

GET THE INTERVIEW EVERY TIME

FORTUNE 500
Hiring Professionals' Tips for
Writing Winning Resumes, Cover Letters
And Landing the Job

REVISED & UPDATED

Third Edition

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Don't Skip the Research

'When you spend 40-plus hours a week with people, your colleagues become more than a professional network. They become your friends.'

JIM GATTUSO
DIRECTOR, STAFFING & RECRUITING
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TO FIND A JOB YOU LIKE, you need to do some research. Many skip this crucial step and instead apply to any job that remotely resembles their past experience or skills—without knowing anything about the company or the specific position or the people they'll be spending a good part of their lives with. These job seekers figure they'll find out all they need to know when they go on the interview—or in the first few weeks of the job.

That's leaving way too much up to chance. Instead, why not spend some time, before you even write or update the resume, exploring what the job market has to offer you!

Think about what you want your work life to look like. Is it a job that offers opportunity for advancement? Is it a job that provides ongoing training? Is it a job that offers flexibility or the option to work remotely? Is it a job that compensates you generously? Is it a job that engages you fully? Is it a job at a big company? The new job may have to check all these boxes or maybe only one or two. That's up to you, but research will give you clarity and help you zero in on the right position.

If you skip the research, there's a chance you'll be looking for another job sooner rather than later. A 2018 Jobvite survey said 30 percent (a pretty steady number no matter what year) of employees leave their new jobs within the first three months—either because they or the employer realized the fit wasn't working.

And because the hiring process continues to change, you will also need to know what the best protocols are for finding that new job. Nowadays job seekers have to familiarize themselves with an applicant tracking system (ATS), keyword-heavy electronic resumes, virtual and social recruiting, even mobile-optimized job applications—to name just a few of the new ground rules. Unfamiliar hiring protocols and processes edge their way onto the job market all the time and even technically savvy job seekers are left wondering what the best methods are for getting their resumes in front of hiring managers.

But while change is always a constant—especially in a post-pandemic world—the basics still apply. If you do your research, have an active network, create a solid, keyword-heavy electronic resume and cover letter, an up-to-date LinkedIn profile and a plan to target specific jobs and companies, you have a good chance of landing a job that checks all your boxes. Even in a disrupted and digitized marketplace, tried-and-true methods will help you land a job.

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Review company websites

So where do you begin? Ashley French said candidates can find out about Windstream by looking at its website. “Definitely check out the Talent Blog [on the company website]. That’s a great way to see our culture. We talk about community events, actual people. Even just looking at news articles, the *Wall Street Journal*, Google, Wikipedia.” Stephen Heckert, a senior manager in Human Resources at JDS Uniphase, said job seekers must “search company websites for the companies that are a personal fit culturally and career-wise.” In other words, begin with research and let that research direct your job search efforts. Brian Little, a group director in Human Resources at HSBC, said, “Research before you send a resume. Nothing wastes more time than looking at resumes that should never have been sent in the first place.”

Today job seekers have incredible access to employers—through the job postings, company websites and social platforms. Digital technology lets you investigate an employer on the other side of the world or in the next town—in a click. Employment opportunities, once so dependent on word-of-mouth, classified ads or research at the library, are now optimized instantly. The job market is at your fingertips, which is empowering but also overwhelming.

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When you begin looking for a job, make a decision to be organized, deliberate and focused. Break everything down into steps. And the best place to start any project—whether it’s a PowerPoint presentation or conducting a job search—is with research. Take notes, create files, look at employees’ reviews on Glassdoor or Vault about their employers, read articles about the industry and Google companies you’re particularly interested in and then set up an “alert.”

The keywords in the job posting

If you’re looking for a job, visit a few of the big job boards: Indeed, SimplyHired, Monster and CareerBuilder (to name a few). These job boards have tons of job postings that can help you identify your current marketable skills. Review the job postings that apply to your profession, industry and job title—carefully. When you see a position you are qualified for—based on matching up skill-for-skill—save the posting and highlight all the applicable keywords (words that describe your skills, such as Excel, HTML, analytics, cycle counts, General Ledger, private label pricing), so you can use these words when writing your resume and cover letter.

Don’t spin your wheels applying for positions you are not qualified for. Your current skills should match up with the skills listed in the posting; those are the jobs where you have the best chance of landing a face-to-face interview. Laurie Byrne, vice president of Global Staffing and Talent Development at

Stryker Corporation, said, “If you understand what you want or where you want to work or where you have a personal interest, those are the places to start—not the rapid-fire shotgun approach of everywhere.”

