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BRAZEN CAREERIST: Resume Rules Not Made to Be Broken

by Penelope Trunk

This is the problem with the resume-writing world: Everyone thinks they're an exception to the rules. Everyone thinks they can pick and choose which rules are important. Do not do this. Until you work in human resources and personally scan 300 resumes a day, you are in no position to discard rules of resume writing.

Here are the six most violated rules among the resumes that people send to me to review:

Keep it to one page. The job of a resume is to get you an interview, not get you a job. A hiring manager has to sift through a pile of resumes to figure out which person to interview. Each resume gets about a ten-second look. If you think you need a longer resume, give someone one page of your resume and have them look at it for ten seconds. Ask them what they remember; it won't be much. They are not going to remember any more information in ten seconds if you give them two pages to look at; ten seconds is ten seconds.

Ditch the line about references on request. It's implied. Of course, if someone wants a reference, you will give one. No one presumes that you will not. So when you write that you will provide a reference you seem to not understand how the game is played.

Bonus tip: If you have an excellent reference, like a CEO of a Fortune 500 company who vacations with your Mom, have the reference call before you even go to the interview. Sets the tone for the employer to think you are amazing.

Tread lightly on the personal interests line. Your personal interests are not there to make you look interesting. They are there to get you an interview. Every line on your resume is there to get you an interview. So, only list personal interests that reveal a quality that will help you meet the employer's needs. If you are in sports marketing, then by all means, list that you kayak. If you were an Olympic athlete, put it down because it shows focus and achievement. If you are a mediocre hobbyist, leave it off.

Personal interests that don't make you stand out as an achiever do not help you. And personal interests that are weird make you look weird, and you don't know if your interviewer likes weird or not, so leave weird off the resume.

List achievements, not job duties. Anyone can do a job. Achievements show you did the job well. Past performance is the best indicator of future performance, so don't let someone think you just showed up for your last job and didn't do it well.

It's very hard to see your achievements from the trenches; you might think you did not have achievements because your boss doesn't ask you to do achievements, your boss asks you to do tasks and projects. But you need to recognize that you do not see achievements and ask for help to see them. A resume coach, or even a friend, can help you to see them more clearly.

Don't be a designer unless you are. If you have more than three fonts on your resume and you're not a designer, I can promise you that you've botched the layout. If design were easy, no one would get paid for it. Recognize your strengths and keep design elements to the bare minimum. And please, save Photoshop for cards to your mom. Just because you know how to use the shading tools doesn't mean you know how to use them well.

List your most recent job first. Chronological order is only a good idea if you are looking to get hired to go back in time. Otherwise you look like you're bucking resume writing convention in order to hide something, which you probably are, but you have to do it with a better sleight of hand than that.

Penelope Trunk writes the [Brazen Careerist blog](#). Her new book, Brazen Careerist: The New Rules for Success (Warner Business Books, 2007), is available at [Amazon.com](#). E-mail her at penelope@penelopetrunk.com.

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