



10 CRINGEWORTHY WORDS TO AVOID ON YOUR RESUME (+ WHAT TO SAY INSTEAD)

100+ action verbs, strength descriptors, and high-impact phrases to improve your resume.

Hey There,

I'm Jessica Hernandez, the president & CEO of Great Resumes Fast.

Is your resume lost in the black hole of no response?

You find a position that aligns with your goals, skills, and experience, so you apply.

And wait.

Weeks later, still nothing. Not even a "No, thank you."

You try for a different position. Same story.

What's going on?

Why aren't companies seeing what you bring to the table?

Is it that you're not as qualified as you thought?

It's not you. It's the system.

You need a resume writing service that gets you through all stages of the hiring system.



Let our executive resume writers uncover what makes you the only one for the job.

It starts with a phone call. [Schedule your resume strategy session here](#).

Jessica Hernandez

PRESIDENT & CEO



10 CRINGEWORTHY WORDS TO AVOID

Words are how you convey value, communicate your achievements, and give the employer the information they need to make a decision to interview you.

INSTEAD OF “DEMONSTRATED SUCCESS IN” OR “PROVEN RESULTS,” SHOW THE EMPLOYER YOUR RESULTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

Words like “results,” “success,” “professional,” and “accomplished” sound great, but they don’t communicate anything meaningful. It would be better to share the exact result you achieved or the challenge that led to the success.

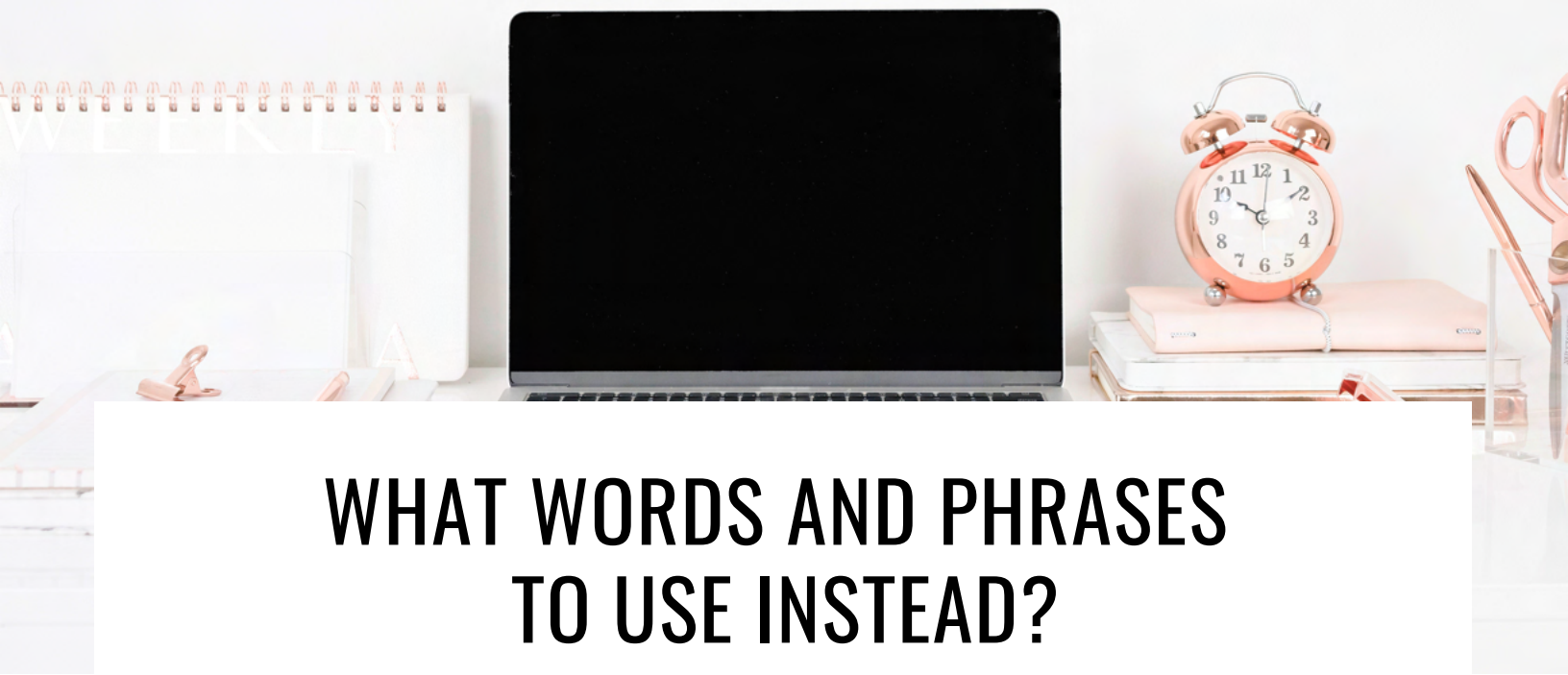
This top ten list of cringeworthy words and phrases includes mostly passive phrases or terms that don’t show the employer the value and contribution you can make, thereby lessening the impact of your resume on hiring managers.

