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Seven **Eight** Worst Resume Mistakes

By [Sue Campbell](#), [1st-Writer.com](#)

What are the eight worst mistakes people make when preparing their own resume?

1. **Not determining a target or goal for the resume.**

There are job hunters who mistakenly believe it's the hiring manager or potential employer's responsibility to determine what role or position a job hunter will best fill.

In fact, it's the job hunters job to know in which position he or she can make the greatest contribution, and to back up this assessment with proof - through relevant history, experience and achievements.

If you haven't decided yet the type of positions for which you're best qualified (you can even choose several positions, you just may need several resumes that will effectively target each), then it's too early to write an effective resume or to navigate a productive job search.

A resume without a target or a goal is like a map without identifying markers or a hope of a destination.

2. **Not understanding the needs or interests of the intended reader.**

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"If we choose to be no more than clods of clay, then we shall be used as clods of clay for braver feet to tread on." - Marie Corelli

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If you need it created, 1st-Writer can help.

"If you don't feel like *the* most important client I've ever worked for, then I haven't done my job."

Or, for that matter, not understanding who the intended reader is (potential employer, a hiring manager, a recruiter, etc.).

It may seem like common sense, but to write effectively a writer needs to write with a specific reader in mind. If you're not thinking about who will be reading your document, and you're not writing for this specific reader, then you're writing for the wrong person.

Imagine, for example, writing and submitting the perfect lasagna recipe to a business magazine - unless, of course, creating the perfect lasagna recipe led to a lucrative business venture. The recipe may be well written, the content may be interesting, the end product may be mouth-watering, but without the right audience the target is all wrong. Business readers want to read about business, not lasagna. Potential employers want to read about relevant past experience and achievements that attest to a job candidate's ability to contribute to and excel within their company.

This means that non-relevant hobbies, interests or responsibilities are omitted, in favor of more relevant and meaningful material. The targeted recipient of a resume (a hiring manager, a potential employer, a recruiter, etc.) will be very interested in learning how a job candidate's efforts and contributions have benefited past employers. He or she will be less interested in learning that a candidate's favorite pastime is gardening - unless, of course, the position being targeted has something to do with horticulture. This also means that information that could be viewed as discriminatory is left off. Anything that points to a candidate's race, religion, age, etc.

A resume is not a good opportunity to create an autobiography of your career life.

A resume is an excellent opportunity to focus on your reader's needs and interests and present content relevant to these needs.

- Identify the type of work you want to do, with a clear understanding of what prospective employers will be looking for in candidates applying for the targeted position.

~Sue Campbell

- Include everything about yourself that is relevant to the statement above.
- Leave everything else off.

3. **Focusing just on the "duties and responsibilities" of previous positions.**

And not organizing the information so that it effectively highlights and showcases the candidate's strong points, achievements, and accomplishments.

A resume shouldn't just describe what a candidate has done, but should include the benefits of a candidate's efforts and contributions, including any quantitative information that best defines the level and scope of that responsibility and achievement.

Imagine the difference between the statements "Led projects," and "Led major _____ projects with budgets of \$350K to \$1 million. Or "Sold sprockets," and "Sold sprockets to new market avenues, achieving recognition as ABC's Top Seller for five consecutive quarters." Or "Oversaw production," and "Led production and increased productivity by 45% through the implementation of improved..."

If you need help in determining the benefits of your contributions, then ask yourself the following questions for each responsibility statement you list:

Why was this important?
 What did it entail, in detail?
 What did my efforts ensure or enable
 How did my efforts and contributions benefit
 (productivity, production, profits, efficiencies, capabilities, costs...)?
 What problems did my efforts solve, and what was the short and long-term benefit(s)?



4. **Leaving off quantitative information.**

(e.g., "Increased sales **by 50%**," "Reduced costs **by \$50K per year**," "Led a team of **35** professionals in..."). Numbers, figures, dollar amounts and percentages.

Quantitative information provides a sense of the size and scope of the positions and responsibilities held, and the real value of the stated achievements.

Simply stating "Increased profits," for example, may leave your reader saying "so what?" You could have increased profits by .001% and still make that claim. Saying that you "Increased profits by \$1 million within six months," or "Increased profits by 75% within the first year," gives your reader a better sense of the actual achievement, and may leave him or her anticipating the same great results via hiring you.

Before you consider inflating your results, however, make sure you look at point #8 of this article. Your achievements, just as everything else in this document, need to be factual.

5. **Forgetting to tell the reader HOW.**

While some of the "how" is best left to the interview stage, some of it needs to be explained in the resume, too. Telling your reader how you achieved your various successes allows your reader to get a better sense of your ability, capability and knowledge. It also allows the reader to get a visual impression of you at work, providing these same great solutions and results for their company or organization.

For example, look at the difference between these two statements and consider how each makes you view the abilities and achievements of the writer:

"Increased annual sales by 45%"

and

"Increased annual sales by 45% through the implementation of improved processes that enabled company to establish OEM relationships and international channels."

