

# Avoid the Top 10 CV Mistakes

by Peter Vogt

It's deceptively easy to make mistakes on your CV and exceptionally difficult to repair the damage once an employer gets it. So prevention is critical, especially if you've never written one before. Here are the most common pitfalls and how you can avoid them.

## 1. Typos and Grammatical Errors

Your CV needs to be grammatically perfect. If it isn't, employers will read between the lines and draw not-so-flattering conclusions about you, like: "This person can't write," or "This person obviously doesn't care."

## 2. Lack of Specifics

Employers need to understand what you've done and accomplished. For example:

- Worked with employees in a restaurant setting.
- Recruited, hired, trained and supervised more than 20 employees in a restaurant with £2 million in annual sales.

Both of these phrases could describe the same person, but clearly the second one's details and specifics will more likely grab an employer's attention.

## 3. Attempting One Size Fits All

Whenever you try to develop a one-size-fits-all CV to send to all employers, you almost always end up with something employers will toss in the recycle bin. Employers want you to write a CV specifically for them. They expect you to clearly show how and why you fit the position in a specific organisation.

## 4. Highlighting Duties Instead of Accomplishments

It's easy to slip into a mode where you simply start listing job duties on your resume. For example:

- Attended group meetings and recorded minutes.
- Worked with children in a day-care setting.
- Updated departmental files.

Employers, however, don't care so much about what you've done as what you've accomplished in your various activities. They're looking for statements more like these:

- Used laptop computer to record weekly meeting minutes and compiled them in a Microsoft Word-based file for future organisational reference.
- Developed three daily activities for preschool-age children and prepared them for a 10-minute holiday program performance.
- Reorganised 10 years' worth of unwieldy files, making them easily accessible to department members.

## 5. Going on Too Long or Cutting Things Too Short

Despite what you may read or hear, there are no real rules governing the length of your CV.

Why? Because human beings, who have different preferences and expectations where resumes are concerned, will be reading it.

That doesn't mean you should start sending out five-page CVs, of course. Generally speaking, you usually need to limit yourself to a maximum of two pages. But don't feel you have to use two pages if one will do. Conversely, don't cut the meat out of your resume simply to make it conform to an arbitrary one-page standard.

#### **6. A Bad Objective**

Employers do read your CV's objective statement, but too often they plough through vague pufferies like, "Seeking a challenging position that offers professional growth." Give employers something specific and, more importantly, something that focuses on their needs as well as your own. Example: "A challenging entry-level marketing position that allows me to contribute my skills and experience in fund-raising for nonprofits."

#### **7. No Action Verbs**

Avoid using phrases like "responsible for." Instead, use action verbs: "Resolved user questions as part of an IT help desk serving 4,000 students and staff."

#### **8. Leaving Off Important Information**

You may be tempted, for example, to eliminate mention of the jobs you've taken to earn extra money for school. Typically, however, the soft skills you've gained from these experiences (e.g., work ethic, time management) are more important to employers than you might think.

#### **9. Visually Too Busy**

If your CV is wall-to-wall text featuring five different fonts, it will most likely give the employer a headache. So show your CV to several other people before sending it out. Do they find it visually attractive? If what you have is hard on the eyes, revise.

#### **10. Incorrect Contact Information**

I once worked with a student whose CV seemed incredibly strong, but he wasn't getting any bites from employers. So one day, I jokingly asked him if the phone number he'd listed on his CV was correct. It wasn't. Once he changed it, he started getting the calls he'd been expecting. Moral of the story: Double-check even the most minute, taken-for-granted details -- sooner rather than later.