CHEEKY SCIENTIST®
Industry Training For Intelligent People

Join The Association   Home   About Us   Resources   Team

Book A Seminar

10 Things Smart PhDs Do NOT Put On Their Industry Résumés

Share 460   Share 261   Tweet 308   g+1 8

What are you supposed to do when you send hundreds of résumés out and get nothing back but a few automated responses? This is the question I was trying to answer my last year of graduate school. I literally sent out hundreds of résumés. I posted my resume to Monster.com and waited for the tidal wave of industry job offers to roll in. Yeah…that didn't happen.

I polished up a generic résumé and uploaded it to dozens of industry job websites. I remember getting on Pfizer and Baxter's websites, clicking the job opportunities tab, and seeing all the industry job openings. "Yes!" I thought. Piece-of-cake. I'll just upload my résumé and have an offer by the end of the week. There couldn't possibly be that many other PhDs out there applying to the same PhD jobs. Wrong. I found out later that some companies receive over 2,000 résumés a day. 2,000 a day!

Don't Follow Bad Advice

I felt stuck and lost so I asked my academic advisor to help me write my résumé. He sent me his CV and said "Here, look at this." Great. Thanks for nothing. I knew that industry hiring managers weren't interested in CVs. How did my advisor not know this?

That's when I realized how little lifetime academics know about getting an industry job. So, I asked one of the job counselors at the graduate school for advice. She told me the key to getting an interview was to write a very detailed cover letter, make sure that my

All Time
Networking
Resumes and CVs
Interviewing
Transferable Skills
Industry Positions
Academic Blues
Success Stories

TOP 10

education history was at the top of my résumé, and to include a one sentence "objective" at the very top of my résumé.

Okay. That's great advice. Right? Nope. She was wrong too. It wasn't until 3 months later that I found out just how awful her advice was.

Is My Résumé Being Read?

Over 427,000 résumés are posted to Monster.com each week—that's just one job website. Most companies use Applicant Tracking Software to automatically filter and eliminate 75% of the résumés sent to them. If your resume makes it to the desk of a hiring manager and recruiter, they will spend an average of just 5-7 seconds reading it.

Seconds. That's all you get. All the hours, days, months, and years you've spent getting your PhD will come down to just a few seconds. Think of how hard you've worked to get to where you are. Are you really going to throw it all away by not taking the time to get your résumé just right?

How To Write An Industry Résumé

More is more. This is what most PhDs are taught. Triplicates are better than duplicates. An N of 200 is better than an N of 2. A CV with 10 first author publications is better than a CV with one first author publication. On and on. But, when it comes to creating a strong industry résumé for a PhD job, less is more. Adding the wrong things or too many things to your résumé will keep you from getting the industry job you want.

A better strategy is to simplify your industry résumé down to only the things that industry hiring managers and recruiters actually want to see. Here are 10 things smart PhDs like you should remove from your industry résumé:

1. Unprofessional email address.

Three out of four résumés are discarded because they're sent from an unprofessional email address or have an unprofessional email address attached to their résumé or cover letter. This means you can put yourself ahead of 75% of the other applicants simply by eliminating any references to unprofessional email addresses like bigboy77@yahoo.com or similar.

A lot of PhDs are afraid to use their University email address when applying to jobs because they think their PI is going to hack into their email account and find out they're trying to leave the lab. This won't happen. PIs don't have access to your University email account.

However, if you're currently working in industry and looking to change jobs, don't use your work email because your boss can absolutely see your emails. Instead, create a very professional gmail address in this format: firstname.lastname@gmail.com. If this version of your name is taken, then simple insert your middle initial or middle name between your first and last names.

2. Impersonal greeting.

Never use an impersonal greeting on your résumé's cover letter. Greetings like "Dear Sirs" or "To Whom It May Concern" are creepy, distant, and outdated. Most importantly, these greetings

PhD Career

How To Be A PhD Big Companies Want To Hire

How Smart PhDs Use Their Transferable Skills To Get High-Paying Jobs

What Recruiters Want To See On A PhD's Resume

makes you seem lazy. Instead of taking the time to research who the hiring manager is, you just threw your hands up in the air and typed a general greeting that could be applied to anyone. As a result, your résumé and candidacy were seen as mediocre at best.

