

Job seekers

survival guide

“A succinct, swish resume and good interview ability are two of the most important skills”

It is an activity we may do many times in our lifetime, yet few of us are properly educated in the dos and don'ts of job hunting. Searching and applying for a new job requires the effort and preparation of a full time job in itself. Apart from this, simply mentioning the words job interview often sparks fear in the most confident graduates.

But a succinct, swish resume and good interview ability are two of the most important skills a graduate can leave university with. They can also help alleviate some of the nerves that surround interviews. So how can a good resume and interview preparation turn a potential employee into a successful candidate?

The most important aspect of the application is creating a professional, concise resume, which includes a cover letter. A resume is a marketing tool – promoting yourself is the aim and landing an interview is the outcome. A cover letter and resume should always be personal and tailored to the job in question.

Don't use the 'scattergun' approach and create generic cover letters and resumes that address every potential employer. These are easily recognisable and employers are quick to disregard them as they show a lack of true interest in the advertised job.

A resume for a graduate or executive level position should include a comprehensive list of all qualifications, education, work experience and skills. The use of 'power words' can also be helpful when describing past employment positions and personal qualities. Words such as proactive, focused, and highly motivated can be used in both the cover letter and resume. Swinburne careers counsellor Marianne Mooney, says a resume should be a way to "promote yourself, but don't over do it".

The cover letter is the "the wrapping on the parcel", Mooney



says. A cover letter generally should be up to five paragraphs long. It should discuss in sequence the job in question, the skills you pertain, why you are enthusiastic about the job, and finish with a definite point of contact and availability.

Most importantly, don't forget good editing. Poor format and incorrect grammar in a cover letter and resume can be a deal breaker when deciding which applicants make the final interview cut.

And it may seem obvious to some but a resounding 'do not' is lying on a resume or in an interview. Recruitment consultant Jo Holt says, "Don't say you did a degree that you didn't do, because we always find out."

A good resume will result in being invited for a job interview, which is encouraging to graduates, but can also often be a daunting experience.

"Nervousness has always been

my weakness," student Sue Raj says. Studying Multimedia Technology, Raj is aiming to gain as much work experience as possible in the industry to impress future employers, but can never seem to get past her nerves when it comes to interviews.

One way to calm nerves is as simple as being properly prepared across all areas, including appearance. While some employers genuinely may not care about

how an employee looks, Holt has had to strongly suggest to some candidates to take a shower or shave before an interview. She even keeps shoe polish in her office desk for emergencies. Traditionally, a suit and tie are more impressive than tracksuit pants and a five o'clock shadow, but ensure you make an impact on the employer without dressing inappropriately.

The job interview allows the employer to decipher which candidate will be the right "cultural fit" for the business. Employers often tell recruiters they are looking for three common qualities in potential employees. These are the ability to self manage, to think outside the square, and for evidence they are not 'clock-watchers'. Although Holt says that it is currently an employee's market, employers are still looking for this package in their employees.


Demonstrating that you are able to transfer skills across areas is an asset. She says that employers will almost always employ a candidate who shows they are strong across all fields, rather than a candidate who has very precise job experience but terrible communication skills.

Preparation for an interview can be as simple as researching about the company or job you are interviewing for on the Internet. Mooney suggests knowing even a little about the company before hand shows you are motivated to be a part of their team.

But she also suggests to "expect the unexpected" from an interview. While generally they may run for around 30 minutes, being prepared with only technical knowledge is not enough. Employers have been known to ask questions totally irrelevant to the job as a means of insight and understanding into a potential employee's personality.

If all these points are addressed and you're still nervous, a smile and eye contact can be an instant confidence boost, and will create a positive impact with the employer.

Finally, Mooney says the tremulous issue of pay is a 'can do'. Feel free to ask what salary you could expect, but only towards the end of the interview.

Always remember, a job interview is a two way street. It's not just the employer surveying your suitability for the job, but also an opportunity to make sure the role fulfils your own expectations. 

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