

The Executive Candidate Survival Guide

Tips & Hints for
Resume Writing, Interviews
and Salary Negotiations

By Kylie Hammond & Tom Hannemann

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1. Introduction

by Kylie Hammond

A. Kylie Hammond Executive Search & Coaching Group

Kylie Hammond Executive Search & Coaching Group is a world class, proudly Australian human resources consulting firm. Our offices are located across Australia, with international executive search affiliate partners located in London, Paris, Singapore, Hong Kong, New York and San Francisco, allowing us to draw upon an international pool of top talented senior executives for our clients.

We are a boutique firm providing a range of Talent Management & Human Capital Management Solutions. As a young Executive Search firm, we pride ourselves on networking with a fresh, dynamic talent pool of senior executives and in particular with emerging talent. We offer an exclusive service and distinctive approach to identifying, attracting and retaining top talent.

Executive Search & Selection

True Candidate-Centric Approach

Kylie Hammond Executive Search & Coaching Group is a unique firm in the Asia Pacific region. We are 100% candidate-centric in our approach and partner with candidates who meet our stringent criteria in a highly professional and confidential way.

Over the years, we have developed quality relationships with a mixture of national and international clients across a wide range of industries. With loyal relationships with blue-chip clients in the Information Technology, Communications & Media, Professional Services, Property & Construction, Pharmaceutical, Not-For-Profit, Higher Education, Banking & Financial Services, High-Tech, Legal and Venture Capital industries, we are particularly well-placed to provide sound career advice and recommendations to you as an executive candidate. We develop strong relationships with small to medium sized, stable companies with a bright future who are seeking top talent to assist with their growth and expansion plans.



Complete confidentiality of all candidate applications and discussions is guaranteed. As an executive candidate, you can rest assured that we provide candidate names and other confidential information to a client only after you have provided your consent for us to do so.

Exclusivity

Kylie Hammond Executive Search & Coaching Group operates very differently to many other recruitment & executive search firms in the market. In most cases, we are retained exclusively by our clients to search for top talent for specific employment opportunities on their behalf. We work with a select group of clients, and as such, our candidates are guaranteed assignment exclusivity, exclusive representation and accurate information about the recruitment process and the clients that we represent.

Opportunity Briefing

Before moving forward with an opportunity, candidates are interviewed by me personally or by one of our experienced Executive Search Consultants. You will be briefed thoroughly to make sure that there is an appropriate match of skills and experience, as well as a cultural fit with our client organisation. We take the time to understand your career aspirations and your ideal next career move and we brief you fully on the job opportunity.

Exclusive Talent Agent Services

Top talented executives are increasingly seeking a more proactive approach to career management. As one of Asia Pacific's leading Executive Search Consultants and Executive Career Coaches, combining experience and capability with over 15 years of business experience and in-depth understanding of Human Capital Management programs, we can offer our most senior candidates and emerging talent an exclusive, invitation-only approach to managing your executive career.

“Kylie Hammond is unique in the Asia Pacific region, as one of the only Executive Search Consultants who will assist and represent the executive's best interests during the end-to-end search and selection process, in a highly confidential and professional way.”

With us by your side as your exclusive "Talent Agent" to assist with your next career move, success and amazing results are within reach. This innovative approach is a market-leading, exclusive Executive Career Management Service for the executive who wants to manage, lead and take control of their career.



Effectively, many executive search and recruitment firms chose only to represent the interests of the hiring company. Kylie Hammond Executive Search & Coaching Group is unique in the Asia Pacific region, as one of the only Executive Search Consultants who will assist and represent the executive's best interests during the end-to-end search and selection process, in a highly confidential and professional way.

This unique approach is only offered to our most senior executives and "emerging talent" who match Kylie's stringent criteria.

Career Management Services Offered to Executives include:

- Helping in managing your executive career management strategy;
- Developing your career portfolio including a board portfolio;
- Identifying upcoming career opportunities;
- Identifying entrepreneurial opportunities;
- Fielding employment offers;
- Leveraging our network of "C-level" contacts around the globe;
- Proactive job search assistance;
- Introductions to other top executive search consultants;
- And when appropriate, assisting with salary and employment contract negotiations.

Talented and Want To Be Headhunted?

As a young, dynamic Executive Search firm, we are constantly on the lookout for top talented executives and emerging talent. We have published a number of high-profile advertising campaigns in the Sydney Morning Herald and The Australian to help us identify and attract top talent to register with our firm.

When you register your resume details with Kylie Hammond Executive Search & Coaching Group, we have an opportunity to discuss upcoming senior executive assignments with you and assist you confidentially with future career moves.