If you want your resume to make a good first impression, swap out these useless words with more meaningful alternatives.

Here are ten words and phrases you need to swap with more meaningful alternatives.

- Demonstrated success in . . .
- Proven results . . .
- Successful/success
- Results-driven/results-oriented
- Excellent communication skills
- Responsible for . . .
- Duties included
- Seasoned
- Accomplished
- Worked with / served as

And lastly, I strongly advise that you use this term with caution: “team player.” Studies have shown that including the phrase—or its synonyms—once in your resume is OK, but to use it or similar phrases more than once can actually give employers a negative impression.



WHAT WORDS AND PHRASES TO USE INSTEAD?

CHALLENGE, ACTION, RESULT.

Instead of “demonstrated success in” or “proven results,” show the employer the results using data, numbers, and metrics. You can do this by writing bulleted statements about your accomplishments using the C.A.R. formula.

C.A.R. stands for Challenge, Action, Result.

Share the challenge that you faced, the action you took to address the challenge, and the data/numbers that go with the result. This provides proof to the employer of the value you can add and is much more specific than saying you have proven results.

The same goes for using the terms “successful,” “success,” “results-oriented,” or “results-driven.” Instead of using these vague terms, simply tell the story of the results you’ve achieved using the C.A.R. formula.

Replace the phrases “excellent communication skills” and “team player” with examples of how you’ve used your communication skills and how you’ve been a team player. Words that can help you lead into these examples might be “influenced,” “empowered,” “negotiated,” “advocated,” “advised,” or “enabled.” You always want to show—not tell.

It’s a minor shift in language but a major change in meaning.



Instead of the phrases “responsible for” and “duties included,” focus on sharing accomplishments.

Look at the job description you’re applying to. What are the main requirements of the role? Contract negotiation? Budget management?

Replace “Responsible for budget management” with “Managed \$3M annual budget.” That way you’re showing the employer not just what you can do, but you’re giving them concrete examples of what you have done.

“Seasoned” and “accomplished” are two very overused resume phrases that are often interpreted negatively. These terms can be construed as over-experienced, out-of-date, or worse, implicit age bias takes over and the candidate is assumed to be too old. I’m not condoning this, and I rather abhor that it even exists, but I bring it up because it’s out there, it happens, and I see it way too often.

So, until things change and companies come up with progressive ways to guard against bias in the hiring process, safeguard your resume by avoiding these terms.

It’s more effective to discuss the areas you’re experienced in, listing industries, hard skills, functions of the role, professional or technical skills, academic credentials, etc. These terms are specific and communicate with more clarity than a general statement like “seasoned sales executive” or “accomplished professional.” Both of which I see on a great deal of resumes but which tell me little about who you are or what you’re capable of doing.

I’m also not a fan of “worked with” or “served as.” Both are passive terms. If you collaborated on a project or headed the budget committee, be specific about who you worked with and what you accomplished as part of your work with them.



IMPROVE YOUR RESUME WITH ACTION VERBS

Action verbs are high-impact words that convey your performance and achievement to potential employers. By using them, you can quickly and easily improve your resume.

Use them at the beginning of your resume bullets and throughout your career summary.

Starting each bullet with an action verb not only communicates achievement, action, etc., but it also opens the sentence to lead right into the challenge you faced and the result you achieved.

It's hard to start a sentence with "transformed," "increased," or "achieved" without following it up with something specific, measurable, and relevant.

- Accelerated
- Acquired
- Adapted
- Addressed
- Advanced
- Advised
- Advocated
- Analyzed
- Authored
- Budgeted
- Built
- Captured
- Chaired
- Championed
- Changed
- Closed
- Coached
- Composed
- Counseled
- Decreased
- Delivered
- Designed
- Developed
- Devised
- Discovered
- Diversified
- Diverted
- Drove
- Earned
- Educated
- Eliminated
- Enacted
- Energized
- Engineered
- Enhanced
- Established
- Examined
- Exceeded
- Expanded
- Facilitated
- Finalized
- Formed
- Formulated
- Founded
- Generated
- Guided
- Headed
- Hired
- Identified
- Implemented
- Improved
- Increased
- Influenced
- Initiated
- Inspired
- Integrated
- Introduced
- Launched
- Located
- Maintained
- Managed
- Mapped
- Marketed
- Mediated
- Modeled
- Motivated
- Navigated
- Negotiated
- Observed
- Operated
- Orchestrated
- Organized
- Originated
- Oversaw
- Perfected
- Performed
- Persuaded
- Piloted
- Planned
- Pinpointed
- Prepared
- Presented
- Projected
- Provided
- Rebuilt
- Recaptured
- Redesigned
- Reorganized
- Reinvigorated
- Resolved
- Restored
- Revised
- Secured
- Simplified
- Solidified
- Streamlined
- Structured
- Supervised
- Supplied
- Supported
- Surpassed
- Targeted
- Transformed
- Transitioned
- United
- Upgraded
- Won
- Wrote