With thousands of job postings for the type of work you do, you can discover exactly what qualifications are necessary to be considered for the type of job you want. Start by plugging your job title (or one you aspire to) into the search bar of a job board, then start scrolling through the positions. When you see something of interest, save it and put it into a file dedicated to your job hunt. Then find a few more jobs. Check out different job boards—even a niche job board, such as CollegeRecruiter, Energyfolks, HealthcareJobsite or JobsinLogistics. Spend time looking at the jobs that describe what you do (or want to do). With about five or six postings, you’ll know what skills are required for the work you want to do.

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Targeting certain companies that fit your qualifications and skills is important, but to get in the door at these companies, you’ll have to parse their job postings for keywords and make sure those keywords appear in your resume. The job postings also will introduce you to the language your employer is using; that’s the language you want to use, and it includes both the soft skills (team-oriented) and the hard skills (account reconciliation). Laura Terenzi Khaleel, director of Talent Acquisition Strategies at Pitney Bowes, said, keywords are “critical, critical, critical.” The hiring process relies heavily on search—and search relies on keywords.

Job postings hold a good deal of information—more information than ever before—about the potential job. You want to match up skill-for-skill to jobs where you have the best chance of landing a face-to-face interview. That’s what your resume has to convey; you’re a good fit for the potential job.

Take a look at the following Indeed job posting; the keywords are *italicized*:

TRADE OPERATIONS ANALYST: ABC Hedge Fund is seeking a *Junior Trade Operations Analyst*. This position will be responsible for *middle* and *back office operation* functions on the *investment* team and responsibilities include *supporting portfolio management, trade settlement, account reconciliation* and *reporting*. Candidates must have a *bachelor's degree* with a strong academic record, at least two years of relevant experience and strong technical skills, including *Excel, Access and SQL*.

Responsibilities:

- Support the *portfolio management process* through *trade settlement, account reconciliation* and *reporting*.
- Ensure *trade allocations* are accurate and *settled* within all necessary systems and *reconciled* daily across multiple strategies.
- Coordinate with various counterparties to *facilitate loan settlement* within the context of available *cash, market nuances* and *portfolio management guidelines*.
- Review and analyze various *system reports* to identify and resolve *trade discrepancies* proactively and independently with custodians within *settlement timelines*.
- Control data within various systems to ensure integrity to *minimize operational risk*.
- Review *corporate actions* and *proxy notices* for required processing; interpret and verify *loan notices* for processing.
- *Reconcile cash* and *security positions* daily; *coordinate supporting documentation*.
- Interpret and evaluate *reconciliation results* and *resolve discrepancies*.
- Provide *account cash balance* to *Portfolio Management* on a daily basis.
- Maintain *accounting* and *portfolio management databases*, including *asset masters, trades, prices, dividends, debt registration* and *foreign currency exchange rates*.
- Maintain *settlement documentation*.
- Review *data imports* from external sources for accuracy.

- Reconcile data within internal systems to *custodian records* and resolve discrepancies.

Qualifications:

- *Bachelor's degree* from a highly accredited four-year university with a focus in *Finance, Accounting, or Economics* a plus
- 2+ years previous *Operations experience*
- Knowledge of *financial markets* and basic *economic concepts* required
- Excellent *communication skills (oral and written)*
- Ability to communicate to an audience based on their knowledge of the current situation
- Excellent *listening skills, analytical skills, organizational skills, problem recognition and resolution skills*; strong attention to detail
- Strong *reading comprehension* skills
- Ability to work within a *team*
- Strong *work ethic* and professional demeanor
- Ability to prioritize duties based on competing initiatives
- *Intermediate Microsoft Office Suite (Excel, Outlook, Word, PowerPoint)* skills

If you are a trade operations analyst, this may be an example of one of the five job postings you would keep on file so that you can access your keywords (italicized) when you compose your resume and cover letter. If you are a TOA and these keywords are Greek to you, then this position at this company is not the right one for you. Job postings allow employers to tell you what they need; you have to have these specific skills to be the solution to their problem.

The preceding keywords should appear on your resume if you apply for the trade operations analyst position (if you actually have these skills). Whether you apply through an applicant tracking system (ATS) or a recruiter finds you on LinkedIn, keywords are crucial. Ashley French, a recruiting and HR consultant with Windstream, said in a telephone interview for the third edition, “When you have 100 applicants, you want to be able to narrow down through keywords on who to call first.”