Your confidentiality is assured and you will find that our approach is refreshing and very candidate-centric. At any given point in time, we have executive search assignments in progress, and we are always on the lookout for talented executives who hold C-Level and other Senior Executive positions.

Visit the Kylie Hammond Online Shop

We have created a unique range of products and services developed exclusively for the executive candidate, covering all aspects of career management. These include our highly popular Executive Resume Writing Services, which include Resumes, Corporate Biographies, Statements of Capability & Selection Criteria and Customised Cover Letters, as well as a range of Interview Coaching, Online Personality Tests, Job Analysis Testing, Career Assessments & useful HR Assessment Tools, plus Executive Coaching and 360-Degree Assessment Products.

Please visit our [Online Shop](#) to view all the products on offer and current pricing.

Register for Current & Upcoming Executive Opportunities

Please register your details by [emailing us your resume & cover letter](#) or you may call 1300 669 139 or 02 9922 6175 and ask to speak to Kylie Hammond or one of our Executive Search Consultants. Alternatively, consider booking an exclusive Executive Career Guidance Session.



B. About This e-Book

Besides possessing the appropriate skills and experience, preparation is the key to securing an executive position. We have developed this complimentary e-Book for executive candidates to help guide you through the process of applying and interviewing for top-level positions and negotiating your salary package.

Our tips and tricks come from many years of experience in the executive search industry and dealing with a large variety of companies and HR professionals. Armed with this inside knowledge, you will have increased your chances of success in your executive job search.

Kylie Hammond
Principal, Talent Agent & Career Coach

2. Resume Writing

Climbing the corporate ladder is a process that most often starts with a resume (CV). In order to secure an interview for any executive position, having an outstanding resume is essential. Your resume controls the number of interviews you get, plays a vital role in the salary you can command and influences the quality of job offers you receive.

The importance of a good resume should not be underestimated. It truly is one of the most important documents you possess and is the main bridge between you and your future. The effort, time and money you invest in the development of a professional resume should be equivalent to its potential impact on your life.

A good resume presents your skills, experience, qualities and expertise in the most effective way and helps position you among the chosen few to be selected from the multitude.

“

Do you need a superior resume that maximises your chances to secure that important job interview? Kylie Hammond offers a [Professional Executive Resume Writing Service](#) to make your application stand out from other candidates in the market. Our executive resume writing experts work with you to research and craft a customised CV in order to present you as the perfect candidate for the position. See our [Resume Writing Packages and Prices](#).

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C. Elements To Consider When Writing Your Resume

Format, Design and Layout

File Type

Most employers and recruitment firms prefer you to attach your resume to an email as a Microsoft Word document created on a PC running Microsoft Windows. If you use an Apple computer (and all strength to you), expect your document's formatting and layout to be distorted at the other end. It is also not recommended that you send PDF documents. Most resume software packages used by recruitment firms convert the data scanned from resumes into a database and this simply works best with Word documents.

Design

Design your resume to appear distinctive, crisp and professional without looking as though you spent twice as long on the design as you did on the content. Unless you are a qualified or experienced graphic designer (but even then), you should keep it simple. The more complex you get, the more likely it is that the design on which you worked for hours will be distorted at the other end and the elaborate design detracts from the important content of your resume.

Font

Use standard fonts such as Arial, Times New Roman or Georgia, because many recruitment firms and employers only allow their employees to have a small number of fonts available on their computers. Arial, Times New Roman and Georgia are easy to read on the screen, they look reasonably good on paper and they are contained in the stock standard version of Word. Because you will be sending your profile by email and recruitment consultants or employers will probably first read it on their computer screen, it must look good on their screen (no matter what screen size and resolution they have.)

Spacing

Do not right justify the lines of text. Experts in graphic design and printing say that text is easier to read when the lines are of unequal length and the spacing between words is constant. This is because it forces the brain to concentrate and not miss any words and it is easier for the eye to know where it is on the page. When the lines are of the same length, the eyes and brain get fatigued more quickly, lose concentration and can miss or skip words or lines. In addition, Word does a lousy job of setting text so that the space between words is even when the text is right justified because it is just a word processing program, not a typesetting program.

Colours

Always use black and white. The document will most likely be printed on a black and white laser printer at the other end and photocopied in black and white. If you use different colours, they may not come out well in a black and white copy.

Samples

There is a selection of resume designs available on the [SEEK website](#). See the [Career Resources](#) section of the main SEEK website and the SEEK Executive site for samples (under the Salary, Advice & Tips tab). Alternatively, you can use the resume templates that are available within a few clicks from within Microsoft Word. Click on Help > Office on the Web, select the Templates tab and find [Resumes and CVs](#) from the Template Categories overview.

