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Tips on Cover Letters, Resumes,
Job Applications and Interviews.

How to make your job application stand out

1. Tailor your application to the job

This first tip is the most time-consuming and, as a result, the most ignored. However, to get noticed, it's crucial to make your application relevant to the specific role you're applying for.

2. Make your resume easily skimmable

Imagine you're a hiring manager and you receive more than 100 cover letters and resumes to sift through to find the right person for the job. With that kind of volume, applications that are clearly laid out, using the right font and paragraph breaks, are most likely to get noticed.

3. Use the right keywords

One of the best ways you can make your application stand out is to make it more findable.

This involves using specific keywords for skills that recruiters or hiring managers might be looking for in your resume and cover letter.

If search tools are being used to search a database for a potential candidate, yours will show up in the search results. Be sure to naturally integrate these words and phrases into sentences in your application, rather than awkwardly listing words somewhere on the page.

4. Proofread, proofread, proofread

Hiring managers aren't very forgiving when it comes to spelling mistakes. In fact, just one or two errors or typos in your application could mean that your application is rejected entirely.

5. Be results-focused

Hiring managers are looking for someone who can get the job done and deliver results. Show that you are that person by using statistics ("increased sales by X%") or action words ("steered X project") to demonstrate the results you can achieve.

6. Use the STAR technique

The STAR technique is a proven method for clearly conveying important information. It helps provide context and demonstrates your capabilities in a concrete, measurable way. When describing a skill or capability, use the following formula: **SITUATION – TASK – ACTION – RESPONSE**

8. Follow up

If you are genuinely suitable for a role, a follow-up phone call to the relevant recruiter, hiring manager or decision maker within an organisation can go a long way to support your application.

By putting in extra effort and demonstrating you are truly interested in this specific role, you'll give yourself a better chance of success.

If there are no specific instructions about how to send your resume via email, stick to the following:

Tips for sending a resume by email + resume email template

1. Keep it succinct

Introduce yourself, explain why you are writing the email, and outline the documents you have attached. Include a warm but professional sign-off expressing that you hope to hear further from the hiring manager.

2. Triple-check your message and documents

Run your email message, resume, cover letter, and any other documents through a spelling and grammar check, and read each piece out loud to ensure it makes sense. Importantly, double-check that you have tailored everything to the current job you are applying for, as your CV and cover letter templates may still mention a previous business name from a past job application.

3. Use a professional email address

You might like to email your friends from StarWars_Lover_69@hotmail.com, but for job applications you should use a professional email address that contains all, or part of, your first and last name.

4. Send yourself a test message

Before you send your email to the employer, send yourself a test message with your documents to make sure all the formatting is correct and that all the attachments open as they should.

How to write a cover letter that stands out

1. Open with a hook

The number one goal of your cover letter is to get a hiring manager interested in you, and what you have to offer.

Swap the standard introduction with a memorable statement instead. Start with an impressive achievement you're proud of, and that's relevant to the role, or highlight an aspect of the job description that stands out to you. If you can get them to keep reading, that's half the battle won.

2. Personalise it to match the job listing

Address your letter to the appropriate person, quote the job title and reference number (if applicable), and add where and when you saw the advertisement. Also, include the date and your contact details.

3. Use a clear and concise structure

A good cover letter uses short sentences, simple language and is concise. It should be between 3-4 paragraphs in length and no longer than one page.

Begin by clearly stating why you are interested in the role and company. Next, demonstrate how your key skills, qualifications and experience can help the business meet its goals. Show how your interests and personal qualities make you the best fit for the job and close by thanking the reader for considering your application.

4. Keep the tone positive and upbeat

The tone of your cover letter should be professional, friendly, and upbeat. You want to demonstrate that you are enthusiastic about the role and have a positive attitude towards the company. Avoid mentioning areas where you may be lacking the skills or experience listed in the job advertisement.

5. Use a cover letter template

If you've ever wondered how other people make their cover letter and CV look so great, here's the secret: templates. There are countless templates online.

6. Give them a reason to read your resume

The point of a cover letter is first to introduce yourself and show why you are a good fit for the role and the company, but it should also act as something of a teaser for your resume. You want the reader to move from the letter to your impressive resume, so don't simply regurgitate all of the information from your resume into your letter.

7. Always proofread

Spelling mistakes or poor copy-paste jobs are the fastest way to get your application discarded by hiring managers.

Have a trusted friend or family member double-check it for mistakes. Reading your cover letter out loud is another great way to catch any tiny errors in the mix.

How to write a resume that stands out

1. Tailor your resume to fit the job description

There are many ways to do this, but lying at the heart of all of them is research; learn about the place you're applying to and show them why you're the best fit.

