



The Dos and Don'ts of Tightening and Toning Your Resume

By Mary Waldron

There were two inspirations for this week's resume article. One was Britney Spears's less-than-stone-toned body in her awkward and sloppy comeback performance at the MTV Video Music Awards (VMAs) show, and the other was an atrocious resume that arrived in my email inbox last week. Both brought horror to my face, but more importantly, both needed a lot of "tightening up." Read on for some tips that could have saved them both.

Don't Bore Your Viewer.

Length is always a big issue when it comes to resumes. Too many people feel that they're entitled to three-page-plus resumes even though they've barely graduated from law school. Everyone knows people—especially those who do hiring—have short attention spans and time frames. So why do they keep doing this? Not only does this waste trees, but it also destroys the applicant's chances of landing a job with the employer because he or she will not read a resume that long.

Even if someone truly has a long history of relevant experience, it should be whittled down and tailored to the job at hand. No one wants to read a whole novel about your career—no matter how spectacular you think you are.

Do Present a Refreshing and Solid Package.

Any bozo can list every element that relates to his or her career. The real masterminds of resume writing are able to take the same amount of pertinent information and craft and refine it into a beautiful one-page document. Two pages are fine if you're an old pro; however, most people don't reach this status until after they're 40, so sit tight.

Think carefully about what you need and don't need. What does the job require? What experience, specifically, will help with the job? If you can leave something out that won't *definitely* help you, just do it. Otherwise, the unneeded information might take the front seat and downplay the qualities you really need to shine.

Don't Overwhelm Your Audience with "Junk."

Usually, it's not even that people's resumes have too much rich information—obviously, a young professional can only have so many past internships and jobs at the local pool. The problem lies in the formatting of the page. Don't carelessly list whatever comes to mind on your resume. Realize that an employer's attention to your resume is limited, so make sure to maximize the short time and space you have. Too much unfocused information that does not directly relate to the job clutters the page and dilutes what you're really trying to convey: that you fit the job description perfectly.

An extra page of "additional employment" and 10 references later, and the employer has already forgotten that you graduated at the top of your class from Yale Law School and that you had one of the most prestigious clerkships on the East Coast.

Do Show Off a Visually Pleasing Display.

People tend to forget that a resume can cover the whole page—every inch of the page, not just the left half. Get creative about how you can list your experience in a tasteful, organized, and professional manner.

When you have the bare necessities of an excellent resume for the job, come up with a couple of headers that can house the information. For example, instead of having a "Professional Exam" section and a "Software Proficiency" section, list all of these qualities and more under a clean heading like "Special Skills."

Don't Show Too Much of Yourself.

It's nice that people like to be thorough and complete. I do. I practically have OCD. But when it comes to resumes, do not thoroughly describe your personal life and background. Some people include their marital status, ethnicity, salary expectations (without being asked), date and place of birth, and even personal references listed as friends and family. What's next? Your favorite color and shoe size?

Besides making yourself look weird and unprofessional, you also make the employer feel strange when you include all this extra information. So what does he or she do to stop this feeling? Toss or delete the resume. Pronto.

Do Know When to Back Off.

Do your best to gauge what the employer is looking for; this will help you decide on your own that you need to leave out personal details. No job application should ever require the above information I described. Occasionally, an employer may ask for your salary history, but you don't have to provide it unless you choose to.

Sometimes you can list personal hobbies and interests if they directly apply to the job at hand, but this is rare. Any hobby you list should be a relevant and useful tool that you can apply to the job. If you're applying for an international or immigration law job, you might want to list that you're fluent in Spanish. On the other hand, you wouldn't want to list your favorite European vacation spots.

On the Net

Britney Spears's Performance at the VMAs
www.mtv.com/overdrive/?id=1568788&vid=173440

Yale Law School
www.law.yale.edu

Europe
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europe