

25 Things You Should Never Include on a Resume

By HR World Editors on December 18, 2007

Applying for a new job comes with its fair share of rejections, setbacks, frustrations and perhaps even lonely periods of unemployment. If you've been turned down for position after position, you could be getting desperate and may want to shake things up a bit so that your résumé will stand out from the piles of others stacked quietly in HR. Before you decide to get too creative, there are some rules to résumé etiquette that you should follow. Read below for the 25 things that you should *never* include on a professional résumé.

- 1. What You Hated About Your Last Job:** If you turn your résumé into a ranting session, you're starting off on the wrong foot. During an interview, the hiring manager will most likely ask you why you left your last job, but you can use this challenge to remain positive. Explain that you wanted to work with a company that promoted more mobility within the business or that you felt your strengths weren't adequately utilized at your last job.
- 2. What You Hated About Your Last Boss or Co-Workers:** Even if your last boss really acted like a tyrant or no one in the office could stand that jerk next to the water cooler, complaining about the past only makes you look like the bad guy. Showing that you are able to work with all kinds of people will take you far in the business world.
- 3. Irrelevant Job Experience:** Job experience that is unrelated to the position you're applying for only clutters your resume and irritates the HR department. Did your lawn-mowing gig or high-school job as a checker at the grocery store really prepare you to be a PR professional? There are other ways to prove your people skills, so stick with the jobs and internships that are most relevant.
- 4. Sexual Preference:** Your sexual preference has no relevance on how well you can perform the job. Leave it out when writing up your résumé, because according to Emurse.com, "discrimination still exists in the hiring process, and [including this information] may lead to a premature and completely unwarranted disposal of your resume."
- 5. Religion:** Discussing religion in the workplace is another big no-no for Americans. Including your religion, or lack thereof, on a résumé is too controversial and is irrelevant to the job. So unless you're applying for a job at a religious institution, exclude this information.
- 6. Every Job You've Had Since You Were 16:** Once you've been a member of the workforce for a few years, it's safe to say that you can exclude those babysitting jobs you had when you were in high school. Employers look for relevant, recent work experience that will have prepared you for the current position for which you are applying.
- 7. Age:** Like it or not, some hiring managers will discriminate against employees based on their age. Technically, this kind of discrimination is illegal, but if you seem too young or too old to do the job, you may not even get an interview — despite what the rest of the résumé says
- 8. Political Identity:** Again, asking your future employer to acknowledge your political leanings is just too controversial. Unless you're attempting to become the next big pundit, it's no one's business if you're überconservative or irrevocably liberal.
- 9. Lies About Job Experience:** If you haven't worked in a managerial position for more than five years, you'll be outed with a simple phone call to your last boss and immediately disqualified from the rest of the hiring process. If you feel uncomfortable about your lack of skill, focus on the positive and show how other great qualities would make you a great manager or supervisor.
- 10. Lies About Educational Background:** If you lie about where you went to high school, the hiring manager might not find out, but if you fake the fact that you have higher degrees than you really do, someone is bound to discover your lie. Background checks are standard at most offices, and even if you get the job, your lack of skill will quickly be revealed.
- 11. Bad Grammar:** Bad grammar absolutely does not belong on a résumé. It shows that you are lazy, uneducated and don't care enough about the job to pay attention to detail. Even if you think you have great grammar skills, it's best to let someone else look over your résumé as a precaution.
- 12. Hobbies:** While some employers like to see that interviewees are active in the community or have won nonprofessional awards, no one really wants to know that you love knitting with your grandmother or were named the beer-chugging contest winner in college. When in doubt, leave it out.

- 13. Social Security Number:** As a safety precaution, do not include your Social Security number on your résumé. Chances are, your résumé could be floating around a busy HR office where anyone could pick it up.
- 14. Photograph:** JobFairy.com reports that hiring departments "legally cannot consider your picture in determining if you are to be interviewed, or hired," and that "many companies won't even consider résumés that are submitted with a picture to ensure that they are in compliance with [the Equal Opportunity Employer]" legislation. Keep in mind, however, that if you are applying for jobs overseas, photographs may be the norm on résumés.
- 15. Physical Characteristics:** Just as you should never submit a photograph along with your résumé, it's also best to leave out your physical characteristics, such as your height, weight and hair color, in writing. Describing yourself as a "hot blonde" is asking for trouble; conversely, overweight job seekers are sometimes unfairly discriminated against.
- 16. Health Issues:** Money-Zine.com reports that "an employer has no legal right to know your health status. The only health-related questions that an employer can ask are job related." If you and your doctor feel that your health is adequate enough to complete your job duties as expected, then your health issues are no one else's business.
- 17. Information About Your Family Members:** Whether or not you're married or have children does not belong on a résumé. Some supervisors automatically assume that a parent of small children will be unavailable to work odd hours, but you should be the one to make that call, not them.
- 18. Boring Words:** Instead of writing that you are a "dedicated, interesting person," jazz up your vocabulary to stand apart from the crowd. In general, action words are best. Also, use a thesaurus if you're stuck trying to find unique synonyms.
- 19. Negative Thoughts, Words or Ideas:** Even if you have a hard time believing in your strengths, your résumé is not the place to show weakness. If you know that you're not a born leader, consider writing that you work well in groups or that you take direction well. Putting a positive spin on yourself will help the hiring manager see you that way also.
- 20. Blanket Statements:** Some companies require applicants to send in their salary requests when they apply for a job; however, asking for a six-figure salary "and not a penny less" marks you as being stubborn and difficult work with. You never know what kinds of negotiations can arise in the person-to-person interview, so keep your options open and avoid making blanket statements.
- 21. Criminal Record:** While it's generally best to be honest, including any mention of a criminal record, however insignificant it seems to you, is not advisable for a résumé. If the HR department has a policy on criminal histories, they'll ask during the interview.
- 22. Prejudices:** If you harbor any prejudices against certain groups or individuals, it's best to keep that to yourself (or consider counseling). Advertising the fact that you don't work well with others is not going to get you the job. Office managers want employees who can blend into the workplace and relate to their co-workers in a civilized manner.
- 23. A Messy Format:** In this day and age of advanced but easy-to-use formatting systems and computer programs, there is no excuse for a résumé with messy indents, unequal spacing and other formatting errors. If you're hopelessly inept at working with computers, ask a friend for help.
- 24. Low GPAs:** Unless you're fresh out of college and looking for your first big job, don't bother including your GPA. A good track record in your employment history will go much further in impressing the hiring department than a GPA that shows you got A's and B's in psychology eight years ago. This rule holds true especially if you had a low GPA in school.
- 25. Sarcasm:** Sarcasm does not often translate well through business writing, and even if the hiring manager does get it, he or she probably won't appreciate it. Résumés and the interview process are not appropriate outlets to release your offbeat irony, since you don't know how it will be received and it's just plain inappropriate.

When creating a résumé, it's generally best to leave out overly personal information like your marital status, physical characteristics, Social Security number and any other attributes that could be controversial. Ask someone you trust to edit your résumé for grammar mistakes, typographical errors and formatting discrepancies to make sure the hiring department can focus on your skills and experience — not your carelessness.