Look at the keywords you've gathered and make sure you match up to the type of position you are applying for skill-for-skill. You should also think about your past experience and translate that into keywords. Many employers expect you to have about 80 percent of the skills in a job posting before considering you a viable candidate, so if the posting says you need Excel or a Master's degree or Bond-pro or SharePoint or PaaS, then make sure these relevant keywords appear on your resume.

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If you don't have all of these skills, an employer may give you some leeway if you are particularly strong in other areas (the ATS won't be as forgiving). If you look at a number of postings and notice that you are sorely lacking the skills for the type of work you plan to do, then either redirect your job search and apply for a different job—or sign up at the local Community College and take a crash course to bring yourself up to speed on the necessary skills. Job postings are an excellent vehicle to direct your skill acquisition.

Generally most employers are in agreement about the basic skills needed for a particular type of job, so if you see certain skills popping up again and again throughout the postings you collected, then those are the skills you need for the type of work you plan to do—whether you're a programmer or an administrative assistant or an accountant.

Highlighting the keywords in a job posting and making them part of your vocabulary will help you when speaking to a recruiter or hiring manager. In a telephone interview for the third edition, Ola Abiola, a senior HR manager at Host Hotels & Resorts, said, "People should really take the time to read the job posting and make sure they have the right keywords: I'm not saying they should lie about their qualifications, but they should tweak their resume to fit the job." Most employers expect you to speak their language. You won't be able to do this unless you understand what it is they value.

The time frame for securing a new job

Finding a good job can take anywhere between two to three months—under the best of circumstances—and often longer for more senior positions. In “Here’s How Long It Really Takes to Get a Job,” Martha White said, “Jobs with either ‘vice president’ or ‘director’ in the title take a lengthy 76 days to fill.” That’s why it’s a good idea to conduct your job search while you still have a job. Why does it take so long? Consider the steps you have to take before you are hired:

1. Research.
2. Write a compelling resume and cover letter.
3. Update your LinkedIn profile.
4. Submit a resume and cover letter.
5. The recruiter and/or hiring manager calls you for a telephone interview.
6. If successful, you arrange for a time to meet for a face-to-face interview.
7. Once you get past the HR gatekeeper, you may have to meet with more people, very possibly on another date.
8. You have to allow the company to do its due diligence, such as checking your references, conducting a background check or other types of screening (depending on the position, it may be a credit report).
9. If all goes well, you can then negotiate the offer. (Think it over for 24 hours.)
10. In most cases, you will have to give two weeks’ notice to your current employer.

If you are ready to find new work, decide how many hours you want to devote each day to looking for a new job, and then commit to it. Some career experts, like Google’s Sean Splaine, suggest you spend just as much time looking for a job as working a regular job—8 hours a day. In an ideal world, people may do that, but it really depends on how eager you are to find a new job and whether you are currently working. No matter how much time you spend, make sure to dedicate yourself to making a consistent effort.

It’s tempting to get off track when searching for a job. If you’re like

most people, you'll find the whole process challenging. You may look for any excuse—the lawn needs mowing, the cat needs to be fed or the kitchen drawer needs to be reorganized. Don't lose your momentum. Set aside all those other competing distractions, and focus your attention on getting a job that matches your skills and interests. For important priorities in your life, you need to be single-minded.

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Devote your time to thinking about what it is you want to do, where you want to do it, how far you want to commute, what kind of culture you will thrive in, what skills engage your interest, how high you want to climb, what work/life balance makes your life manageable, how much salary you need to meet your bills and save and finally whether your contribution will matter—to you and everyone else—at the end of the day. Whatever you do, don't take the first thing that comes along. Consider all of your options and pursue them mindfully. Establishing your priorities before you start looking will help you narrow your options.

The right fit

Research helps determine the right fit. If you haven't got a lot of experience in the work world, find people in your network who enjoy what they do and talk to them. Ask them why they like their work. In a telephone interview for the third edition, Heather McBride-Morse, then an HR VP at Fiserv, said, "I do think people wake up in the morning wanting to know if what they're doing makes a difference... that their work matters in the real world."

Get a picture in your head of the ideal company you want to work for—whether it's a large Fortune 500 company with 50,000 employees or a small, local start-up. Your temperament will have a lot to do with the choice.

