

Tame Résumé Chaos

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While your résumé says a lot about you—your education, work history and skills—it shouldn't say too much. If a hiring manager knows your favorite color and how fast you can run a mile after reading your résumé, you should probably tidy it up.

Hiring managers and recruiters see hundreds of résumés each week and only spend between 10 and 20 seconds scanning each one. With little time and plenty of competition to choose from, hiring managers will not wade through cluttered résumés to find out more about your qualifications. A résumé that stays on point makes a good impression on the reader and can make you a serious contender for the job.

Here are a few questions to ask yourself before submitting a résumé:

Is this relevant?

Experience from a time long ago and in an unrelated field doesn't enhance your résumé.

Therefore, if you're applying for a position in pharmaceutical sales, you can omit those two years working at the pet store your junior year of high school. Feel free to include experience in a relevant field that shows how you're qualified for the job. Otherwise, don't list any experience older than 10 years.

Is it true?

Lies about previous jobs, salary history and education can come back to haunt you. You could get caught during the interview process or even after you've been hired. Employers don't want a liar on their team, so why take the risk? Stick to the facts and life will be simpler for everybody.

Is this art or a résumé?

Having too much visual distraction can make the reader doubt your professionalism. Keep fonts simple and businesslike; ornate typeface can be hard to read on computer monitors and on paper. Bold, underline or italicize your section headings, but don't do all three. And please, save the colorful borders for birthday party invitations. You want readers focusing on the text—not on the decorations.

Is there room to breathe?

Your résumé shouldn't look like a page out of a Faulkner novel. In other words, the amount of text shouldn't intimidate your reader. Include plenty of white space between sections and use bulleted lists so that the blocks of text don't run together. Doing so allows readers to scan the page with ease and gives their eyes a chance to rest.

Why am I even telling you this?

Résumés are about business. Don't include your age, height, weight or headshot. Information about your children, spouse or partner can be left off, too. Employers want to know your job qualifications, not your personal statistics.

Can I say this in fewer words?

It seems like obvious advice, but get rid of unnecessary words. Most instances of "I" and "me" are redundant because the résumé is obviously about you. Omit articles ("a," "an" and "the") where possible. Fragments are acceptable on résumés because readers just want to get to the

point. For example, “I was responsible for managing the sales team” becomes “managed sales team.” You don’t sacrifice any information, but you save time and space.

Was I really the glue of the company?

You definitely don’t want to sell yourself short on your résumé. You do, however, need to resist the temptation to list every task you performed at your previous job. Hiring managers understand that you had several responsibilities, so they want you to mention the highlights. A job description that takes up 20 lines will overshadow your real accomplishments and appear exaggerated.

Did somebody else look this over?

Even if you think your résumé is clutter-free, it never hurts to have a friend or an associate have one last look.

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