2. Highlight the important skills

There will be lots of ways you can benefit any company you work for, but the beauty of a creative resume is that it focuses on the exact skills you're able to bring to the table – the ones the company you're applying to is looking for.

3. Focus on your achievements

When you write a resume, it should focus on the unique accomplishments that make you stand out. Demonstrate how you contributed to the organisation: did you save money or time, exceed targets, solve problems, improve processes, or attract new customers? Where possible, quantify how you added value with numbers, percentages or dollar amounts.

4. Ensure your resume makes for a compelling read

The tone of your resume should be enthusiastic, upbeat and professional. Put your strongest and most relevant points first, using action words such as ‘completed’, ‘developed’ and ‘managed’, and superlatives such as ‘first’, ‘best’ and ‘highest’.

Use a practical resume format

- **Choose a fuss-free layout** that provides enough white space so the resume is easy to read.
- **Keep the text size no smaller than 10 point font** and provide enough white space so it’s easy to read.
- **Aim for 2-3 pages** to include the information that is relevant for the role – there is no need to include everything you’ve done across your entire career.
- **Ensure your name and contact details** (mobile phone and email address are requirements) are clearly visible at the top of the resume.
- **Include a career summary or professional profile** at the beginning that highlights your relevant experience, core competencies and technical skills.
- **For each role you’ve held, include the company name, job title and dates.** Start with your most recent role and then add your previous roles in reverse chronological order.
- **Briefly describe the scope, responsibilities and important aspects of each role**, to whom you reported, the number of people you managed, size and type of projects you handled and size of budget if relevant.
- **Include bullet points of your accomplishments for each role.** These should include the tangible results of your efforts.

How to prepare for an interview

1. Research the company

- Before you get to the interview, it’s vital to do your homework about the company and the person you will be working for. Visit the company’s website to find out everything you can about their key products and services, target markets, recent events, structure, culture and future direction.
- Researching the company will help you to better understand where your role fits and your knowledge will boost your credibility with the interviewer.
- Additionally, find out as much as you can about the person who will be interviewing you. And talk to people; if you happen to know someone who works there or has worked there before, they could be a source of valuable inside information.

2. Review the job description

- Carefully examine all the information you have about the role, including the job description and job listing. Make notes about how your skills and experience align to the role.
- Doing so is not only useful for preparing relevant responses, but also for forming intelligent questions to ask during the interview.

3. Practise your responses... and your questions

- Rehearsing your responses is one of the most critical steps in interview preparation. Try to anticipate the questions you might be asked and make sure that, when they come, you're not answering them for the first time.
- For each potential question, prepare practical examples that demonstrate how you responded to the task/situation and highlight the positive outcome.
- Also prepare some questions you can ask towards the end of the interview. Choose questions that are relevant to the role and the company, and avoid topics like salary and benefits – these discussions can happen further down the track if you're offered the role.

4. Play to your strengths

- Know your key strengths and be able to communicate them convincingly. Have confidence in your professional experience and abilities and be able to articulate these strengths.
- The interview is your opportunity to sell yourself, so be sure to have prepared examples of what makes you a compelling candidate.
- And don't forget an interview should be a two-way conversation, not an interrogation. Don't be afraid to ask sensible and pertinent questions, because this is your opportunity to find out if the role is the right fit for you and your career needs.

13 common interview questions to consider

1. Tell me a bit about yourself

“Tell me a bit about yourself” is a commonly asked interview question to help break the ice and provide a brief, high-level understanding of who you are and your professional work background.

2. Why do you want to work here?

With this question, the interviewer is trying to understand your motivations for applying to the job.

What’s key here is to showcase your knowledge of the company and to highlight insights you have discovered during your interview preparation and research phase.

3. What do you know about us as a company?

Research and being prepared are, again, crucial to any successful job interview. This question allows you to showcase the time and effort you’ve spent really getting to understand the business, and you can use this question as an opportunity to align yourself to their value proposition and the services they offer.

4. What are your strengths?

With this question, the interviewer is looking to understand your professional strengths and how these will tie into the role. Choose a few of your key strengths that fit the role requirements, and wherever possible, give strong examples to back this up. Strengths include the ability to work under pressure, delegate successfully and to manage various projects and stakeholders.

5. What are your weaknesses?

While this is possibly one of the trickiest interview questions to answer, the interviewer is simply trying to gauge your level of self-awareness. It can be tempting to try and avoid the question, and maybe job candidates panic and end up responding with “I can’t think of any” or “I don’t have any”.

So, when it comes to the weaknesses discussion, focus on one or two areas that you could improve on or what you find most challenging. What’s key here is an ability to both acknowledge and be self-aware, while demonstrating your ability and willingness to learn and grow.