For some of you, searching for a job is unpleasant and you will be tempted to take the easiest route. Hold off. Consider all your options. That way you won't have regrets later—and you may even end up loving the work you do. Consider everything that's important to you.

Candidates have a great deal of access to information about employers. Not only do you have the opportunity to go online and check out the company website, but now you can discover what everyone else is saying about the very same employer. Overviews of the company you may want to work for are on Glassdoor, Vault, LinkedIn, Facebook, Indeed, Twitter, to name just a few. Read what current and former employees are saying about a company. You wouldn't have surgery without a second opinion, so make sure you know what you're signing up for.

Hiring is an expensive proposition—it costs a company about 20 percent more than the intended salary to hire a new employee, so if an employer is going to pay you \$50,000; it's going to cost an additional \$10,000 just to get you up and running. That's a serious investment, so most employers are careful about the people they bring on board. Employers are going to do their due diligence before they hire you. And you should do the same.

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Take the job hunt seriously—not only as a courtesy to yourself but also as a courtesy to an employer. In an age when everyone is busy, don't waste people's time. Your reputation hinges on your integrity and character, but also on your respect for others—including their time and their investment. Make informed decisions about your work life; those career decisions will pay you dividends on many fronts in the future.

In job hunting, your research is as important as writing a good resume. Visit company websites, find second opinions about a prospective employer on social media, review job postings, zero in on the keywords that describe what you do all day, set up a Google alert for news about the employer and keep talking to people in your network. Always know who the CEO or

owner of the company is. It's likely to be one of the questions prospective employers ask you when you are interviewing for the job. And it wouldn't hurt to know something about the executive leadership also. Don't scrimp on the information-gathering stage. You'll get much better results by acting like a private investigator now rather than later.

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Kathy O'Leary, an HR manager of Employment Services at Allied Waste, said, "Do your homework. Study the posting and prepare notes on your relevant experience. Be prepared to provide specific relevant examples with quantifiable results."

It's to your advantage to become familiar with the current hiring protocols. The days of staying in the same job your entire career are over. While employees at Fortune 500 companies tend to stay at a job longer than most (approximately 10 years at General Motors), that's not typical. Most employees, especially younger ones, spend three-to-four years at a job, so there's a good chance you will be employed at 12 different companies throughout your working life or maybe even change careers, have a second career or work in an entirely different industry. For that reason alone, you need to stay current on how the job market works and what the hiring protocols and standards are. While HR departments might cut some slack for recent graduates, seasoned employees are expected to know how things work, including how companies hire new employees. Staying informed is a testament to your professionalism.

After reviewing job postings, continue your research on an employer's website, take a look at the company's mission statement or view its "About Us" page. Try to get a feel for what's important to the company and see if it aligns with your values and work experience. If the culture of the company seems antithetical to your maverick sensibility, then you may not fit in well

there. But if you sense that it may be a good place to spend your time and efforts, then take a few notes—just in case you decide to write a cover letter for a position at this company.

McBride-Morse said, “It’s really up to the individual to choose what it is—to really assess—what these different companies do, how they operate, so try to understand the company’s story—what a company’s headline is going to be. One of the reasons I went to Fiserv was because it is a company that grew by acquisition. That was what drew me in. Even if I’m early out in my career, there should be a draw—not just ‘I need a job,’ but what the company stands for and what it can bring to you.”

While some career experts will tell you that you can create your own job, your best chance at landing a position is to apply to open jobs. Kellogg’s Carolyn Rice said, “People should narrow their options. I want the job candidate to show me what he or she wants. The least effective thing you could do is send your resume in without any job in mind. In this hiring environment, for big corporations at least, there has to be an opening.” Your time is valuable, so don’t spin your wheels trying to get into a company that recently furloughed 200 employees or has a hiring freeze or sees no urgent need for an SEO specialist.

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This doesn’t mean you should give up right away if you don’t see a position that matches your qualifications. Stacey Webb, an HR representative at Gannett, said job seekers need to be “persistent. Contact the HR department to express your interest in opportunities within the company.” A simple phone call may be all you need to open the door (unless the job posting specifically requests that you do not contact the employer). Even though your resume may not be ready for prime time, it doesn’t mean that you can’t initiate contact. Explain to the HR person that you are interested in applying and you want to know what the protocols are for submitting your application. Form an initial connection.

