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Smart resumes for serious success.

The 10 Most Common Resume Blunders

By Cynthia Hanson

Over the past 15 years, I have created hundreds of interview-winning resumes for C-suite executives, directors, managers and mid-career professionals. Before I start working with new clients, I always review their "old resumes," and much to my surprise, I find that most folks make the same mistakes in how they design and write their resumes—mistakes that sell them short in a competitive job market. Here are the 10 most common resume blunders that I correct to help my clients make a *great* first impression.

#1: A cluttered presentation. A well-designed two or three-page resume is far more inviting and reader-friendly than a wall-of-words squeezed onto one page. Declutter the resume by adding generous margins, as well as white space between each position and section.

#2: Task-heavy content. A laundry list of job responsibilities won't help hiring managers understand how your skills and background relate to the positions they're trying to fill. Strike a balance between presenting duties and accomplishments that sell your capabilities.

#3: Missing metrics. There's a world of difference between managing a $100K revenue portfolio and a $100M revenue portfolio. Or leading a team of 20 software developers and a team of five. Include relevant numbers and statistics in your resume to convey the scope of your experience.

#4: A "career objective" on page 1. Recruiters don't care about your goals; they care about the talents you'd bring to the company on day one. Instead of an "Objective," include a "Career Profile" that summarizes your professional history and achievements, while positioning you for the job you want.

#5: Ineffective storytelling. Your resume should tell a cohesive story about your career, so readers get a sense of who you are, what you can do and how you stand apart from the competition. Showcase your unique brand—and key differentiators.

#6: Lame language. Eliminate "References available upon request" (a given) and "Responsible for" (too passive)—two empty phrases that don't advance your story. Other overused words to avoid: high-level, effective, hard-working, dynamic, successful and results-oriented.

#7: Spelling, grammar and punctuation errors.   Typos and other mistakes communicate two negative messages—either you lack attention to detail OR you slept through high school English class. Sloppiness will land your resume in the trash pile faster than you can say, "But I ran spellcheck!" Print out a copy of your resume and proofread it offline before you hit the "send" key.

#8: Unprofessional email address. Cutesy addresses are fine for personal use—be it "SweetPea93" or "GolfMan785." But if that email appears on your resume, it'll get you a round of laughs, not an invite to the first round of interviews. Your email is part of your brand identity. Make sure it's professional and easy to remember—ideally your first and last name.

#9: Including an exit story for each former job.   It's vital to build a compelling exit story that fits the facts and reframes your departure in an optimal way. But it doesn't belong on your resume! Save it for the interview.

#10: Forgettable font.   Times New Roman and Arial are the default fonts for most job seekers. Use a distinctive, yet conservative font, such as Verdana, to make your resume stand out from the crowd.

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Award-winning journalist Cynthia Hanson draws on her 20+ years of covering career strategy and job-search trends for leading national publications to develop resumes, cover letters, executive bios and LinkedIn Profiles that get results. For more information about how Cynthia can support you, please contact her at Cynthia@writenowresume.com or 215-661-1724.