

Top 10 résumé mistakes

By Hannah Nicholas, December 2007
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Résumé tips

- Always tailor your résumé to the job you're applying for.
- Keep your résumé short and concise — two-to-three pages in length.
- Provide your achievements along side your responsibilities.
- Double check spelling, grammar and contact information before sending.

A résumé is one of the most important elements in any job seeker's armoury. It's a chance to sell yourself, and get a foot in the door.

In simple terms, a résumé is a document that summarises who you are, what you've done in your career and how well you've done it. Remember, it will be used by recruiters as a tool to screen and cull. So, to increase your chances of being called for an interview, here are the top10 mistakes you should avoid.

1. Having a one-size fits all résumé

You can't just presume a one-size fits all résumé will work. Just as you would tailor your cover letter to the job you are applying for, you need to do the same with your résumé.

Don't give the hirer a reason to turf your application — make sure you address the key selection criteria and clearly show how, and why, your experience/skills fit those of the position on offer.

2. Too long or too short

A résumé should give the reader enough information to understand your background and how it relates to the position your applying for.

According to Meredith Fuller, a Melbourne-based psychologist and career change specialist, résumés should be kept short and concise at two-to-three pages in length.

"Most employers or recruiters only spend two minutes casting their eye over your résumé, so make every point count."

She said the exception would be résumés for university positions or government roles which usually require more comprehensive information.

3. Not selling yourself

In your résumé, you need to sell yourself wherever you can. Here are three key opening tactics to get off on the right foot.

***Capability statement**

This acts as an introduction to your strengths, relevant expertise and key skills (in three-to-four lines).

***Career summary**

This provides a quick snapshot of your job history.

***Key achievements**

Choose your top three or four career achievements to highlight. It's great if they can relate to the position's key selection criteria.

In short, by highlighting the above on page one of your résumé, you're hitting the hirer immediately with "what you can do", "how you would perform in the job" and "what effect your contribution would have on the bottom line".

4. Failing to highlight achievements

In any résumé you send off, you must provide your achievements along side your responsibilities. Employers don't care so much about what you've done as what you've accomplished in your roles.

Fuller says whatever you do "don't list boring job duties — outline your significant achievements and provide behavioural examples to help the employer get a picture of you doing the job".

"Show them how you operate, how you add value, and how you measure and evaluate goals."

5. Choosing wrong format

It's vital that you choose the format best suited to your circumstances.

***Chronological**

The most common way of structuring a résumé. It lists your work experience and achievements in each job, beginning with the most recent.

***Competency or functional**

This type of résumé groups your work experiences according to your skills and abilities rather than specific positions.

6. Poor presentation

Whether you're sending via e-mail or hard copy, look carefully at the presentation of your résumé.

Do

- Use good quality white or off-white paper.
- Keep fonts plain and simple (and around 12 point).
- Use bold for headings (and usually 14 point).
- Use bullet points where appropriate (ie to outline achievements).
- Use page numbers.
- Run your résumé past another pair of eyes — do they find it easy to read and visually attractive?

Don't:

- Use a tiny font size or lines of italic.
- Mix fonts.
- Use illustrations or fancy borders.
- Waste paper on a cover sheet.
- Use coloured paper or text.

7. Including irrelevant data

Research shows it's not necessary to provide the following when it comes to résumés:

- gender,
- age,
- marital status,
- nationality/religion,
- health, weight, height etc,
- photos.

By including this information, you run the risk of making your résumé look dated or having your application thrown out based on personal attributes (ie age or physical appearance) which are not relevant to your ability to do the job.

8. Omitting action words

Be sure to include adjectives and verbs to create "energy" in your résumé.

Fuller says it's imperative that you use active words. "Think descriptive words like streamlined, spearheaded, and evaluated ... and so on."

9. Spelling mistakes

There's no excuse for spelling mistakes on a résumé. Always run your document through the spell checker and have it read over by someone else before sending.

10. Incorrect contact information

You'd be surprised by the number of candidates who get their contact information wrong. As it's one of the most important parts of the résumé (what's the point of having a winning résumé if the recruiter can't get through to you?) make sure you double-check your personal details.