

Common mistakes in banking CVs

Investment Banking › CV and Cover Letter



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Finding a position in investment banking is a highly competitive process, which gives you a very small margin of error when it comes to your resume or CV. While there is no such thing as the perfect investment banking resume (banks will not expect you to have perfect scores, be the president of every club in your school, and speak five languages), nevertheless applicants do make common mistakes that you should avoid.

This is our list of investment banking CV common mistakes.

1. Typos / grammatical errors

Typos and grammatical errors simply show that you did not spend enough time on your CV, and therefore, you do not take your applications seriously. Also, a large part of your job as an investment banking associate or analyst will be to check for people's mistakes, so typos in your CV are a good indicator of whether you'll be good at your job! Banks do tend to be reasonable though, and if there is just ONE typo and the rest of your application is outstanding, you should not worry. But why take the risk for such an easy fix? Read all of your applications three times and run a spell-check before sending out anything!

2. Formatting issues

This goes together with the first point. You may think this is trivial, but formatting that is not consistent (company name bolded in one place, italicized in another) or wrong (words or paragraphs misaligned, text going over one page) will be spotted immediately by the banker reviewing your CV. Associates and analysts are trained to spot those kind of formatting mistakes and they can be unforgiving, and they will be the ones making a first cut in CVs. The only solution to avoid this is to print a copy of your CV once you're done with it, see what it looks like, and get at least one friend to review it. Finally, don't try to come up with your own template; just use the one provided by your school. Also, do not try to stand out with some "original" formatting - when it comes to investment banking, being conservative is always the best approach.

3. Listing EVERY small job you ever had during your studies

Do not forget that a CV is meant to be an advertisement for yourself. Space is precious, so limit yourself to what sells

'you' best to the investment bank. For example, you don't need to list your job as a sales assistant or as a waiter during your studies if another work experience is more relevant. Expand in detail the relevant experiences, and delete entirely what does not sell you best. The only exception would be mention something like "Achieved 2.1 grade while working 20 hours part-time as a shop assistant at xxx". In this case, it works because it shows that you are a hard worker who can manage multiple demanding tasks, an important quality for an investment banker.

4. Describing your courses in too much detail in the education section

It is fine to mention some of your courses, ONLY if they are relevant (corporate finance, private equity, economics) or stand out and show some very specific interest (19th Century Russian history, quantum physics, etc.). Do not overdo it - your courses should never take more than one line in your CV and should be limited to three or four courses at the absolute maximum, and you do not need to describe those. Bear in mind that 90% of the applicants will write "Corporate Finance" or "M&A" in their list of courses so try to pick another one or two that sound interesting if you can.

5. Being descriptive without highlighting your KEY, SPECIFIC achievements

Bankers don't want to know what you did (we can guess that from the title of your job), but they want to know what you learnt and achieved through your experience. Therefore, be results-oriented and use numbers. For example, do not write the all too common M&A internship description: "Performed valuation using DCF, comparables analysis, calculated WACC, and did benchmarking for associates in the group." Do write: "Led the valuation of a \$700 million technology company under associate supervision, which involved building a complex operating model from scratch, full WACC analysis, and benchmarking of 25 companies in four countries." What is the difference? The good version gives more concrete details and clearly demonstrated the complexity of what you were doing. More interesting details will catch the banker's attention and also prove that you understand what you were doing. Note that this also works for any other kind of experience. Another example: Do not write: "Researched the consumer goods industry and helped partner writing industry reports." Do write: "Supported partner's analysis of the consumer good industry by identifying and benchmarking key performance indicators of 50+ retail companies across the UK."

6. Too long or inappropriate level of detail

Give a good, concise overview with some details, but do not go too deep and try to make a job sound more interesting than it was. Bankers will get a good idea of what you did just by looking at job titles and firm names. Be honest and go straight to the point when talking about your responsibilities and achievements. Also, remember to limit your resume to one page only.

7. Clichés!

Clichés can damage your application. Remember, you do not need to mention your skillset - this should be evident from what you have done instead; don't tell it to me, prove it to me! Clichés include being an "analytical thinker", "developed great team-playing skills", "ability to learn fast", "worked under high pressure and had to meet tight deadlines", "leadership ability and skills", and "extremely hard worker."

8. Boring or weird hobbies

Boring ones includes: reading, jogging, travelling (even travelling to 20+ countries, far too common), shopping, cinema, going to restaurants, or eating, fishing. Weird/geek ones: Word and Excel, mental arithmetic, computer

games, programming, drinking. You can refer to our section on ["What to write in the 'other interests' section of my CV."](#)

9. Stating the obvious

This includes: fluent in English, proficient in Word, PowerPoint and Excel, good understanding of valuation concepts, etc.

10. Errors of style

- Using "I". For instance, "I analysed the financial reports of company xxx. I compiled the reports. I used Excel to do tables and charts." You should be using action verbs without the "I", which makes you sound arrogant.

- Not using action verbs. These are good action verbs for investment banking: leading, analysing, performing, reaching, accomplished, supported, assisted, communicated, presented, contributed, delivered, drafted, ensured, finalised, generated, helped, launched, modelled, negotiated, oversaw, processed, supervised, or volunteered.

- Improper word capitalization, i.e. Worked in the Customer Service Department of a Retail Company.

11. Sharing confidential information

This mostly relates to projects in investment banks. Make sure that all the information contained in your CV is in the public domain.

If you would like your CV to be reviewed by AskIvy, please see our [CV Review Service here](#).

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