

12 Sins of Resume Writing

1. Unprofessionalism

Your resume, above all, must look professional. Consider the following:

- Using paper or ink in unusual colors (such as pinks and blues) and paper in unusual sizes (anything other than 8 1/2 x 11) demonstrates that you are not a candidate to be taken seriously. You want your qualifications, not your choice of paper or ink, to stand out.

It should be printed in black ink on 8 1/2 x 11, preferably white bond, paper. (Ivory and light gray are okay, too, but stay away from light pinks and blues.) The margins should be at least 1 inch all around.

- The typeface should be simple, unadorned, and easy to read. It should not look like calligraphy - the typeface people use for wedding invitations. Although it's okay to use graphic flourishes such as bullets and boldface for emphasis, remember to keep them to a minimum and avoid them altogether in resumes that are destined for optical scanners. Stick to a single typeface in a single size.
- The information in the resume should be presented in short, easy-to-read paragraphs.
- Make sure that no extraneous pen or pencil marks or correction fluid appear on the resume - and please, no gravy stains.

2. Carelessness

The fact that your resume is marred by typos, misspellings, and grammatical mistakes may not be an accurate reflection of how qualified you are for a particular job (unless, of course, the job is proofreader). As a rule, though, employers are neither patient nor forgiving about these flaws. A single typo in an otherwise well-organized and professional-looking resume may not necessarily sink you, but if the resume is riddled with misspellings and grammatical errors, you send the message to would-be employers that you don't pay attention to details.

3. Cuteness and cleverness

Cute is for babies and kittens, but not for resumes. So play it straight. Forget puns and clever plays on words; they don't belong in a resume, and they don't belong in a cover letter, either. People who read resumes are not looking to be entertained. And what you might consider clever, most people - even those who may be amused by the cleverness - will not consider appropriate.

4. Irrelevance and fluff

The people who read your resume are interested in one thing above all: whether, based on what they read, you deserve serious consideration as a candidate. Given this priority, any information in your resume that doesn't contribute an answer to this basic question is irrelevant. If you're a college graduate, you don't have to mention the high school you attended. And go easy on your hobbies and interests. The fact that you are a low-handicap golfer or have one of the world's most extensive beer can collections may make for interesting conversation at a dinner party, but it's of no interest to a would-be employer - unless you're applying for a job as a golf pro or at a company that markets beer cans.

5. Vagueness and jargon

Vagueness occurs when you mention a job title, task, or set of abbreviations that nobody other than you and the person you used to work for are going to recognize, such as Asst. VP, RTP Div. of Corporate Reclassification of ETY Documents. It also rears its ugly head when you fail to mention specifically what you were responsible for in your last job, the number of people you supervised, the size of the budget you controlled, and so on. Don't assume that the people who read your resume will figure out for themselves what you did. They won't.

6. Misrepresentation

Don't lie. It's that simple. And don't be tempted to embellish the truth. Of course, you would be foolish to include in your resume anything remotely unflattering. (It's one thing to be honest and another thing to be suicidal!) But the risks of fudging the truth in your resume far outweigh the benefits, particularly when it comes to specific facts, such as credentials and titles.

If you were not a vice president of whatever in your last job, don't anoint yourself with that title simply because the company you used to work for is out of business. The issue here goes beyond ethics; it's practical as well. If, in checking your references, a would-be employer discovers that you misrepresented yourself in your resume - even if the misrepresentation is inconsequential - your credibility will take a beating and you stand a good chance of losing an offer. If your employer discovers a lie after hiring you, you could lose the job that you worked so hard to get. And you might find yourself in over your head if you inflated prior titles or responsibilities - obviously counterproductive.

7. Overkill

Overkill is the excessive use of superlatives, regardless of who or what those superlatives modify. There's nothing wrong with tooting your own horn in your resume, as long as the notes you toot are actual accomplishments and not simply adjectives that proclaim to the reader how wonderful you are.

For example, instead of calling yourself a "dynamite salesperson" (which you shouldn't do unless you really did sell dynamite, because adjectives like dynamite don't belong in a resume), report that you were Salesperson of the Month for six months running.

8. Under whelming

You will need to do more in your resume than simply list the specific functions you performed in your previous jobs. What you did is obviously important. More important to an employer, though, is the impact of what you did - your accomplishments. The fact that you were the purchasing agent for a doughnut-making company is nice, but of more interest is the fact that you reduced purchasing expenditures by 15 percent during your first year.

9. Long-windedness

The extent to which a resume is "longwinded" has less to do with how long it is - whether it's a one-pager or a two-pager - and more to do with the language you use to describe your past experience. Don't fall victim to the misconception that the best way to make a mundane task appear more important is to dress it up in lofty language.

If one of your responsibilities in your last job was to check the accuracy of invoices, think twice before you write, "Ensured the numerical veracity of documents sent to customers in order to effect the collection of funds due for purchases." If you were a short-order cook, say so. Don't say, "Assisted in daily preparation of large quantities of consumable items in a fast-paced setting."

10. Editorializing

Your opinions on matters such as why a particular project didn't work out or why you had to leave a job don't really belong in a resume. In other words, don't write, "Project would have been much more successful if the birdbrain I had for a boss had let me do it my way," or this gem that actually appeared: "Reason for leaving: Boss was as twisted as a pretzel." Keep your views and sentiments to yourself, as valid as they might be.

11. Over personalizing

Apart from the basics - your name, address, and phone number - don't include in your resume any information that relates to your personal life. Don't mention your age, your height, your weight, the color of your eyes, the kind of dog you own, your marital status, the number of children you have, the condition of your health, or how many push-ups you can do. Don't talk about your hobbies (unless they are career-related or reveal some aspect of your personality that could shed positive light on your personal qualities - the fact that you run marathons, for example). Don't mention your favorite author or favorite food; an employer who spends seconds looking over your resume isn't going to care.

12. Resumespeak

The most effective resumes are written in plain, simple language. Yes, the writing style you use in your resume should be professional and businesslike, and yes, you should avoid slang and trendy words. But be equally wary of business jargon and go easy on "businessese": words and phrases such as "assisted in the facilitation of" and "optimized."