Danger of Sending Viruses

Sending a virus along with an emailed document is definitely not a good move. It's just poor form and will probably result in your inclusion in the pile of rejected applicants. I think everyone understands that computer viruses and other damaging bits of computer code are easily transmitted by email. The internet is a public utility and we therefore have obligations to the general community of internet users.

Don't just assume you don't have any viruses on your computer. You may not be aware of it yourself but inadvertently send it along with your emails. The recipient may get a warning from their virus checker and decide not to open your attachment or delete your email altogether. Or worse still, they may open it and infect their system. Having anti-virus software installed and running regular virus checks on your computer system helps protect you and others.

There is no excuse for not having up-to-date anti-virus software installed and activated at all times. Use a well-known brand of anti-virus software. Do not use shareware or freeware programs because they have no support and their virus definitions are not always up to date, because the backyard kids developing the software probably don't have the resources to do the research and development needed to keep their software up to date.

Cover Page

A cover page adds no value since all your relevant details are on the top of the first page of your Profile. Many people use a cover page to summarise their background, which means you're repeating a lot of information from your resume. Because you're likely to be sending your resume by email, just put a few lines in the body of the email instead of attaching a separate cover page.

How Long Should My Resume Be?

Some people believe that resumes should be one page. Some say two pages. Some say three. Many candidates for positions are frightened that if they don't comply with some arbitrary length limit, their resume won't get read. This is all nonsense and the experience I have had in preparing resumes for thousands of people since 1993 refutes the validity of such so-called "rules".

You should provide sufficient detail so that employers and recruitment consultants realise that you understand the impact of your work, that you go about your work using a well-reasoned thought process and have the judgment and other skills needed for the types of roles for which you are applying.

Recruitment consultants often complain that many resumes they receive lack sufficient depth and do not provide enough information to enable them to make a well-considered judgment about a candidate's suitability. In such cases, these candidates' resumes are almost always discarded in favour of those that provide insight.

The issue is not how long the resume is. It's about whether it conveys enough information to differentiate you from your competition and whether it sheds enough light on your approach and the value of your contributions.

If you need four or five or even six pages to demonstrate what you have to offer because you have a diverse career with numerous and varied job roles, or you have achieved a lot in your career, so be it. As long as the information is relevant and provides insight, include it.

Legibility and clarity is essential. If a resume is well designed and formatted with plenty of white space, headings and bullet points to separate the information, a four or five page version is much easier to read and access than 2 pages of densely worded prose using every square centimetre of the page in a font size that requires a magnifying glass to read.

What about the 2-page rule? The idea that a resume should be 2 pages emerged because employers and recruitment consultants became frustrated at reading excessively long documents that contained mostly padding, irrelevant information and extreme levels of detail. In response, people produced resumes so brief that it became impossible to determine what a person actually did or to distinguish candidates from each other. Because of this so-called 2-page rule, the trend became to produce almost unreadable documents so that as much information could be shoved into as little space as possible.

A resume must cater for the needs of readers who prefer detail as well as for those who prefer a broader picture. You can't tell which type of person will read your resume. This means that you need to create a document catering for both types and allow them to make the choice.

The key point is to make sure that the content of your resume is relevant and economically worded so as not to include superfluous information, but provides sufficient detail to be meaningful.



Explaining Your Accountabilities

In your resume, you need to indicate what you were accountable for in the various roles you have fulfilled. Employers want to know the purpose, value and contribution of what you did.

Most people simply list their duties or tasks. But employers and recruitment consultants want to know the level of your accountability and the purpose of what you were/are doing. This means that you need to go beyond a description of duties or tasks and into the purpose and value each role was/is supposed to add to the business of the organisation. Every role has (or should have) a purpose and is (or should be) designed to add value or contribute to the organisation.



For each role you have had, or at least those you are including in your resume, indicate its overall, core or underlying purpose. This means that you should inform the reader about what the role was designed to contribute to the organisation. In other words, at the end of the day, why did/does this role exist?

By including this, you are helping potential employers and recruitment consultants understand, in a nutshell, what you were/are required or asked to achieve in the job and to have a better understanding of the level at which you were working. This in turn helps them recognise that you are capable of operating at the level of the position for which you are applying.

If you provide information at this level, it will help set you apart from the competition because most people don't go to this depth. It will provide employers with greater insight about your abilities and the level of responsibility you have had. It will help convince employers that you know what you are talking about and have thought through your value to the organisations with which you have worked.

