The Top 10 Pitfalls in Resume Writing

1. Too long. Most new graduates should restrict their resumes to one page. If you have trouble condensing, get help from a technical or business writer or a Career Services counselor.

2. Typographical, grammatical or spelling errors. These errors suggest carelessness, poor education and/or lack of intelligence. Have at least two others proofread it before submitting. Don't rely on your computer's spell-checkers or grammar-checkers.

3. Hard to read. A poorly typed or copied resume looks unprofessional. Use a plain typeface, no smaller than a 12-point font. Asterisks, bullets, underlining, boldface type and italics should be used only to make the document easier to read, not fancier. Again, ask a professional's opinion.

4. Too verbose. Do not use complete sentences or paragraphs. Say as much as possible with as few words as possible. *A*, *an*, and *the* can almost always be left out. Be careful in your use of jargon and avoid slang.

5. Too sparse. Give more than the bare essentials, especially when describing related work experience, skills, accomplishments, activities, interests and club memberships that will give employers important information. Including membership in the Society of Women Engineers, for example, would be helpful to employers who wish to hire more women, yet cannot ask for that information.

6. Irrelevant information. Customize each resume to each position you seek (when possible). Of course, include all education and work experience, but emphasize only relevant experience, skills, accomplishments, activities and hobbies. Do not include marital status, age, sex, children, height, weight, health, church membership, etc.

7. Obviously generic. Too many resumes scream, "I need a job—*any* job!" The employer needs to feel that you are interested in that particular position with his or her particular company.

8. Too snazzy. Of course, use good quality bond paper, but avoid exotic types, colored paper, photographs, binders and graphics. Electronic resumes should include appropriate industry keywords and use a font size between 10 and 14 points. Avoid underlining, italics or graphics.

9. Boring. Make your resume as dynamic as possible. Begin every statement with an action verb. Use active verbs to describe what you have accomplished in past jobs. Take advantage of your rich vocabulary and avoid repeating words, especially the first word in a section.

10. Too modest. The resume showcases your qualifications and abilities in competition with the other applicants. Put your best foot forward without misrepresentation, falsification or arrogance.

The 3 R's

The 3 R's of resume writing are **Research, Research, Research.** You must know what the prospective company does, what the position involves and whether you will be a good fit, before submitting your resume. This means doing research—about the company, the position and the type of employer the company typically hires.

Research the company. Read whatever literature the company has placed in the Career Resource Room. For additional information, call the company. Ask for any literature it may have, find out how the company is structured, and ask what qualities the company generally looks for in its employees. Ask if there are openings in your area, and find out the name of the department head and give him or her a call. Explain that you are considering applying to their company, and ask for their recommendation for next steps. Thank that person for the information, and ask to whom your resume should be directed.

The Internet is another key tool to utilize in your research. Most companies have Web sites that include information regarding company background, community involvement, special events, executive bios, or even past annual reports. Be sure to take advantage of the Internet during your job search.

Research the position. The more you know about the position, the better able you will be to sell yourself and to target your resume to that position. If possible, interview someone who does that same job. In addition to finding out the duties, ask if there is on-the-job training, whether they value education over experience (or vice versa) and what kind of turnover the department experiences. Ask what they like about the position and the company; more important, ask what they don't like about it.

Finally, **research yourself.** Your goal is not just to get a job. Your goal is to get a job you will enjoy. After you find out all you can about the company and the position, ask honestly whether this is what you really want to be. The odds are overwhelming that you will not hold this position for more than two or three years, so it's not a lifetime commitment; however, this first job will be the base of your lifetime career. You must start successfully so that future recommendations will always be positive. Furthermore, three years is a long time to spend doing something you don't like, working in a position that isn't challenging or living somewhere you don't want to live.

One last word of advice: Before you go to the interview, review the version of your resume that you submitted to this employer. The resume can only get you the interview; the interview gets you the job.