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CAREER EDUCATION

# Why Your Resume Gets Tossed

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*The average recruiter sees 5,000 resumes a year. Any legitimate reason he or she can find to make one disappear makes his or her life that much easier — and yours that much harder. Here, top-level recruiters reveal how candidates blow their chances to get a foot in the door.*

## **Numbers do not add up**

If accomplishments can be quantified, do it — but use discretion. Brandishing borderline performance numbers signals a lack of experience and bad judgment. “Phrases like ‘managed a budget of \$500,000’ or ‘led a team of two’ might catch my eye in a bad way,” warns Olaf Wecksser; a former recruiter for McKinsey & CO. Better to spin it as “managed company’s large budget.”

Alexandra DeMarino, a Citigroup recruiter, adds: “If a small number is impressive, you absolutely have to put it in context.” Because you can’t provide context for academic numbers, don’t include GMAT scores below 650 if you are targeting a top firm. DeMarino suggests bragging about nothing less than a 3.7 GPA.

## **Formality takes a vacation**

Do not succumb to the informality of e-mail. “If you send a cover letter by e-mail that starts with ‘Hi’, it and your resume will probably end up in the trash,” says Cynthia Shore, an assistant dean of the University of Buffalo School of Management. Treat an e-mail as you would a proper letter. Instead of “Hi,” write “Dear Mr. Case.” Instead of “Thanks,” conclude with “Sincerely.”

## **Keywords are overused**

Recruiters sometimes use scanners to sort through resumes looking for certain keywords. However, resumes appear contrived when candidates continuously try to include them. If there is a skill listed in the ad that you possess, explain how you obtained that skill while using the keywords from the ad.

## **Things get too personal**

“If you mention your age, we have to trash your resume,” says Jeremy, Vice President of Talent Acquisition at Idea Lab!, the California incubator firm. Since it is illegal for a company to solicit a candidate’s age, race, or marital status during the hiring process, firms have adopted a “don’t tell” policy to avoid potential bias suits. Many will not risk even having it handed to them.

## **It looks too fancy**

“A recruiter who receives resumes in pretty plastic folders will likely toss them,” says Dave Upton, CEO and founder of ExecuNet, an online executive recruiting service. Another faux pas: folding a resume so it fits into a standard business envelope. Heavy stock paper that retains its crease can be a nuisance. They are easier to store and photocopy if they are flat.

Also, do not try to differentiate your resume with boxes or ornate lettering. Instead, focus on content. Your resume will rise to the top of the pile.

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