Ten things NOT to do on your CV

By Andrew Gordon

When you submit your CV it had better be good. The recruiter who receives your application will probably have dozens or even hundreds of CVs to shift and sort. So you'll be lucky if your CV is read for more than 10 seconds.

Here then are ten 'CV clangers' to avoid that will help keep your CV IN the in-tray and OUT of the bin:

1. Applying for a position for which you're not qualified
2. Providing irrelevant personal information
3. Burying important information
4. Spelling errors, typos and poor grammar
5. Unexplained gaps in employment
6. Lying or misleading information
7. A long, waffly CV
8. Badly formatted CV
9. Meaningless introductions
10. The 'So What' CV

1. Applying for a position for which you're not qualified

You may look at a job advert and think, 'I like the sound of that! I think I'll apply!'

However if you haven't the right qualifications or experience then you're probably wasting your time. Make sure you read the job description carefully and any other additional information that may be available.

And then stop.

Ask yourself, 'I might like the sound of the job but do I really have the right skill set and experience?'

If the answer to your question is still 'yes' then go ahead, hit that 'Apply Here' button and good luck! But if you don't fit the bill then please don't go any further. Save the recruiter valuable time and yourself the heartache of rejection.

2. Providing irrelevant personal information

You may be very proud of your membership of the local Hell's Angels chapter. You may also be proud of the fact that you voted Green in the last election, weigh 12 stone, are 6ft tall and Buddhist. But unless your personal information is relevant to the job you're applying for, do not include it on your CV.

3. Burying important information

Remember, your CV will have little time to impress. The recruiter will look at your CV and think 'Why should I interview this person? What will they bring to the organisation?'

So when compiling your CV think 'Benefits, benefits, benefits!' and make them obvious. That doesn't mean putting them in all CAPS but it does mean making what you'd bring to the role easy to find, easy to understand and, above all, compelling.

4. Spelling errors, typos and poor grammar

This 'no no' should be obvious. But it obviously isn't. The number of CV's that recruiters see on a daily basis with spelling errors and other mistakes is ~~apalling~~ ~~appaling~~ terrible.

You've got a spell checker. Use it!

5. Unexplained gaps in employment

Having unexplained gaps in your employment history is a big 'no no'. It makes recruiters nervous. If you're lucky, they'll briefly wonder what you were doing during that mystery period as your CV is folded into a paper aeroplane and whizzed towards the trash can.

6. Lying or misleading information

Obviously, you have to describe yourself in the best possible light. This often means adding a little 'sparkle' to your CV. But avoid the temptation to go too far.

Recruiters are not stupid. They can spot information that doesn't stack up. For example, they're always on the look out for inflated:

- Qualifications
- Salaries
- Job titles
- Achievements

Employers are conducting increasingly vigorous background checks on candidates. This can range from conducting a Google search on you to employing a specialist candidate checking service. Something that you think is just 'bending the truth' could really trip you up.

7. A long, waffly CV

Keep your CV short, punchy and to the point. This means it shouldn't run to more than 2 pages of A4.

When your CV is too long - and many of them are - then this suggests that you've been either job hopping (which is a 'no no') or you can't write concisely (which is another 'no no').

For the older jobseeker, this 2 page limit can be a real problem. How should you describe a job you had 25 years ago?

The solution - Don't describe it!

Instead, focus on your recent experience and achievements. If you must refer to a job(s) from a while back, then you could create a separate 'Previous Employment' document and refer to it in your cover letter. This will show you've thought about your application and will put you into a good light.

This rule applies to qualifications too.

If you studied a subject many eons ago then, unless you have kept your skills up-to-date, it's probably no longer relevant. For example, if you studied French to degree level in 1986 but have maintained your levels of fluency by visiting France every year then great! However, if you're applying for a job in Web Design because you took a home study course in HTML in 1998 then don't be surprised if the recruiter doesn't call...

8. Badly formatted CV

These days your CV will most likely be read on-screen before it's printed off. If indeed, it is ever printed. Therefore, format your CV so that it is easy to read on a screen.

Stick with fonts such as Arial or Times New Roman at font size 10 or 12. Use italics sparingly and don't use any colours, crazy backgrounds or, heaven forbid, flowery page borders.

These rules apply if you've sent your CV as an attachment to an email - make sure it's a Word attachment by the way.

However, you may need to submit your CV via a web form. Most likely is that these web forms will strip out your document's formatting anyway. It's even more important, therefore, to ensure that your CV is laid out and formatted to look good stripped bare of its 'bolds', sub-headings and even bullet points.

9. Meaningless introductions

Does your CV have a paragraph at the top that goes something like:

"Dynamic, enthusiastic, sales oriented I.T. literate, results driven manager with several years people management experience seeking exciting and challenging new opportunities in the blah blah blah..."

Yawn.

Your CV has got to hit the recruiter smack bang between the eyes! It's got to make them sit up, spurt hot coffee from their mouths as they scramble across their desks for the phone to call you and appoint

you on the spot!!

Or, to put it another way, your CV has got to get you noticed and invited in for interview. So an opening paragraph that says everything and nothing at the same time is not going to do it.

Ditch it.

In its place, consider crafting a short, simple and benefits focused headline about yourself. For example, "Senior Librarian with 10 years experience of managing online resources in the health sector."

That'll do nicely. It might not be perfect but it's better than what you had before.

Journalists do this all of the time of course. They write headlines that tell you what the story is about but tease you just enough in order to encourage you to read on. Your opening, personal headline should do just the same.

10. The 'So What' CV

We end where we started. Your CV has a tough job. It will probably be in the hands of the recruiter for a very small amount of time - unless, that is, you smeared it in Super Glue before you sent it (that would be an inventive touch but is also a 'no no').

To give yourself the best chance of it actually being read, make sure that it 'looks right'. Make sure that it's not too long, that it's laid out correctly, is properly formatted and so on. If you do all of these things then you have a chance. The recruiter will lean back in his or her chair, take another sip of coffee and start to digest - not scan - what you've written.

So don't throw this moment away!

Making sure you don't do the CV 'no no's' simply gets you to the first base. Whilst this is an achievement in itself, if your CV doesn't convince and persuade then you've again wasted your time.

Your CV has to sell you.

It has to make you sound interesting. It has to make you sound as though you'll fit into the organisation and that you'll make a quick and substantial difference.

Because if all your CV does is make the recruiter think, 'so what?' you'll have dropped the biggest CV clanger of all.