

10 Mistakes You're Making on Your Resume

Chances are good that you're making a few of these common mistakes on your resume. How many are you guilty of?

1. Relying on outdated sources of advice. Resume conventions have changed dramatically in the last 20 years. If you're reading a book that insists you use an objective on your resume or that you can't exceed one page, chances are good that you're reading something outdated (or listening to someone who hasn't hired recently).

2. Including every job you've ever had, no matter how irrelevant or long ago. A resume isn't meant to be an exhaustive accounting of every job you've ever held. It's a marketing document designed to present you in the strongest, most compelling light. That means you don't need to include every job you've ever had, or the part-time work you did on top of your regular job last year, or even your degree in an irrelevant field if you don't want to. You get to decide what you do and don't include. The only rule is that you can't make things up.

3. Listing only job duties, rather than accomplishments. Resumes that really stand out go beyond what your job description was and instead answer this question: What did you accomplish in this job that someone else might not have?

4. Including subjective descriptions. Your resume is for experience and accomplishments only. It's not the place for subjective traits, like "great leadership skills" or "creative innovator." Hiring managers generally ignore anything subjective that an applicant writes about herself, because so many people's self-assessments are wildly inaccurate; they're looking for facts.

5. Leaving out volunteer work. Sometimes during the course of an interview, I discover someone has highly relevant experience they didn't include on their resume because it was volunteer work and they thought it "didn't count." It counts! Your accomplishments are your accomplishments, even if you did the work "pro bono" rather than for pay.

6. Including inappropriate information. Information about your spouse or children, your height or weight, or your salary history doesn't belong on your resume. (And yes, people really do include these things.)

7. Getting creative at the expense of clarity. If you're thinking of trying something "creative" with your resume, like unusual colors or a non-traditional design, make sure your desire to stand out isn't getting in the way of the whole point of resume design. Here's what most hiring managers want from a resume: a concise, easy-to-scan list of what you've accomplished, organized chronologically by position, plus any particularly notable skills, all presented in a format that they can quickly scan and get the highlights. That's it. Creativity, while a nice trait, doesn't trump those requirements, so make sure whatever format you use works in those ways.

8. Having tiny inconsistencies. If you want to come across as someone who takes care in your work and is attentive to detail, pay attention to the small things: Do you have periods after some bullet points but not after others? Do you use consistent verb tenses throughout? Do you randomly start using a different font or type size? These things seem nitpicky, but even small inconsistencies can jump out to an attentive reader.

9. Sending your resume without a cover letter. If you're applying for jobs without including a compelling cover letter--customized to the specific opportunity--you're missing out on one of the most effective ways to grab an employer's attention. A cover letter is your opportunity to make a compelling case for yourself as a candidate, totally aside from what's in your resume.

10. Believing every piece of resume advice anyone gives you. Yes, it may sound funny coming from me, but the reality is that you can give your resume to 10 different people who are all qualified to give resume advice, and you'll get 10 different sets of recommendations: Use this font, use that font, don't go over one page, two pages are fine, objectives are required, objectives are silly--it can be enough to drive you crazy.

The reality is, there are few hard and fast universal rules aside from the obvious (no typos, no illegible fonts, no 10-page rambles, no inappropriate sharing of your personal life). But there are trends--conventions that are gaining majority support. For instance, most hiring managers agree that functional resumes are frustrating and possibly hiding something. And two-page resumes have become completely acceptable these days. But even these trends aren't flat-out rules. The best you can do is to get a feel for the types of things people care about and why and make choices that make sense for you and the job you want.

Alison Green writes the popular [Ask a Manager](#) blog where she dispenses advice on career, job search, and management issues. She's also the author of [Managing to Change the World: The Nonprofit Leader's Guide to Getting Results](#) and former chief of staff of a successful nonprofit organization, where she oversaw day-to-day staff management, hiring, firing, and employee development. She now teaches other managers how to manage for results.