

Conscious Careering



Stop the Insanity; 5 Essential Tips for Resume Success

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Should a resume be only a single page long or is two pages acceptable? Should you include all of your past work experience or merely the last 10-15 years? Should you explain gaps in your employment history or leave them alone, hoping employers won't notice them? Is including a few personal hobbies on your resume a wise idea, or does doing so make you look unprofessional?

Despite what anybody may tell you, there are no "right answers" to these questions. Having written resumes professionally for the past 18 years, I can assure you that even the experts fight constantly about the best practices of modern resume methodology and the strategies professionals should use to package themselves on paper for best results. At the end of the day, writing resumes is more art than science, and every hiring manager and recruiter you'll meet will have a different opinion about them. So if you think you're going to be able to develop a resume immune from criticism, you're fooling yourself. And you'll end up wasting precious time monkeying around with your "brochure" instead of getting down to the much more important task at hand—selling yourself.

So if you've found yourself paralyzed by the sea of conflicting resume advice out there, I'd suggest you follow these five simple guidelines—since they're about the only things you'll find the majority of hiring managers agree on.

Guideline #1: Make sure your resume looks good. Now granted, the word "good" is highly subjective and different people have different aesthetic preferences in terms of how they like to see resumes organized. But basically, this first rule of thumb simply means that your resume shouldn't look like a train wreck. Don't use font smaller than 10 points. Don't use flashy colors or a wacky typeface like Jester. Don't use tiny margins or cram so much information on each page that it resembles microfiche. Beyond that, though, there are millions of perfectly acceptable layout choices you can follow in terms of how you present your information. Any standard resume template will do. The goal? Just don't trigger the reader's gag reflex before they read a single word on the page!

Guideline #2: Make sure your resume is free from typos. This rule, sadly, never goes out of

style. While folks may disagree on other things, there's no "pro-sloppiness" camp out there and no faster way to get your resume booted out of the pile than to allow a few careless mistakes to sneak in. So enlist a few trusted friends to tear your resume apart, looking for errors and inconsistencies. And above all, don't trust your spell-checker. Remember, your computer will be just as happy with you referring to yourself as a "Parole Manger" as it will "Payroll Manager."

Guideline #3: Make sure your resume has a clear focus. While formal "objective statements" have become a bit passé, you'll definitely want to include some form of headline or short summary at the top of your resume that clearly calls out the type of work you're targeting. Employers don't like to guess what you want to be when you grow up and don't have the time to ponder where you might possibly fit within their organization. So kick your presentation off with a strong statement indicating the type of role you're seeking. And yes, this means you'll likely need several customized resume versions.

Guideline #4: Make sure your resume includes all the right keywords. This one's the biggie. Given that most resumes have to survive an initial keyword-based filtration process, conducted by either a computer scanner or HR screener, you need to make 100% sure your document is packed with all the right language and terminology. Sounds simple, I know, but I've found that the vast majority of professionals fail to include at least a few critical buzzwords in their materials, simply because they're too close to what they do for a living. So study job ads carefully to make sure you haven't left out any critical skills, competencies, and industry jargon your ideal employers will be targeting.

Guideline #5: Make sure your resume highlights your top accomplishments. Last but not least, you need your resume (if possible) to show that you have been a GOOD or GREAT employee throughout your career—not just, well, an employee. If your current piece merely lists a bunch of boring, repetitive job duties, instead of actual results you've achieved, the odds aren't as good of getting an employer excited to talk with you. So strive to turn your resume into a "personal highlight reel" showcasing your most impressive achievements to date, studded with facts, figures, and other colorful details.

At the end of the day, if your resume passes these five basic tests, you'll be "good to go" and ready to start landing interviews—while your competitors continue to spend months agonizing over their materials, trying to please everybody!

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