INFLUENTIAL PHRASES

Use these descriptive words sparingly to spice up your resume and cover letter. Consider them like hot sauce. Add a little, but don't overdo it.



One of my favorite places to use these powerful phrases is in the career summary at the top of your resume.

It's simple to select one that fits you the best and start a sentence with it then add the proof.

Down here in the South, we say "The proof is in the pudding," and when it comes to resumes you want to back up these influential phrases with quantifiable results.

It's important to note that without the right words, applicant tracking systems will not pull your resume up in search results. Make sure you incorporate hard skill keywords for your industry and position into your resume, too.

- Accelerated career track
- Action-oriented leader
- Aggressive turnaround leadership
- Award-winning pacesetter
- Best-in-class
- Change catalyst driving organizational transformation
- Change management
- Competitive market positioning
- Cultivator of strategic alliances
- Devoted people leader
- Diversity & inclusion
- Double-digit improvements
- Driving innovation
- Elite performer
- Entrepreneurial vision
- Executive leadership
- Fast-track promotion
- High-caliber
- Innovative growth strategist
- Lean manufacturing driver
- Organizational driver
- Outperformed market competition
- Passionate human resources trailblazer
- Peak performer
- Self-starter
- Six Sigma champion
- Startup organizations
- Strategic planning & execution
- Strong communicator able to engage and influence diverse stakeholders
- Turnaround specialist
- Strong and sustainable gains
- Talent maximizer
- Visionary business leader
- World-class operations



STRENGTH DESCRIPTORS

You need to talk about your strengths within your resume. I know it's hard because we want to be humble and we don't like to brag about ourselves or come off as being arrogant. I hear you.

BUT—YOU HAVE TO ADVOCATE FOR YOURSELF. NO ONE ELSE IS TRACKING YOUR WINS FOR YOU.

If you don't tell the employer what your strengths are, they're not going to know.

If you're struggling with self-awareness when it comes to your own strengths (no judgment here—I've taken my own fair share of assessments, quizzes, and MBTI evaluations), I strongly recommend starting with the [StrengthsFinder 2.0](#).

It's affordable and incredibly thorough. It provides all types of insights about your strengths, and you can use the information it provides for your resume and for planning your future career path. FYI: I don't get a commission from sharing it with you. I value it and believe it's worth mentioning!

Here are 27 strengths descriptors to get you started:

- Achiever
- Ambitious
- Analytical
- Authentic
- Caring
- Creative
- Dedicated
- Developer
- Empathetic
- Enthusiastic
- Flexible
- Honest
- Integrity
- Lifelong Learner
- Logical
- Maximizer
- Motivated
- Optimistic
- Open-Minded
- Patient
- Persistent
- Proactive
- Responsible
- Strategic Thinker
- Self-Controlled
- Trustworthy
- Versatile

These are best used in your career summary. Since many of these are considered “soft skills,” you want to ensure you're not overusing them.

THE SECRET TO A STAND-OUT RESUME?

A memorable career story & personal brand.

This is where many applicants (and other executive resume writers) go wrong. Your resume shouldn't simply funnel your experiences and job titles into a pretty template. It should tell a memorable narrative about who you are and how your unique abilities transform companies.

IT ALL STARTS WITH A PHONE CALL . . .

[BOOK A CALL NOW](#)



BONUS: QUESTIONS TO UNCOVER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Need help fleshing out your successes and value? These are a sample of the types of questions we use with our clients to dig deep and reveal great accomplishment-based content. Use these to help gather compelling content for your resume.

- Have you been recognized as the first person to do something in your role?

- Describe a time when you saved the company money.

- What project have you accomplished recently that helped the company make more money?

- Have you met an impossible deadline? If so, what difference did this make to your company?

- Describe a recent problem you had to solve.

- What is your biggest professional achievement in the past 12 months?

- What project have you accomplished recently that helped attract new clients to the company?

- Look at your most recent performance evaluation or review. What were you commended for?

- What have you come up with in your current position that has made your work easier?