Smart PhDs always use a personal greeting. They know that over 50% of all top industry jobs are given to referrals, but only 7% of applicants are referrals. Let that sink in. Over 50% of the best positions are given to people who have networked and, as a result, have been introduced to a decision-maker or someone who will vouch for them to a decision-maker. Yet, 93% of people applying to these jobs are just sending out their résumés blindly and impersonally on the Internet without knowing anyone at the company they want to work for.

Which side of the fence are you on?

Before you send your résumé in, find out who the hiring manager is. Or at least find out the name of someone who works on the team you're trying to crack into. At the very least, use the name of someone in human resources. Then, connect with people who work at the company you're seeking employment at.

Network on LinkedIn, network at face-to-face events, and do whatever it takes to get to know someone well enough to put their name on the first line of your cover letter. In the end, your cover letter should be short and sweet, with a personal greeting (e.g. Dear Jeremy, Dear Dr. Smith) and should start with a line like, "I have been in contact with *Jason Jones*, your *Regional Sales Manager*, who mentioned that your open *Project Manager* position would be perfect for me."

3. Objective statement.

Putting an objective statement at the top of your résumé will not help you get an industry job. Instead, it will paint you into a corner. A better strategy is to use a *visual center*. A visual center starts at 2 inches from the top of your résumé and ends 2 inches below that. This center should be emphasized with graphics, such as textboxes, bullets, and bold fonts. Load the visual center with the value you will offer the company, such as across-the-board accomplishments, industry-specific skills, a summary of a highly successful project you lead, or even a clipping from a recommendation letter or news article about your work.

Résumés with visual centers that are interesting and catch the reader's eye will be read much more carefully than they would be otherwise. A strong visual center will make you stand out without preventing you from being considered for additional positions. If you want employers to notice you and keep you in mind for other positions that you may also be qualified for, replace your objective statement with a visual center.
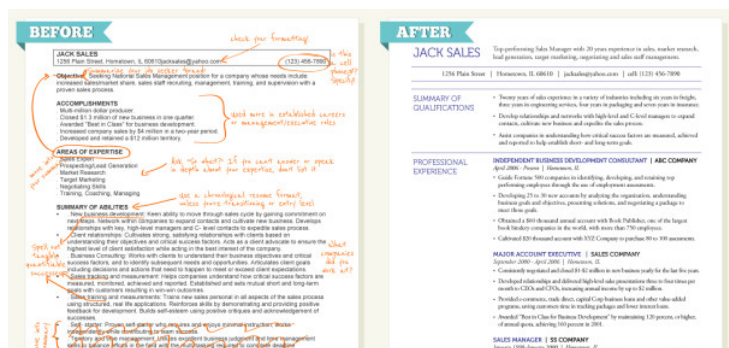
4. Dates.

Recruiters and hiring managers spend just a couple of seconds looking at a résumé before deciding whether it's worth a full read. This means you should show them exactly what they want to see first. And guess what—they don't care about the dates.

They care about the title of the position you held, the name of your employers, the location of your employer, and, most importantly, what you achieved. Don't mistake your résumé for a publication citation. It doesn't need to list the dates first. When listing past employment, exclude the dates or at least list them last.

If you really want to get your résumé read, list your experience by relevance, not by date. Just like you can sort publications on PubMed by relevance to a specific topic, you can sort your work experience by relevance to a specific position.

Always put your work experience above your education history. Smart PhDs never bury the lead on their résumés. Your lead is what employers want to read most on your résumé. Drop the dates and the dated mentality. Instead, create a strong visual center, followed by a list of work experience sorted by relevance to the position you're applying for.

5. Job duties.

Industry employers do not want to read about your job duties. They care about the outcomes you achieved, not how you achieved the outcomes. Your résumé does not need a methodology section. Delete any reference to "job duties" or "responsibilities included." Instead, list key achievements as *tangibly* as possible.

Unlike your typical CV, a good industry résumé is always accomplishment-focused. This means that within seconds of reading your résumé, employers should be able to see that the return on investment for hiring you is higher than the salary you are asking for. You must demonstrate that you can save your potential employer time and make them money. If you've spent your entire career in academia, you can still add tangible outcomes to your résumé. For example, you could say, "Helped PI recognize over $1,000,000 in grant funding by skillfully leading a team of scientists to complete all projects on time, resulting in grant renewal every year."

6. References.

Do not waste precious résumé space on listing the contact information of three professional references. Don't even waste space on writing "References Upon Request." Employers know that you have references. If you don't, then you shouldn't be applying for the job in the first place. You should be networking.