Explaining Your Achievements

You also need to indicate in your resume what you have achieved in each role. Achievements have three elements:

- **Action:** What you actually did to resolve a problem, address an issue or meet a need
- **Process:** What was your method, strategy or approach
- **Outcome:** What was the result, impact, value or benefit

Employers want to understand what you did, how you did it and the impact, value or benefit of what you did.

Don't be vague. For example, if you express an achievement as: "Reviewed and restructured the company's sales force", this does not provide enough information to the reader. What they want to know is how you did it and what the impact was. Reviewing is not an achievement. It is a task or process. "Restructured" is far too nebulous and vague to be of much use to the reader.

Be concrete. Therefore, the achievement might be re-worked as: "Increased the company's revenue base by 10% by decentralising the sales force and delegating decision making authority to enable a higher proportion of sales to be closed in the field."

Even if the achievement is not quantifiable in terms of revenue or costs, you can still provide an indication of the value of the achievement. For example: "Reduced employee turnover and increased productivity by introducing a performance management system that recognised contribution, challenged staff to accept responsibility and empowered them to make decisions."

The general pattern is: what you did, how you did it and what happened as a result i.e. 'what', 'how' and 'so what'.

If you were not the person wholly or fully accountable for an achievement, indicate your role or contribution to it. Saying you "participated in" or were "involved" in something is not sufficient. An employer will rightly ask the question: "What was your role? What was your level of participation?"

The intention is to avoid weak and vague terms and phrases and make your achievements as concrete and explicit as possible, within the constraints of not getting bogged down in excessive detail.

How Far Back Should I Go?

There is no hard and fast rule about how far back you should go in providing details of your experience and achievements. However, as a general (but breakable) rule of thumb there is usually little merit in providing details about experience more than around 10 years ago, particularly if you have risen quite a few steps up the ladder over the past 8-10 years.

However, sometimes it can be valuable to include details of jobs you had over 10 years ago, especially if there are some particularly noteworthy experiences and achievements that may strengthen your case or if you are planning to go back into an industry or field you worked in over 10 years ago.

If you have had numerous jobs over the past 10 years, or if your career does not yet span 10 years, only include details about your last 3-4 jobs.

For technical specialists where technological life cycles are short, there is little value in providing details about jobs where the technology used is now outdated. However, this does not mean you should not mention these jobs at all – you should, just leave out the more detailed description. You don't want any gaps in your resume that leaves people wondering what you did during that time.

Jargon and Terminology

It is usually best to use straightforward, commonly used business English rather than excessive amounts of specific jargon or terms or abbreviations with which only specialists in your field are familiar. You should keep in mind that most recruitment consultants are not specialists in your field. Even if you are sending your application directly to a potential employer, you should avoid the jargon. Although most employers reading your resume will probably be familiar with many of the terms used in your industry, many Human Resources Managers or Recruitment Officers might not be and they could be the first to read the applications and make an initial selection.

Many senior executives don't like excessive jargon. They may have been out of the "game" for some time or they might be managing a wide variety of sections in their organisation and may no longer have a strong or current grasp of the details. It is easy to bamboozle people with "science", but it is far more impressive to translate jargon and technical terms into business concepts that illustrate an understanding of the broader business implications of what you did.

Abbreviations

Using abbreviations or acronyms excessively can often be interpreted as an attempt to impress the reader with knowledge of the abbreviations. However, simply knowing abbreviations and acronyms does not indicate that you actually know what you are doing. Knowing what the acronyms stand for and what they mean is far more impressive.

Putting abbreviations or acronyms in brackets after the full name of a term is not necessary unless the term is going to be used several times throughout the document. It adds nothing and can detract much.

Therefore, aim to achieve a balance between including the specialised terms and abbreviations and acronyms used in your profession, field or industry and conveying what you achieved and did in broader terms to demonstrate your overall business sense.

Academic Results

For most positions, it is not important or even useful to include detailed academic results or transcripts. If a transcript is required, this is usually specified in the advertisement for the position or on the organisation's website.

If you have recently completed your degree and have done particularly well, I suggest including the number of High Distinctions, Distinctions and Credits. If your results lean toward the Pass end of the spectrum, it's best to remain silent on the issue.

If you are in the process of completing a tertiary or professional qualification, indicate when you expect to complete it.

If you only completed a year or two of a degree and never completed it and don't intend to complete it, leave it out. Including this information can do more harm than good. Employers prefer people who finish what they start.



Overseas Qualifications

If you obtained your professional and/or tertiary qualifications overseas and they are not the same as Australian qualifications, it's best to find out what Australian qualification it is equivalent to and indicate that on your resume.

