

5 ERRORS THAT YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO MAKE WHEN YOU WRITE YOUR RESUME

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www.distinctiveweb.com

resumes@distinctiveweb.com

(800) 644-9694

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Myth #1: Resumes should be only one, or at the most, two pages.

In most cases, this is true. It is the rare reviewer of resumes who, when being completely honest, will tell you that he or she spends more than a few seconds in the first review of a resume. Unless your resume captures immediate attention through an eye-appealing design and succinct, compelling language, your resume will be screened out after just 15 seconds. With this reality in mind, imagine the thoughts of the reviewer when he or she receives a four- or five-page resume, with another 100 resumes waiting for review right behind it. Clearly, the odds of your resume capturing attention and being read increase when the length is limited to one or two pages.

Are there exceptions to this rule? Absolutely!

While it is true that with each additional page you reduce your chances of your resume being read thoroughly, for many executives, contract workers, consultants, and technical professionals it is unrealistic and nearly impossible to compress years of experience into one or two pages.

When attempted, important achievements are left out to make room for a full chronology of the career history and education. What is left is a boring listing of companies, positions, and dates that are virtually guaranteed to turn off the reader and land your resume in the circular file.

A better strategy is to write your resume with exactly as much detail and description as is needed to persuasively convince the reader that you are the ideal candidate to solve his or her problems – to compel the reader to pick up the phone and call you for an interview. While this is sometimes a difficult balance to strike, you should review and edit your resume with a very discriminating eye toward reducing unnecessary wordiness. Every word in your resume should have a purpose. Items that can be presented as a list – continuing education courses, technical summaries, associations and memberships, etc. – can often be included in an addendum to the resume that may or may not be used as appropriate. Within the resume, use succinct, dynamic, action-oriented language to convey your ability to add value to the reader’s company and you will capture and hold attention through three or even more pages.

Myth #2: All resumes should include a clearly stated objective.

It is essential that your resume is audience-focused – it must succinctly communicate that you understand the employer’s needs and that you are uniquely qualified to meet those needs. While the use of an objective is a controversial issue, at its basis, an objective tells the reader what you want from him or her (focused on YOUR needs rather than the employers’). A popular and often more effective alternative to the objective, the qualifications summary, allows you to establish focus for the résumé while summarizing the key qualifications and value you offer the employer.

This is a subtle but critical difference – one that may weigh heavily in opening the door to an interview. While an objective is both appropriate and effective in some cases, for example, career changers or new graduates with little or no work experience in the targeted field, experiment with the qualifications summary as a strong alternative.

Myth #3: Resumes should thoroughly describe the responsibilities of each position.

The absolute most important element of your resume is your value proposition. Your unique ability to solve business problems, meet challenging goals, and produce desired results should be the focus of your qualifications summary (see above) and this focus should be supported by proof throughout your career. How better to do this than through achievement-oriented, results-focused descriptions of your career history?

While employers and recruiters will want to know the scope of your position (number of direct reports, amounts of budgets managed, areas of management authority, etc.) this is most effectively communicated within the context of the challenges you faced, the actions you took, and the results of your actions. “Responsibilities” only tell the reader what you were supposed to do, not what you actually did do. Use powerful, active language to concisely tell the reader the “**story**” behind your most recent or relevant positions. By documenting your consistent ability to produce results and solve problems you will demonstrate your ability to produce similar results in the future.

Myth #4: Resumes should include only the last ten years of experience.

Content of your resume should be strategically selected to support your focus and value proposition. While it is true that readers of your resume will be most interested in your most recent experience, there is often value in including experience further back in your history. Perhaps your early career includes work for well-known, prestigious companies. Perhaps you want to document the full scope of your cross-industry experience, much of which occurred in your early career. Perhaps you believe some valuable networking opportunities may come out of your experience 15 or 20 years ago. Or perhaps your most impressive accomplishments were in a position you held 12 years ago.

In any case, if your career history is lengthy, it will be apparent to the reader that your career did not suddenly materialize ten years ago, so there is little harm and many benefits to summarizing this early experience.

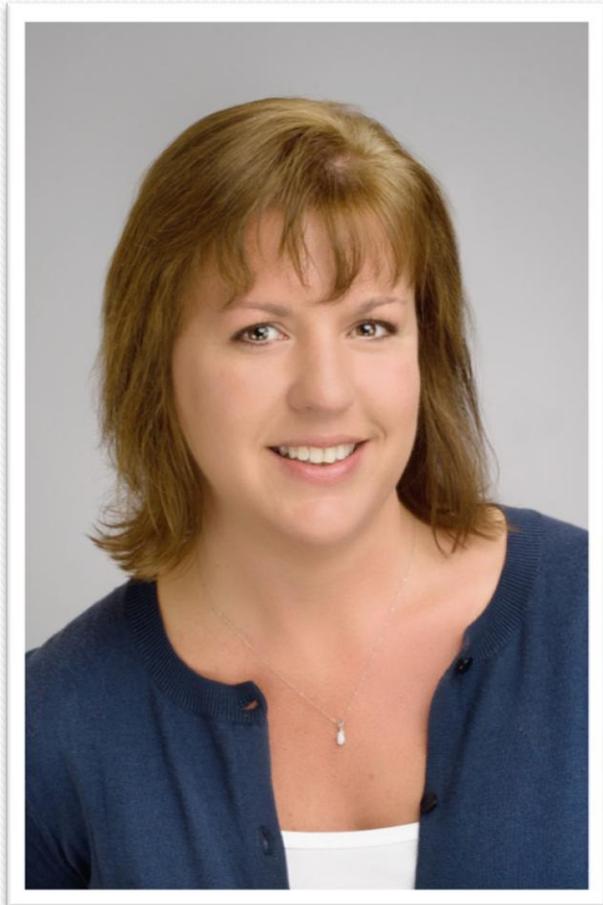
Of course, this does not mean that you must give equal page weight to your early career. If you feel early dates will be used to screen you out, subtly leave them out of your early career summary. If some early career positions have more strategic relevance than others, give them more emphasis in your summary. Think carefully about the content of your resume. If there is solid reasoning behind your desire to present early experience, than do so.

Myth #5: Resumes should include personal information, to indicate the many dimensions to your life and interests.

There is no way to predict the personal biases of the individuals who will read your resume. The first and primary way that an employer uses a resume is to screen candidates out; don't give them any reason! Professional memberships and related volunteer work should often be included but religious affiliations, family status, social club memberships, and hobbies have no place on a resume.

The only exception to this is when you are preparing a resume specifically written to appeal to a single individual who you are absolutely certain would be fascinated in your piloting license or passion for golf. Even then, be careful; you never know where your resume will be passed. However, if you are certain that your personal information will help you to break the ice and build rapport, you may have a valid reason for including it.

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