



Create a lasting impression.

There are two ways to set your résumé apart from the many others potential employers may see: make your résumé perfect (See: "Résumés: The Basics"), or have it riddled with mistakes. When creating that lasting impression, it's important to know what not to do in order to avoid committing résumé and cover letter disasters.

Preparation.

Colored paper. Using colors other than white or ivory can make the résumé hard to read and hard to scan. Colored paper can also make the résumé seem unprofessional. Match your résumé and cover letter.

No colored ink. Black only.

Paper weight. Dress up your résumé with quality paper. Spend the extra dollar to go the extra mile.

No Comic Sans. Simplicity is key. Don't get too fancy or crazy. Avoid ALL CAPS. 10- or 12-point Helvetica, Times New Roman, Verdana, or Arial can be scanned easily by electronic or human eyes.

Don't cram. Give your info enough room to breathe. If you cram it together, it will take away from the readability. Leave at least 1/2" margins.

Send off.

Missing cover letter. Don't be the mysterious person without reason. A cover letter can answer the questions, "Who are you?" and "Why are you applying for this position?" Avoid sending out a résumé without a cover letter.

Résumés: What Not To Do

Guidelines on what not to do in your résumé and cover letter.

Details, details. Résumés should not be seen as one-size-fits-all. Tailor them to fit the exact position. Do your homework on the organization beforehand. If possible, address your cover letter to a specific person. Send signed originals and not photocopies.

Don't be vague. Be sure to open with a clear summary or statement of your credentials.

Don't go there. Avoid including personal info about your age, marital status, weight, health issues, politics, religion, and ethnicity. Any hobbies and interests you include should be relevant to the job.

Don't ramble. Don't ramble or repeat your résumé in your cover letter. Get straight to the point. Remember, you only have a few short paragraphs to make it clear why you're the one for the job. Keep your cover letter and résumé to one page each.

Watch your language. Use action, not passive, words to engage and keep the reader's attention. Include relevant examples and figures to back up your experience. Keep your tone professional and respectful – no slang, graphics, humor, or texting abbreviations.

Don't hide your skills. Sometimes at larger companies, machines "read" résumés to determine qualified candidates. Check the company's website and online ads for key words such as necessary years of experience and specific skills.

History. If your work history has gaps, explain why in your cover letter.

Simply put:

Avoid these mistakes when writing your cover letter and résumé:

- Typos, lack of clarity, and inconsistencies.
- Rambling, wordiness, or missing key words.
- Negative statements.
- Crazy or fancy fonts.
- Passive voice and tone.
- Irrelevance.
- Lies or misinterpretations.
- Personal info about your age, marital status, weight, health issues, politics, religion, and ethnicity.

Avoid using pronouns. Keep your audience in mind. Your cover letter should be all about what benefits you can contribute to the company.

Definite no-no's.

Typos. Spelling and grammar mistakes are the fastest ways to make it into the trash. You should reflect your college education.

Don't seem desperate. No matter how much you may need the job, don't let your audience know that. Enthusiasm is one thing, desperation is another.

Don't lie. Background checks are becoming more and more a prominent part of the interviewing process, so don't ruin your chances by lying.

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