

AVOIDING THE CIRCULAR FILE

The 10 Most Common Résumé Mistakes And How To Avoid Them

Putting your best foot forward is critical in today's highly-competitive employment marketplace. You must do everything possible to give yourself an edge.

What may have worked last year isn't good enough Today!

CAREER DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES, LLC has prepared this guide to help you attain that competitive edge in obtaining interviews.

With over 35 years and thousands of résumés' experience, we know what it takes to help you *consistently out perform your competition* and **get you interviews.**

**You never get a second chance
to make a first impression**

**You will get the interview by avoiding the most common mistakes
in writing and preparing résumés.**

So, you've written your résumé, printed it, posted it on-line, and e-mailed it to prospective employers. But you haven't received any responses. What could be wrong?

Perhaps there were better, more qualified applicants. To the contrary *it's much more likely that you have committed one or more of the most common résumé mistakes. Any one of these errors could cause your résumés to be "circular filed" without further consideration.*

Mark Berkowitz of CAREER DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES, LLC, a CERTIFIED PROFESSIONAL RÉSUMÉ WRITER, NATIONAL CERTIFIED CAREER COUNSELOR, CERTIFIED EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEW PROFESSIONAL AND INTERNATIONALLY CERTIFIED JOB & CAREER TRANSITION COACH, says that any of these mistakes could *disqualify* your résumé within the *first 10 seconds!* "On average, an employer will spend about 10-15 seconds scanning (*eye-balling*) your résumé to decide which ones merit more careful evaluation and further consideration." Try it yourself. Give your résumé a 10-second scan. What did you notice? "What's the most significant detail that caught your attention?" "Failing the *Scannability Test*," says Berkowitz, "may *doom your résumé to rejection.*"

#1 Mistakes

READ YOUR RÉSUMÉ SEVERAL TIMES before finalizing it. Check spelling, of course. Use a computer spell checker, *but don't assume that's all you must do.* Computers generally won't check proper names, technical terms, numbers and dates. **TIP: Read your résumé backwards, one word at a time. You'll see it differently.** If you use a professional service, that's fine, but still check it carefully. They are human too. The single most common mistake made on résumés is uncorrected spelling or typing errors. They tend to be the *kiss of death* for a résumé, ruling you out immediately. At least, you lose a lot of points quickly. If your résumé is being *computer scanned*, you've probably missed the boat completely because the software is doing a key-word search and your misspelled experience doesn't fit the search parameters. For example: Micosoft is *not* Microsoft; *Manger* is a wonderful word during the December holidays, but it isn't *Manager*. One of my

colleagues actually came across this *boo-boo*: CERTIFIED PUBIC ACCOUNTANT. Typographical errors tell an employer that you are inattentive or *sloppy*. Two or three proof-readings by several people is the best prevention. If you are aware of an error on your résumé, have it redone. Under no circumstance should you try to make a hand correction or “sing and dance” it away.

THERE ARE NO SECOND CHANCES !

GET IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME !

#2 Scannability

Make sure your résumé looks THE BEST YOU CAN MAKE IT. Your résumé must look good to the human eye and be easy to read. We call it scannability. The reader / decision-maker must be able to find critical information (make that: *what they are looking for*) quickly. Additionally, is the résumé imaged properly? Does it have the look of entry-level, middle management, executive level, or some element unique to your specialized profession? *A mis-match between the overall look of your résumé and the level of the position to which you are seeking will get your document circular-filed PDQ.* **TIP:** Look at the page, instead of the words, and ask yourself whether key factors **jump out at you**. Are there visual hooks? A scannable résumé will have visual hooks that grab the eye without having to read the entire page. This can be created by text enhancements, bullets or indents. Will the reader’s eye be led to the critical point that you need to make in the shortest amount of time? Is the layout clear and well organized? The format and layout of the résumé help to communicate to an employer how much you care about this job and about yourself. Some of the things that contribute to a poor visual image include: lack of clear categories, lack of intelligent structure; styles that are inappropriate to the profession; mismatch between styling and professional level; poor printing and paper quality. Does your résumé meet the KWS factor? KWS stands for **KEY WORD SEARCHABLE**. Does your résumé contain the appropriate buzz words to persuasively communicate that you meet the qualifications for hire? Many organizations utilize applicant tracking system software. So along with ensuring that your résumé is attractive to human eyes, make sure that your layout and wording will effectively enable the computer to select YOUR résumé out of the hundreds of other candidates’ submissions.

