

## Indicating Race/Religion/Political Affiliations/Sexual Orientation or Other Personal Information in Resumes and Cover Letters

*Indicating race, religion, political affiliations, and sexual orientation in a resume can often be touchy. The best way to do it is inadvertently. Place the information in the resume in a subtle way. Only mention them if they are directly related to your previous work experience and if doing so will be an asset to your present job search. In a resume, there is no room for unnecessary information. Pay attention to the time factor; if only a few months were spent working on a project that would reveal race, religion, political affiliations, etc., it won't be necessary to include on the resume. Make sure that you don't have too much emphasis on your personal hobbies in your resume. This can easily backfire as the employer may think you can't separate personal and professional life. They may see that you will need frequent or excessive time off. Be cautious in all things that you include on your resume.*

This is one of the touchiest subjects with regard to your self-marketing materials. By "indicating" we are not referring to outwardly stating these things by writing something like "Republican, Heterosexual, White, Catholic Male" on your resume. Rather, we are talking about inadvertently revealing personal characteristics about yourself through the experience and activities you include on your resume, such as membership in certain organizations, volunteer work, activism, church affiliations, etc.

While we'd like to think that the person evaluating your resume is basing his/her opinion solely on your qualifications, we all know that external factors often come into play. For that reason, if you have information on your resume that gives away personal attributes, it may be in your best interest to exclude it. Maybe you participated in the Christian Law Students' Association or the Muslim Students' Association, the Federalist Society, the Young Democrats' Organization, or the Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual Student Association while in school? Or maybe you volunteered with a particular church group or lobbying group?

If these affiliations will not play a role in your professional life, it's best not to include them on your resume. Not because they're bad or wrong, but because they do not have any bearing on who you are as a professional.

There are certain situations in which this advice does not apply. If you spent the last 10 years working for a political organization or a religious nonprofit, obviously you will not exclude this from your resume. However, if you merely interned with such an organization for a couple of months, you will want to leave this off of your resume. Let the time factor be your guide in this case. Another exception would be if you know that a particular company or organization shares your political or other beliefs. For instance, if you are applying to a Catholic school as a media specialist, then your 5 years of experience as a Sunday School teacher with your church might work in your favor.

Even if the person reading your resume shares your personal attributes, this tactic may also backfire. He/she may view your disclosure of them as an indication that you cannot separate your personal life from your professional life. In addition to evaluating what you've done, employers will also be analyzing your resume to see what kind of choices you make. A well-thought-out resume shows intelligence, self-awareness, and insight. For this reason, you should know that you will be judged, however unintentionally, on the choices you've made with regard to your resume, as well as by your experience itself.

One more area that many job seekers may not initially see as potentially harmful is activities that involve your children. (If your intended industry involves children, such as education or childcare, then this would certainly not apply.) For instance, if all of your activities or volunteer work center around the PTA, school functions, preschool activities, field trips, school fundraisers, etc., a potential employer may incorrectly assume that these outside activities will somehow interfere with your work. These can also indicate the age of your children. Although it is rare, there are still employers who feel parents of young children, particularly women, do not make optimal employees. “Weeding” them out in this phase of the hiring process is far less conspicuous than trying to slyly extract this information in an interview. They may be afraid that you will take off excessive time for illnesses or not be able to put in necessary overtime if you need to pick up your children from school or daycare by a certain time each day.

Although you may truly enjoy the types of activities we have mentioned here and perhaps you have even acquired new skills through them, consider your audience before including them on your resume or cover letter. The safest bet in the vast majority of situations is not to mention or indicate sensitive topics on your resume or cover letter that a potential employer cannot bring up during your interview.