If establishing OEM or international channels is important to your target organization, the second statement, and the second candidate, is going to offer a stronger indication of potential value and success. In fact, the second statement actually illustrates THREE achievements: increased sales, improved

processes, and established new and profitable channels.

6. **Using passive language, repetitive statements, or the wrong terminology.**

Reading a resume littered with the statement "Responsibilities include" can put a reader to sleep, particularly a reader who's reading the 45th resume submission. Repetitive terms, such as Managed, Managed, Managed, or "Duties included," can do the same.

Did you know that most resumes receive an initial "reading" time of 15 seconds, or less? If you start each of your responsibility statements with "Responsibilities include;" you've just reduced that "reading" time to 10 seconds or under.

Begin each of your responsibility statements with a strong action word that best denotes your role and level of responsibility, and vary these terms to keep the reading interesting.

For example, "Manage" is a strong action word and a good choice, but not if it's used repetitively throughout the document. It can and should be varied with other action words, some of which may be more accurate, such as, "Direct," "Lead," "Supervise," and "Control."

It's also important to **use the right terminology for the position and industry being targeted**. You wouldn't expect a teacher to write "*Trained* students in..." because it's the wrong terminology for the industry. A teacher "teaches." A trainer "trains." A facilitator "facilitates." You get the idea.

Use the correct terminology for your position and industry.

7. **Using gimmicks.**

Such as brightly colored or decorated paper (think fluorescent) or unusual formats (distracting layouts or unusual presentations, such as brochures). **These may get attention, but possibly not the type of attention you intended.**

As a professional resume writer, I occasionally receive offers from outside companies that promise they can turn my clients'

resumes into "something that will really stand out in the crowd," such as a PowerPoint presentation. The idea is to incorporate the resume into a PowerPoint presentation that can then be submitted to a potential employer via a CD-Rom. The potential employer is then required to load it into their computer (not likely to happen) and watch... what? Some of these presentations include a musical backdrop (who thought that would be a good idea?). Others suggested a type of "recorded audition" by the job candidate. Sort of a one-sided interview.

Attention grabbing, possibly. But what gimmicks fail to consider is the recipient's time. If you're in receipt of a hundred or more resumes, and it's your job to fill a specific position with a qualified candidate - within a specified deadline - in addition to all the other responsibilities your position entails - do you have time for this?

One of my favorite possessions is a resume that was given to me as a birthday gift. It's an actual resume, submitted for an actual position. It's printed on heavy fluorescent-pink paper, 9x11, with a full body shot of the candidate - in thigh-high black boots. I'm not kidding. I'm also certain that its creator didn't plan for it to become the treasured possession of a professional resume writer. This particular candidate did manage to make herself unforgettable.

8. Thinking that inflating or exaggerating (or out-and-out lying about) past experiences or achievements will make your resume more effective or make your job search more productive.

It won't.

Joseph J. Ellis is a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian who has written some of my favorite books, including "American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson," which won the National Book Award in 1997. To say that Joseph J. Ellis is impressive would be an understatement.

Why, then, would someone as accomplished as Joseph J. Ellis decide to fabricate his past?

Fabricating professional history and achievements is an idea that some job seekers have embraced without

appreciating the full consequence of their actions. It's always a mistake.

In an interview with The Boston Globe in 2000, Joseph J. Ellis told an interviewer that he went to Vietnam in 1965 as a platoon leader and paratrooper with the 101st Airborne Division. Ellis also said that his Vietnam service included duty in Saigon on the staff of Gen. William C. Westmoreland, the American commander in Vietnam. He shared similar Vietnam experiences with his Mount Holyoke College students whom he taught. But after reviewing public records and interviewing some of Ellis's friends and colleagues, the Globe reported in 2001 that Ellis's military record was not true. **He was suspended for a year without pay** by Mount Holyoke.

Emory University's David Garrow, a fellow historian, declared, "Knowingly being dishonest in class is just as great an act of moral turpitude as being knowingly dishonest or inaccurate in your written work."

And we're talking about the Pulitzer Prize-winning Joseph J. Ellis!

Ellis quickly apologized and issued a public statement. He doesn't know why he fabricated his past, and he deeply regrets the decision. The irony, of course, is that he had no need to fabricate his past. His genuine accomplishments are impressive and real. He remains one of my favorite authors to this day.

So while fabricating your past may create initial interest, the outcome can be devastating. Imagine getting hired under false pretenses, doing a fantastic job in your new position, enjoying real growth and potential... only to have employer find out that you lied on your resume or application, months or years after the fact. Suddenly, everything about you can become suspect, and **you can be fired**.

And that's not going to look good on your resume.

Stick to the truth.

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Good luck in your job search! [Sue Campbell, 1st-Writer.com](#) - over 15 years experience helping clients achieve their career and business goals. Feel free to [e-mail](#) me with any questions you may have. I'll be glad to help!

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