



Writing great resumes that will actually get you hired

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These tips are about how to write a resume that a human will read and like. Feel free to disregard some or all of these points, especially if you are enjoying your time off.

1. **Shut up already.** Recruiters will make a snap decision in 10 seconds as to whether they want to read your resume. If your resume is really long, and crammed full of tedious detail, it will be skipped. Seriously.

The number one mistake people make on their resumes is the same mistake that they make in interviews and the same mistake they make on the witness stand: they say *too much*. No one cares about the incredible minutiae of your 500 job responsibilities and accomplishments. By droning on about trivial and irrelevant details, you make yourself look, well... trivial and irrelevant.

I'm 100% serious. When people ask me to review their resumes, the most important change I make is to delete about 50% of the content. When I'm done, I've probably changed 20% of the phrasing, deleted 50% of the detail, and fixed problems that will prevent the resume from being understood correctly by resume parsing software.

Here's an example. Let's say your last job was as a receptionist for Richard's Fine Whines, a daycare center. Basically, the job title tells us about 99% of what we need to know. You really don't need to tell us that you also organized the office supplies room, reordered the Pampers, and kept call logs and made travel plans, blah blah blah. We know that. Even if we didn't know that, no one is going to hire you because you organized the office supply room, are they? No, they are not.

Bill Gates is the most accomplished person in America. Here is his resume:

Bill Gates

Co-founder, Microsoft.



That tells you *everything* you need to know, does it not?

So that brings us to **Bob's First Rule of Writing Resumes That Actually Have a Chance of Getting You Hired**: Ask yourself: "Why the heck is *that* on there? Is *that* really going to get me hired? If the answer is "no", then don't put that on there. People that hire people are more interested in what you *can do* than in what you *did do*, so, make sure you don't obscure the big picture by hiding it in 1,000,000 little details.

2. **Get over yourself.** Overselling is not selling. If you are not the President of the company, don't try to make your resume read like you are. When I read a resume of an Assistant VP and it is in Full Overblown Mode, I ask myself "If this person is that good, why isn't he running the company?" Unfortunately, the conclusion is going to be: (a) he isn't that good, or (b) he's a megalomaniac, or (c) both.

Don't list trivial or obscure accomplishments. Trivial and obscure accomplishments make you look like you really have nothing significant to offer. Again, if I can't understand how that relates to why I should hire you, leave it off.

3. **Stay out of the Buzz-O-Sphere.** "Thought Leadership" is not a header for a paragraph that I want to read. If you are a "change agent" who "thinks out of the box" and delivers "game-changing" "new paradigms", I have to ask myself: Am I looking for a buzzword parrot, or a real person? In the not-huge-corporate-America, those kinds of buzzwords are deadly. In huge-corporate America, and only there, buzzwords are fine – but you must use only the most current buzzwords. Yesterday's buzzwords are *so passé*. The Wall Street Journal is a great buzzword resource. Most of the really trendy corporate buzz phrases get launched there or legitimized there. Some clown gets quoted saying that "buying in a bear market is like trying to catch a falling knife" and 20 minutes later 28% of the corporate workforce has managed to work that sassy little gem into their morning wasting-my-time-and-yours-too rituals.

But I digress.

Which brings us to **Bob's Second Rule of Writing Resumes That Actually Have a Chance of Getting You Hired**: What you say you ARE can actually tell the reader what you ARE NOT. Saying that you are



“creative” and “think outside of the box” is the least creative and the least “outside the box” thing you can do.

4. **DO speak to soft skills and cultural fit.** It’s better to have this in a narrative of a few sentences rather than in a list of bullet points, and again, shy away from clichés and buzzwords where possible. Help me understand how I can help you succeed. If you are a manager, also help me understand how you help others succeed.
5. **Bob’s Third Rule of Writing Resumes That Actually Have a Chance of Getting You Hired:** Practice safe submitting. Never use your real name or full contact info when submitting your resume to a non-human.
 - a. Your resume will live forever in resume databases and on the internet.
 - b. You may wish to have multiple resumes that are crafted to cast you in a different light as you apply for specific jobs.
 - c. Your resume’s historical detail may need to change over time.
 - d. Your present employer may find your resume and fire you.
 - e. Your identity may be stolen. The two largest resume databases on the web were hacked for personal data.

Here’s what to do:

- a. Get a new email account at gmail or Hotmail or whatever. Make sure it contains no personal info. SallySmithDallas3@gmail.com is not what we are looking for, nor is BunnyLover456@hotmail.com. Use something like GST704@hotmail.com, and then never use that address again.
- b. Use a fake name. A *generic* fake name. A fake name that is appropriate for the job type and career level.
- c. Make CERTAIN that you monitor that email account.
- d. Omit your street address, but provide your City/State/Zip. Do NOT provide a phone number.

When you receive an expression of interest from a REAL HUMAN, then you can say “By the way, for privacy and identity theft reasons, I did not



post my real personal data. My name is Sally Smothers and my phone number is 564-888-9999.”

Also, and this is sad but true: Names that are perceived to be made-up African-heritage given names are to be avoided, because studies have shown that Lakieshequia is half as likely to get called for an interview than Sally. Fair? Absolutely not. But the point here is to deal with the *reality*. When you make up a name, make it generic. One day soon, we all hope, this silent discrimination will go away. Until then, get around it by using a *generic* fake name (until contacted by a human).

Here is the link to one such Harvard study:

<http://www.economics.harvard.edu/faculty/mullainathan/files/emilygreg.pdf>

Here is the summary:

We study race in the labor market by sending fictitious resumes to help-wanted ads in Boston and Chicago newspapers.

To manipulate perceived race, resumes are randomly assigned African American or White sounding names.

White names receive 50 percent more callbacks for interviews.

Callbacks are also more responsive to resume quality for White names than for African American ones.

The racial gap is uniform across occupation, industry, and employer size.

We also find little evidence that employers are inferring social class from the names.

Differential treatment by race still appears to still be prominent in the U.S. labor market.

- 6. Bob's Fourth Rule of Writing Resumes That Actually Have a Chance of Getting You Hired.** Always make sur that the speling and grammer are perfect. Recruiters will often rewrite your resume to correct such errors, but corporate hiring managers will not. Bad spelling and bad grammar are The Kiss of Death. This is true at every career level. How do you expect to



get hired for a clerical or admin job when your resume says that you are “Detailed orientated”?

Have someone else, preferably someone who always annoys you by correcting your speech, proofread your resume.

7. **Always make sure your resume is understandable by automated resume-processing systems.** This can be a separate version that you use just for online uploads. Bob has a separate memo for how to do that, written in the same smart-aleck tone, so you may want to wait a day or two before you tackle that meal.