

The Washington Post

Tiny Typos Can Add Up To a Big X On Your Résumé

By Michelle Singletary
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Dear sir or madman . . .

Oops. Make that "madam."

If I had made such a mistake on my cover letter, should that disqualify me for consideration for a job?

Should someone's résumé get tossed in the trash if he or she mistakenly wrote "Graphic designer seeking no-profit career"?

Well, it appears that in this tight job market, those tiny mistakes could keep you jobless, according to a survey by Accountemps, a staffing-services firm specializing in accounting and finance.

In interviews with 150 senior executives from the nation's 1,000 largest companies, 40 percent of the respondents said that just one typo on a résumé would kick a job candidate out of the queue for consideration. Thirty percent said it would take just two mistakes before the résumé was discarded.

"The way we see it, there's so much competition out there. There's no room for error," said Natasha Melgar, branch manager of the Washington office of the staffing firm Robert Half International. "The résumé is the first opportunity to present yourself."

With unemployment in some areas in the double digits and job postings drawing hundreds of applicants, I understand the need to quickly weed people out. But zero tolerance for one or two résumé typos is too harsh.

Certainly a résumé or cover letter riddled with errors points to sloppiness or incompetence, but a minor mistake shouldn't disqualify you from a job or at least an interview.

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In fact, a perfect résumé doesn't guarantee that a company is getting a great job candidate. In a Robert Half survey, 72 percent of executives polled said it is common for candidates with promising résumés to not live up to expectations during an interview.

By the way, Accountemps is a division of Robert Half. In one survey, the staffing conglomerate found that, overwhelmingly, hiring managers were intolerant of a few errors. In another, it found managers admitting that candidates weren't living up to their stellar résumés.

So once you know that many managers are screening you based on perfection, how do you avoid getting your résumé pushed to the side? Accountemps offers the following tips for creating error-free résumés:

-- Find another pair of eyes. Get someone to proofread your résumé. Seriously, don't dismiss this simple tip that you probably know already. Do I have to repeat again how tough this job market is? Don't send out a single résumé or cover letter without having someone read it over for you.

-- Put the résumé down and come back to it later with your own fresh eyes. Take a break and review it when you're less harried.

-- Print a copy. Please don't skip this suggestion. It's so easy to overlook errors after staring at a computer monitor for a long time. My husband often uses a ruler and places it below each line he's reading.

-- Read your résumé aloud. I've read my share of these things, and sometimes I scratch my head wondering what in the world the candidate was trying to say.

-- Review your résumé from the bottom up. Starting from the back and moving forward will help avoid skipping over certain sections.

There's a Web site you should visit: <http://www.resumania.com>. The term "resumania" was coined by Robert Half, who founded the staffing company. The company has posted résumé and cover-letter errors its clients have found and solicits authentic examples from online visitors. Here are some blunders submitted to the site (some of the Web postings are blooper legends):

Education: "Studied public rations."

Work history: "Faxed documents to attorneys over sees."

Objective: "To get an opportunity to proof what I know."

Job duties: "Assist callers and answer heavy phones."

Job history: "Grocery store catchier."

Additional skills: "Computers
and off ice machines."

Experience: "Detailed-oriented saleman."

"If you make errors on your application materials, the assumption is you'll make mistakes on the job," says Max Messmer, chairman and chief executive of Robert Half. Messmer regularly comments on résumé and cover-letter gaffes in his Resumania column.

Tempted to skip reading your résumé aloud? Here's an example from Resumania of what one candidate wrote under job objective: "To secure challenging opportunities in which I can see a real value in terms of rendering a valuable and valued service to people."

I guess this person really values being valuable.

Join me Thursday at noon at washingtonpost.com for a discussion on job hunting. Executives from Robert Half

will be available to take your questions.

Some hiring managers may

see the humor in trivial typos. But they are still making quick judgments based on what you

put on your résumé. Do what

you can to give them as little reason as possible to pass you up.

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