7. Typos and grammatical errors.

If you can't spell "Technical Specialist" correctly, you shouldn't be one. At least that's what employers will think when they read a typo on your résumé. Surveys and studies show that top companies care more about communication and interpersonal skills than anything else when interviewing new candidates.

One of the very first indicators employers will have of your communication skills is your industry résumé. If it is riddled with mistakes, you will not move to the interview stage. Your industry résumé must be absolutely perfect. If you're not a good writer or if English is not your native language and you're submitting your résumé in English, make sure you have a professional editor proofread it for errors.

You don't need to pay hundreds of dollars for this. You can find worthy editors on eLance and [Fiverr](http://cheekyscientist.com/industry-resume/) who will polish your résumé for as little as $5. Once you've had your résumé professionally proofread, go back and insert relevant keywords into it. Then have it proofread again. This is the best and most successful sequence to follow.

First, write your résumé without considering keywords so it flows well. Then, have it proofread. Next, add keywords. And finally, have it proofread again. Using relevant keywords is critical to getting your résumé past the Applicant Tracking Software checkpoint. It's also important for getting your résumé past recruiters and hiring managers who will use the "Find" function on their computers to do quick keyword searches on your résumé.

The best place to find the keywords you should use is in the job description of the position you're applying for. For example, if the description contains the phrase "project management" over and over again–as in, project management experience required–you can bet the hiring managers entered it into their Applicant Tracking Software and that they will search for it themselves once they have your résumé in hand.

8. Publications.

Publications don't matter in industry. Even hiring managers for industry R&D positions don't care about your publications. This is especially true at the résumé-reading stage of the hiring process. I know—it hurts. I'm sorry. There may be a few outdated hiring managers or R&D directors who will insist that publications should be listed on an applicant's résumé, but they're simply wrong.

Smart PhDs know that putting their publication record on an industy résumé is a waste of time. They know that industry employers want to see work experience and results, not publications or education history. You've worked hard on your publications and should be proud of them, but don't let your pride get in the way of creating a sharp résumé. Besides, your publication record isn't going anywhere. Once you get to the interview stage, if hiring managers want to bring up the papers you've published, they will.

9. Paragraphs.

Recruiters and hiring managers have mountains of résumés sent to them daily. Recall that some companies receive thousands of résumés a day and most of these will be filtered out by Applicant Tracking Software. The remaining résumés will be further filtered out by employers who are unwilling to read anything beyond a bullet point followed by a single sentence.

Think of writing an industry résumé as the opposite of writing an academic journal article. Instead of using dense text and long paragraphs to construct a well-formulated argument, you want to simplify everything down into digestible nuggets of information. Avoid turnoffs like small, dense font styles and sizes. Avoid run-on sentences. Avoid paragraphs altogether. Smart PhDs put

everything on their résumé behind a bullet point, number, or header and never put more than two sentences together at a time.

10. Overly personal information.

Industry résumés that are submitted with photos are rejected 88% of the time. Why? Because submitting a photo is too personal. Don't make the mistake of getting too personal too soon. The most important rule of writing an effective industry résumé is to leave off all personal information. If you're smart and have followed the other points in this article, you know that networking and finding strong references is the most important thing you can do to get your résumé read.

The only personal information you should submit with your résumé is a short cover letter with a personal greeting and a personal reference—a reference who works at the company you're applying to. However, don't be afraid to add a line (just one, single line) to your résumé indicating a particular award you're received or leadership roll you've held in the past, especially if it's a non-academic award or leadership roll. Things like "Captain of the swim team winning 3 consecutive awards for leadership" or "Four-time Habitat for Humanity project leader and Eagle Scout" will help differentiate you from the piles of résumés coming in from PhDs who having nothing but academic achievements to reference.

Finally, it's important to understand that almost every company you apply to (up to 93% of them) will Google your name and look up your social media profiles. Before you submit your résumé, make sure your social media profiles are professional and display a unified message.

To learn more about transitioning into a non-academic career, including instant access to our exclusive training videos, case studies, industry insider documents, transition plan, and private online network, join the Cheeky Scientist Association.

About   Latest Posts

Isaiah Hankel

Isaiah is a Ph.D. in Anatomy & Cell Biology and internationally recognized Fortune 500 consultant. He is an expert in the biotechnology industry and specializes in helping people transition into cutting-edge career tracks.

Isaiah believes that if you feel stuck somewhere in your life right now, you should make a change. Don't sit still and wait for the world to tell you what to do. Start a new project. Build your own business. Take action. Experimentation is the best teacher.