Career Central™ Advice

Résumés: Know the No-No's

Avoid these résumé (and similar cover letter) mistakes for winning results.

Draw the right attention.

Your résumé, like your cover letter, must be perfect in both appearance and content. Period. Both should catch the eye of recruiters by your credentials, not by distractions. To create an effective résumé (as well as cover letter), know the taboos, not just the to-do's.

Ready...

Colored paper. It's hard to read, hard to scan, and smacks of being too casual. Stick with white or ivory quality stationery.

Colored ink. Black. End of story.

Copier paper: Use quality paper. Don't dress your résumé and cover letter in T-shirts. Think black tie.

Fun with fonts. Keep it simple, see? No fancy fonts or ALL CAPS. 10- to 12-point Helvetica, Arial, Times Roman, or Verdana are easily scanned by both human and electronic eyes. Remember, 30 seconds or less....

Tight quarters. Don't cram your info. Leave approximately 1 inch margins and white space all around clear and concise content.

Aim...

No cover letter. "Who ARE you? And why are you applying for this job?!" Never send out a résumé without a cover letter.

Mass mailing. These documents are NOT generic or one-size-fits-all. Tailor them to the specific job opening. Research the company beforehand. Whenever possible, personalize by addressing the recruiter by name. Send signed originals, not photocopies.

Obscure Objective. Opening without a clear application summary or statement of qualifications is a fast ticket to the trash. It's the keynote.

TMI. Avoid personal info about your age, weight, health issues, marital status, politics, religion, and ethnicity. Hobbies and interests, if included, should be relevant to the job.

Autobiographies. Don't ramble, don't rehash. Get to the point, don't digress. Go for the bull's eye, not buckshot, approach. Brief is best; Think soundbites. Keep both documents to one page each for now.

Languid language. Use action words for greater punch. Pass on passive words. Don't just "work" and "do"—"implement," "organize," "deliver." Engage and keep the reader's attention. Incorporate examples and figures to back up your experience. Keep the tone professional and respectful: No slang, graphics, humor, or texting abbrev. The recruiter is not your friend, so don't be informal.

Misplaced keys. At larger companies, machines, not humans, often "read" résumés to determine qualified candidates for the first cut. Keywords are key. Check the prospective company's Web site and online ads for key words such as necessary years of experience and specific skills. If you have what it takes, say so.

Missing link. If your work history has gaps, explain why in your cover letter.

Me, me, me, me, me. It's not all about you. It's about what you can do for the company, not what the company can do for you. And leave out the pronouns.

Misfire...

Typos. BIG taboo! One of the quickest ways to end up in the trash. Your grammar and spelling should reflect your college education.

Desperation. No matter how much you may need the job, never let them see you sweat. Enthusiasm is one thing. Desperation is a turnoff.

Lying. Don't. More and more employers these days are doing background checks.

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in a nutshell:

With résumés and cover letters, there is no margin for error. Avoid:

- **Typos and inconsistency**
- **Lack of focus and clarity**
- **Wordiness / missing key words**
- **No cover letter**
- **Negative statements**
- **Passive statements and tone**
- **Wrong résumé style**
- **Self-centeredness**
- **Irrelevance**
- **Visual clutter and photos**
- **Lies or misrepresentations**

Keep it short and sweet, clear and concise.

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