And remember, just like every interaction you have with a potential employer going forward, you are being evaluated, even in this first interchange, so ask appropriate questions and don't have your favorite rock band blaring in the background. Observe the protocols when you connect with an employer and act like a professional—showing you have a basic idea of how the process works, even when you are still in fact-finding mode.

Your brand matters

Before you apply to jobs, remove any compromising material and update everything on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn (or any other social sites where you spend your time). Your online musings are your personal brand, so don't initiate contact with an employer before doing an overhaul of any inappropriate content or photos. Delete posts, mention to your friends you're job hunting and not to tag you (at least temporarily). Start to polish your profile—and that means all the social networking sites you use that form a picture of who you are online. When you are looking for a job, above all else, you want to come across as a professional, so have a critical eye in regard to your LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

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Ask yourself what kind of message you are sending out to the world. Mike Rickheim, a vice president of Global Talent Acquisition at Newell Rubbermaid, said, "I would have a hard time saying that personal and professional networks should be completely separate because I think, at the end of the day, to really be a good networker, you figure out how to mesh [the personal and professional networks] well."

Social networking is covered in more detail in Chapter 6, but if you are eager to initiate contact with an employer before sending a resume and

cover letter, do some social damage control before reaching out. At the very least, Google your name and see what's circulating. Delete anything that may compromise your job hunt (if you can). If you can't delete the information, close the (Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter) account to make it harder to find—at least for the duration of your job hunt. If you have had legal troubles, you may have to get outside help to remove it from Google.

The worst thing you could do? Act as though all this social information is none of the employer's business. If you post online, the information is public. If you wouldn't be comfortable seeing your online comments on the front-page of a newspaper, then that's a good indication that you might not want an employer to see it, either. Most employers consider it their business to know who they are going to be working with eight hours a day, five days a week. While they don't always admit it, employers look at your social sites. It's important to clean up your online act.

Knowing your work-self

The job hunt revolves around knowing what you want to do and how you can offer your skills and services to an employer. Knowing about the company you are planning to work for will clarify your options. And getting to know your work-self—what engages your interest and allows you to shine—will also be sharpened by spending time in research.

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It's important to present yourself to the company as a good fit (your skills meet the employer's needs). Don't shortchange yourself. To get hired for a job that meets all your requirements—requirements discovered when you do your research—you have to remove fuzzy goals and instead target your research to reveal exactly what you want and what you have to offer.

Identify your strengths and think about your interests so you can align your job search with who you are. If you spend a good part of your workday coding, and you don't like it, then don't pursue another job that requires hours of coding. If you love graphic design and spending most of the day on Adobe Creative Cloud, then go for it. According to Art Calderon, a director of Human Resources and Strategy at Phelps Dodge, you should know what your "Wow factor" is.

Think about the last vacation you planned. You spent hours looking at tickets, hotels, attractions—going over all the endless details and relishing every possibility—until you came up with a plan. Your career path needs the same attention. Think about your strengths, talent, passions and align them with the opportunities in the job market. If you still have a job, you could make a list of the things you like about it and the aspects you don't like about it. Write it all down—commit those words to paper so you have a clear picture of what you're looking for in your next job.

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Forbes writer Heidi Grant Halvorson said, "More than a decade of research shows that when people experience a fit between their own motivation and the way they work, they are not only more effective, but they also find their work more interesting and engaging, and value it more." If you've never had a full-time job, you can still create a plan. Think about your soft and hard skills, your expectations and your temperament. Do you pay attention to details? Do you have initiative (or direction)? Do you like a fast-paced environment? Or do you thrive in a calm, peaceful atmosphere? Are you gregarious and social? Or do you prefer to work quietly on your own? Do you like numbers or facts? Or do you always look at the big picture?

If you are still at college, go to the career office for a skills assessment. If you don't have access to career services, take a free assessment test online—one that measures your skills or your personality or your aptitude or psychometric

skills (visit www.practiceaptitudetests.com/ or <https://www.jobtestprep.com/personality-test-free> for free sample tests). Not only will the tests help you to discover your strengths and weaknesses, but you'll get some practice taking them. According to a Talent Board's Candidate Experience Research report, "82 percent of companies are using some form of pre-employment assessment test." While there are never any guarantees that a new job will meet all your expectations, the more time you research, the better your chances are. Don't forget you'll be spending 40, 45, 50 hours a week with your future employer, so learn as much as you can beforehand, so you can make a match that works.