6. What have been your greatest achievements to date?

Here, the interviewer is looking to see if you are a high performer and where you have excelled in your previous roles. In this case, select a few recent accomplishments that are directly related to the job position, role and responsibilities wherever possible.

7. When have you had to overcome a difficult situation at work and how did you manage it?

Don't be afraid to select a tough situation that wasn't caused by you and explain the steps and measurements you took to overcome it.

Focus on and highlight the successful outcome and the learnings from the situation, as well as how the process and improvements enhanced overall performance.

8. What were the best and worst parts about your last role?

Focus on what you enjoyed in your last role, and when addressing the negative side, be cautious about criticising your previous employer – it doesn't make a good impression.

9. What are your goals for the next year?

Prepare for this ahead of the interview and really think about where you want to be and how it aligns with the role you are applying for. If your answer mentions continuous growth, learning and a willingness to adapt and take on new challenges, you're on the right track.

10. How do you respond to high-pressure situations?

Give an example of when you've succeeded under pressure that demonstrates logical problem-solving and people skills.

11. What do you like to do in your spare time?

This question is designed to uncover your team and culture fit. Whilst it can be tempting to rattle off a laundry list, stick to hobbies that paint a fuller picture of you as a person. Think about what you do in your spare time but remember to keep it professional.

12. Why should we hire you?

Your interviewer is essentially asking you to give your personal sales pitch, so take the time to explain why you're qualified to do the work (a combination of skills and achievements).

13. Do you have any questions for us?

Use this opportunity to ask any questions that haven't been covered during the interview. Questions could be about KPIs, what a standard day involves, team size, training opportunities, employee perks, or anything else that will help you determine the role's suitability.

6 challenging interview questions to prepare for in advance

1. Why are you leaving your current job?

If your reason for changing jobs is because of a personality conflict with your manager or colleagues, it's best not to highlight the situation as it may raise red flags. Instead, focus on talking about how you are looking for a new challenge, how excited you are about this new opportunity, and how you believe you are very well suited to the position.

2. How do you respond to taking direction from superiors?

Here you need to emphasise your ability to work as part of a team. Talk briefly about how all teams need to take direction from a manager and give a strong example of how you have done this successfully in the past.

3. How well do you handle criticism?

Here you get to show your human side by talking about how we all make mistakes, and how we can all learn from constructive and positive criticism. If they ask for an example, talk about some constructive feedback you've received in an area that is not vital for the job, and how you worked to implement it.

4. What motivates you?

This is definitely not where you talk about 'money'! It might be working as part of a high-performance team, being immersed in important and meaningful projects, or seeing how much of a difference your contribution makes to customers or your business.

5. What do you know about the company?

This is where your pre-interview research pays off. Briefly outline what you've learned about the company and appear keen to hear more.

6. What can you offer us that the next candidate can't?

This is where you get to show off what you have to offer. Talk about your achievements to date, the areas of the business you feel you could work with and where you believe you can make a positive impact.

What not to do at the interview

Not doing your research

You might have the skills to do the job, but do you know the how the company operates?

Turning up late

Unless you have a very good excuse and ring ahead to rearrange, turning up late for an appointment will not endear you to any employer.

Dressing inappropriately

It's all about first impressions.

Fidgeting with unnecessary props

This can include mobile phones, nail files and chewing gum.

Poor body language

Eye contact, good posture, a cheerful demeanour, and a firm handshake will get you a long way in an interview.

Unclear answering and rambling

Take time to think before you answer questions and avoid stumbling to an uncomfortable halt; it doesn't inspire confidence. Also, don't mumble; the interviewer doesn't want to have to ask you to repeat an answer or have to strain to hear every word you're saying.

Speaking negatively about your current employer

Never complain about your current or previous employer no matter how despotic or ineffectual they are. Badmouthing won't reflect well on you.

Not asking questions

Employers want to see you're interested enough to hear more about the job or company and will look kindly on any well-placed questions.

Lying on your CV

Anything written on your CV could be discussed at an interview, so a fabrication about your work or education record could damage your reputation in the long run.

Getting personal or too familiar

Avoid giving sob stories about how much you need the job due to the mountain of debt you've accrued. Also, don't behave in a conceited or overly-familiar or flirty manner.

Sitting down before invited

It's common courtesy to wait until you're shown a seat to sit down. Also, avoid slouching or putting your feet anywhere but firmly on the ground.

Discussing money or time off

Unless an offer is put on the table it's not recommended that you discuss money or future working and holiday arrangements.

Cursing

Using foul and inappropriate language is generally not acceptable at any time in the workplace, so at an interview it won't win you any accolades.

Not following up

You might not think you've performed well in an interview but a simple email reiterating your interest is a courtesy that might just pay off in the long run.