

# Conscious Careering

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**Beware your trusty spellchecker! It can be your worst enemy in preparing a foolproof résumé**

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Hands down, the all-time funniest typo I've seen on a résumé was from a gentleman who sent me his materials several years ago, proudly showcasing his many years of executive management experience, including two years of tenure serving as "Chairman of the Butt."

When I finally stopped laughing, which wasn't for a considerable length of time, I was suddenly overcome with intense pangs of sympathy for this individual. More than likely, this fellow had spent many painstaking hours crafting his résumé and had sent out hundreds of copies to various employers around town he was targeting in his job search. And yet, despite his considerable qualifications and talents, each of these submissions was utterly doomed from the start—thanks to an embarrassing typo.

Think it can't happen to you? The statistics, unfortunately, indicate otherwise. Most studies (and my own anecdotal experience) suggest that at least half of all résumés and cover letters contain significant spelling errors. Whether due to a declining interest in the importance of writing skills, in general, or the increasing influence of casual communication methods such as e-mail, more and more job hunters seem to be growing lackadaisical with their proofreading efforts—and trusting that spellcheckers will intercept all of their mistakes.

When authoring your own job search materials, therefore, it's critical you keep in mind that these technologies *only catch and fix words that don't exist!* They don't call your attention to legitimate words that have been used inappropriately or out of context. So if spellcheckers continue to be your main line of defense against typos, be warned, mistakes can and will slip through the cracks. Rely on them too much, and you might find yourself keeping company with the individual I encountered who (in a twist worthy of Freud) is aggressively "writhing" to employers in search of new opportunities. Or perhaps you'll be more like the executive with the knack for seeing the "big pitcher," the administrative assistant offering excellent "faxing and coping" skills, or one of the numerous citizens of the "Untied States" whose résumés are floating around out there. I even just came across a job seeker who prides herself

on being highly "thrustworthy," but to be fair, this last one wasn't the spellchecker's fault!

The good news, however, is that spelling errors are by no means inevitable. By following a few simple precautions, you can ensure that all of the materials you send out are 100% error-free:

● **Know the limitations of spellcheckers and rely on them sparingly.** As discussed, the first step to a typo-proof document is to remind yourself that spellcheckers don't protect you in cases where you substitute the wrong word by mistake. So assume a little human fallibility will creep into each document you write and that human quality-control steps will be necessary to guard against this occurrence.

● **Have other people proofread your materials before sending them out.** Even professional writers know better than to edit their own work, since their eyes tend to fill in missing letters and blow right past obvious mistakes. For this reason, it is imperative you get into the habit of asking one or more people you trust to go through your job search documents (especially your résumé) and provide feedback. These people will approach your text with fresh eyeballs and be much more likely to spot potential mistakes. And if you know that spelling is not your strong suit, in general, it's even *more* critical to take this step with each piece of correspondence you send out.

● **Avoid writing your job search materials in a single sitting.** It stands to reason that many otherwise-avoidable typos occur when people sit down and try to bang out their job search materials in a single, marathon session. While it may feel good to get your résumé "over with" and begin sending it out to employers, this kind of haste usually leads to the proverbial waste—and you'll be sorely disappointed if you discover significant flaws in your documents down the road. It is therefore a far better strategy to complete your writing tasks over several short sessions, since each time you come back to your work, you'll be refreshed and much more likely to notice mistakes you previously overlooked.

By following these three simple steps, you'll ensure your résumé passes muster with even the most anal-retentive hiring managers—and that your résumé doesn't end up as a "bad example" cited in a column somewhere. And in the event you're still wondering how anyone could *possibly* slip up and write "Chairman of the Butt" on their résumé, here's the kicker: the individual was actually the former Chairman of the Butte, Montana Chamber of Commerce!

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