#3 Summary

In a ten second scan, the top of a résumé will be reviewed first and most thoroughly. A summary or *positioning statement* provides a focus point for the reader. Here is where you ‘*brand*’ yourself. You can’t rely on someone reading the entire page to get your message. A summary permits you to grab the readers’ attention early, and *focus* attention on the points you have selected for them to remember about you. The summary is a mini-sales presentation. It tells the employer right away who you are and what you are about. The summary should persuade the reader that you should be considered for the position. It can include both professional and personal qualifications. **TIP:** Try not to overweigh the summary with generic personal characteristics like “detail-oriented” or “interpersonal skills”. These are important, but an employer also wants to know what content or particular expertise you bring to the job. Remember that “All employers listen to radio station WIFM; standing for WHAT’S IN IT FOR ME!” Make sure that you answer the employer’s implied question: “**Why Should I be interested in YOU?**”.

Your summary should effectively sell your candidacy in those first crucial seconds.

#4 Responsibilities: no Accomplishments: yes

The word responsibility implies that this is what you were assigned, but says nothing about what you *actually did*. What you actually do is often very different from what you were supposed to do. At CAREER DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES we purposefully avoid the words “duties included” or “responsible for” like the plague. What’s more, when you use a phrase like “responsible for ...”, you make yourself *passive*, removing yourself from the action. **TIP:** Why not begin with the ACTION VERB. “Produced monthly activity report”, rather than “Responsible for producing monthly activity report”. Briefly describing the things you have

improved, created, developed, initiated etc. will tell an employer more about you than the phrase “*Responsibilities included ...*”.

Try using the **P A R** formula: **P**-roblem, **A**-ction, **R**-esult to describe *your* accomplishments.

To really add *persuasive punch* try to either quantify or qualify your achievements and accomplishments.

#5 **Too Wordy**

The original definition for résumé is a summing up, a brief outline of your job-related abilities and accomplishments. Avoid long narrative descriptions. Bullet items should *usually* be a maximum of two or three lines. With the exception of academics, technical consultants, or highly experienced candidates with lots of relevant experience, more than two pages *might* be too much. Similarly, less than a page tells an employer that you have little to offer. One to two pages is usually perfect for most résumés. Bear this in mind however:

**THE LENGTH OF A RÉSUMÉ IS PREDICATED ON
“*WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO DO OPTIMAL JUSTICE TO YOUR BACKGROUND.*”**

#6 **Gimmicky**

Brochures, fancy inks, pictures and the like, don't work *unless they are appropriate* for YOUR profession and level. A résumé is a professional business communication, and should be businesslike and professional, marketing your abilities to the person who has the power and authority to hire you.

#7 **Gaps, Omissions and Black Holes**

Employers like to follow the chronology of career progress. Make it easy for them to do so. It's perfectly okay to have periods of time when you did not work or attend school. But those times need to be accounted for. An unaccounted period of time could lead an employer to wonder: **What were you incarcerated for? Why were you in rehab? Was this candidate committed to a mental health institution?** You certainly don't want to have your résumé screened-out for something innocent such as attending advanced training or caring for a sick family member.

#8 **Irrelevancies**

What information does an employer need to evaluate your potential? Providing age, race, gender, religious and marital information opens up the possibility of hiring discrimination. Do your personal hobbies demonstrate critical qualifications that this employer absolutely needs? Filling the space with *unnecessary information drains attention* from the message you really need to deliver: your strengths.

#9 **Lack of an Overall Strategy**

A clear idea of how you want to use your résumé is crucial in finding the right job. A résumé is a marketing tool. It needs to work for you at all four phases of the hiring process:

- 1) Avoid having your résumé screened out and instead, making it to the 'keeper pile'.
- 2) Getting further consideration and earning you an invitation to interview for the position.
- 3) Peaking the interviewer's curiosity and guiding him/her to ask the questions that enable you to deliver your most 'sellable' experiences and accomplishments instead of merely repeating data printed on your résumé. (remember: *if* the interviewer / company doesn't know that you excel at something those achievements and experiences can't help tip the scales in your favor.
- 4) Help the hiring manager aggressively pitch your candidacy to the 'higher-ups', those with the full power and authority to actually hire you and pay you at your full value.

