: the last job or educational program should be listed first within the appropriate section. If your educational background is an important qualification for a particular job opening, then it should be presented before your work history, not dead last on the document. Conversely, if real-world experience is highly valued, then it should appear before the Education section. If special skills are at a premium, as they are in the IT field, they should be showcased immediately after the opening summary, not left to the end of a two-page resume.

5. **Failure to Showcase and Quantify Accomplishments**

Hiring managers and admissions directors will not pore over every line of a resume to find what a candidate has to offer, especially if it's buried within dense blocks of text. Applicants must provide special sections indicating

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professional or academic achievements, and these must be quantified. Vague, unsupported declarations like "Increased productivity within the division" or "Planned annual school dance" simply don't offer enough information. A better way to present the data is to write, "Increased productivity 58% within three months of hire by retraining staff on latest accounting software" or "Organized Winter Waltz for 750 students while staying \$200 under budget." Percentages, dollar amounts, and time frames will strengthen your achievements.

6. Irrelevant Data

Unless directly related to the current application, hobbies and interests should never appear on your resume — such activities do not enhance your candidacy. Other information to omit: birth dates, religious affiliations, race, social security number, and marital status.

7. Inappropriate Length

There is no single correct page length for a resume. The document should be as long as it has to be in order to provide a clear and effective picture of the candidate. Professionals with many years of experience will most likely have two pages. Cramping all the data into one page or excluding important information will only dilute your candidacy. The key is to provide only that data which is relevant to the current career goal (see Mistake #6). If you follow this rule, your resume will always be the appropriate length.

8. Casual Language

Modern resumes are business documents and should never use personal pronouns like "I" or "my." The tone of the resume should always be businesslike, avoiding slang completely. Consider your resume a presentation to your company's board of directors or your district's school board, not an email to a friend.

9. Redundant Data

Once information has been provided in a resume, whether it's in the Qualifications Summary, Career Accomplishments section, or Professional Experience section, it should *not* be repeated elsewhere. Hiring managers and admissions directors soon tire of redundancy and begin to suspect that the candidate is padding the resume to reach a more "impressive" length.

10. Spelling or Grammatical Errors

If an admissions officer or a hiring manager finds a spelling or grammatical error on your resume, she will simply stop reading it. Her trust in your abilities is forever lost — quite a price to pay for a careless mistake. This is also true when dates of employment or education are obviously incorrect (e.g. a recent college graduate listing the date of graduation as 1979 instead of 1999) or when verb tense does not match dates of employment. Use *present* tense when listing duties at your current job, *past* when describing previous positions.

