

Your Resume – Pragmatism or Prose?

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While there are many fantastic resume writers plying their trade, there are also those who might perhaps be better suited to other forms of writing. Though easy to identify the genuinely bad or inept resume writer, it can often be more difficult to identify those with less obvious flaws.

In particular, I refer to those resume writers which I tend to classify as either Frustrated Writers or Tortured Teachers. While they can be great writers in their own right, they don't always tend to be great resume writers. Their clients may receive a resume that reads like a prize winning novel or is grammatically flawless, but it won't necessarily help them get an interview.

And the primary goal of a resume is to get the applicant an interview or job. To do this a resume writer needs to possess two key characteristics. First, they need to be focused, specifically targeting their writing style towards an intended audience. And secondly, the resume writer needs to be flexible, sometimes bending the rules to suit circumstance and occasionally breaking some rules for the sake of practicality.

When looking for an effective resume writer, your best interests would be served by identifying those practitioners that value substance over form and pragmatism over dogma. Here are eight items to be on the lookout for;

Flowery Language – Unless submitting a literary text or applying for a creative writing position, the use of flowery language is best avoided in a resume. While often used to elaborate a point, recruiters tend to view flowery language as an unnecessary embellishment, and will discount an application accordingly. The simple rule in resume writing is to keep things factual, clear and concise.

Targeted Resume – The tone, language and jargon used in a resume should be appropriate and relevant to the applicant and role in question. One size does not fit all. While terms like 'value proposition or stakeholder management' would be perfectly appropriate in a manager's resume, they typically would be out of place in a junior level resume.

Embellishment – While a small amount of embellishment in a resume is not unheard of, ensure all claims are grounded in reality and can be backed up with facts, figures and examples. Resumes full of grandiose claims unsupported with substance are swiftly discounted.

Photos and Pictures – Some writers are keen to include photos of the applicant or pretty pictures in their resume. Unless physical appearance is an innate part of the role or one is applying for a creative position, we suggest leaving them out. Unless relevant, inclusion of photos and pictures can just as easily have a negative impact. Best to let your resume content do the talking.

Resume or Résumé? – While use of either “resume or résumé” is acceptable, I have yet to come across a recruiter who places any real significance on the correct use of accent marks. Perhaps if applying for a proofreading role you may want to be a little more particular, but in general this is a red herring.

Font – Some practitioners are adamant that Arial, Helvetica, or Times Roman be used for resumes. While these are fine, the use of any clean, easy to read font is acceptable. Just stay away from any fancy, silly or hard to read fonts.

CV or Resume? - Historically CV tended to be used for academic roles and were more detailed than a resume. However, today use of either resume or CV is largely interchangeable, with resume being the more popular of the two. I would however give serious thought to using CV when applying for certain international positions or academic roles.

Resume Length - In line with international trends, there has been movement to reduce the size of resumes in the local market. While most resumes will fit the 2-3 page average, there will always be cases of shorter and longer resumes. Just be sure that content is valid and concise. No recruiter wants to rummage through numerous pages of a resume to find key information.

With all of the items discussed above, common sense should prevail. If unsure, the acid test should be whether a recruiter places any value on these distinctions, and not whether your resume reads like Shakespeare or grammatically adheres to the letter of the law.

Of course your resume will always need to adhere to the basic tenets of grammar, and it must read well. But ultimately the purpose of a resume is to get the applicant a job, and not to win a Pulitzer Prize or pass a grammar test.