Format, content and layout mistakes can be traced back to a lack of early planning. Before writing your résumé, *think through what you want it to do for you*. Be clear about the job you are seeking. Avoid details that will distract the hiring authority from the image that you want to project. You want the job. Don't try to write '*your best essay*' or your employment auto-biography. Structure the sections, with strategically worded titles, and their sequencing on '*... building a solid case that will ultimately lead to the verdict of :*

“you’re hired”.

Always keep in mind that as you approach the job market, you become the *‘product to be sold’* in addition to being its #1 sales person. Focus on what you have to ‘sell’ (capabilities, accomplishments, experience) that will be of greatest interest to the potential employer, presenting it where it will be seen immediately, and formatted in a way that ensures that this information will **not** be missed. With that being said, unless you are planning on a position within Academia, most employers really don’t care where and when you earned your degree (exceptions: Harvard or Wharton M.B.A. or M.D. from Johns Hopkins). Therefore putting your Education section at the top of your résumé is a terrible waste of ‘prime real estate’! (If you’re a recent grad, putting your Education at the résumé’s beginning delivers two disastrous subliminal messages: 1) if your diploma is the best that you have to offer, then you don’t have much value to offer; 2) you’re a brand spankin’ newbe without any experience, why bother with you?) Your best strategy is to focus on your accomplishments and / or achievements. After all they will actually prove that you are good at what you do.

The entire employment market is driven by the exchange of value. What can you bring to the prospective employer in exchange for your compensation package? Why should this organization be interested in you?

Here are five questions that your résumé must answer:

- 1) Who are you as a professional, and what value would you bring to the company?
- 2) What (*quantified* or *qualified*) results can you deliver, that would benefit the organization?
- 3) What are your major areas of expertise that tend to produce results?
- 4) Where have you delivered these results in the past?
- 5) Why would I be better off having YOU on the team rather than someone else? / What can YOU do for me that another candidate, with a similar skills/experience mix, *couldn’t* do?

#10 **Misdirected**

A résumé may be misdirected in the *writing* or in the *sending*. Jobs can be classified into different levels and categories such as entry, mid-level, professional, and executive. Therefore a résumé should be both written and formatted to convey experience *at the appropriate level*. If you are hearing that you are overqualified, misdirection is probably the cause. Directing your résumé to the right person’s attention is an important part of the job-search process. No matter how wonderful your résumé — if you are sending it to the wrong person it just won’t be (*working for you*) read. Do your very best to discover exactly who the hiring manager is and their correct title and use it not only in the address, but also your cover letter / E-note. After all, how much attention do YOU pay to a piece of mail that’s addressed to ‘Dear Occupant’ or ‘To Whom It May Concern’?

The use of effective résumé / job search strategies
will undeniably have a cumulative effect
on the ultimate success of your job search / career transition campaign.

One goes to a medical professional to stay / get healthy;
a legal professional to when the need arises, and an accounting
professional to ensure the best outcome for tax returns.

Prudent drivers make use of GPS and radar detectors while travelling.
***Does it make sense to initiate a career transition blind and
under-equipped?***

CAREER DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES provides a no-charge résumé evaluation. This service can save you both time as well as money in addition to helping you get the interviews you deserve. Just bring, fax, or send in your résumé. We will offer feedback and well-crafted career success strategies.

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Berkowitz holds a Master's Degree in Career Development and is a National Certified Career Counselor, Certified Professional Résumé Writer; Internationally Certified Job and Career Transition Coach, and one of six dozen individuals credentialed as a Certified Employment Interview Professional. His work appears in nearly two dozen books on résumé /cover letter writing and winning interview strategies. He has been spotlighted on WCBS television in "*Acing The Interview*", named Professional of the Year by the Podcast Business Network, and highlighted as a frequent guest expert on Empire Radio.

Berkowitz has been recognized as "... *one of the leading résumé writers in the U.S. today*" in Professional Résumés for Executives, Managers, and Other Administrators. Wendy Enelow, Founding President of the CAREER MANAGEMENT ALLIANCE has acknowledged Mark as "... *one of the most talented career counselors I have ever met.*" He can be contacted at (910) 833-5013 or CarDevRes1@gmail.com.