Overseas tertiary institutions often use different nomenclature to Australian Universities. What might be called a Diploma in an overseas country might be equivalent to a Degree here and vice versa. Some overseas countries call what we call an Honours level undergraduate degree a Masters degree.

It is a good idea to have your overseas qualifications officially assessed by the [Australian Skills Recognition Information](#) service. This is particularly important if you are applying for positions in professional fields where specific qualifications and accreditations are mandatory.

Memberships

Include

If membership of a professional body is a mandatory prerequisite to getting a job in that field and/or if becoming a member requires you to pass exams or demonstrate your competency, then you should include it on your resume.

Do Not Include

If you can become a member of an organisation just by paying a fee and there is no test or other evidence of competency required, then it says nothing about your competence or expertise and is therefore not worth including.

Career Objective

Including a career objective in your resume is **not** useful because:

- If you are applying for a position, the reader will assume that it meets your career objective in some way (it's unlikely you would apply for a job if it didn't);
- The reader does not really care about your career objective;
- You can say almost anything you want without being able to substantiate it, as there is no valid way of corroborating what you say, which means it will usually be taken with a grain of salt anyway;
- An objective says nothing about your ability to actually do anything;
- It is usually too generic to be useful;
- It often contains the sort of flowery, fluffy and imprecise language and phrases that can make many readers want to heave;
- It adds no value.

For these reasons, you shouldn't include a career objective in your resume.

Your Contact Details

Which Contact Details Should You Include?

The only contact details you really need to include on your resume are your daytime phone numbers (either work or mobile or both) and your email address. You will be submitting your resume by email 99% of the time. That means that your physical or postal address is not needed because employers and recruitment consultants will reply to or acknowledge your application by email. Including your address may in some cases also result in you being excluded based on where you live, so to reduce the chances of that happening, leave your address details off.

Phone Numbers

Which phone numbers to include: Put your mobile number on your resume and/or your direct phone number at work, where you can be contacted during business hours, rather than your home phone number. Even if you are not working, you should not include your home phone number if you have small or mischievous children.

It does not sound professional if the little one answers the phone and then continues to do whatever they were doing before the phone rang without finding you. Or imagine the following scenario occurring. Caller: "Hello, could I please speak with..." Child: "She's not home". And hangs up. This is an effective way of missing opportunities. Including your home phone number is only a good idea if you are there during the day and it will be you or another responsible adult picking up the phone.

Using a message bank service: Make sure you have a facility on your mobile and daytime phone numbers for callers to leave a message. Recruitment consultants might not try again if they can't leave a message! We strongly recommend having an actual voice mail or message bank rather than one of those facilities where you just SMS a number. Firstly, you will not recognise the number if it's from a recruiter or employer and therefore won't accord it the priority it deserves. Secondly, it gives the impression that you are pinching pennies in the wrong places. And thirdly, recruitment consultants get frustrated if they can't leave a voice message. It's just more professional to have a proper voice mail or message bank. A more practical reason for not using the SMS service is that many recruitment consultants will be using their firm's land line switch number to call you and when you call it back, you won't know who to ask for because they could not leave their name.

Phone number format & style: Please consider legibility of long phone numbers when including these on your resume. Put gaps between groups of digits in places where people expect them – it's easier to read phone numbers like this: 0419 907 088 and 02 9922 6175 than like this: 0419907088 and 0299226175. It's about being considerate to your reader who will not know your phone number. When the number appears as nine or 10 continuous digits with no spaces between them, it is much harder to read without losing track. You don't want any recruiter or employer to hesitate when picking up the phone to call you, or cause them to accidentally call the wrong number.

Australian phone numbers for overseas jobs: If you are applying for a position overseas, put +61 and then the STD code without the 0 in front of your phone number to make dialling your number as easy as possible. When someone calls into Australia from overseas they must dial the country code for Australia (61) and then the second digit of the area code, followed by the local phone number. Fixed line numbers for international callers calling Australia therefore look like this: +61 2 9922 6175. Mobile numbers for international callers dialling Australia look like this: +61 419 907 088. (Note that there are no zeros in front of the 2 or the 419.) If you are communicating with employers or consultants from other countries, do not put zeros, either in brackets or not, in the area code of your phone number as that may cause confusion.

Overseas phone numbers for jobs in Australia: If you are overseas and applying for jobs in Australia, put the international dial code for your country and your area code in front of your phone number. It is also useful and courteous to indicate how far ahead or behind Australia your country or city is. A useful website that will quickly tell you what time it is in most cities around the world is [The World Clock](http://timeanddate.com) on timeanddate.com.

I have seen people who live in Australia and who are only applying for jobs in Australia use the following form for their Australian phone numbers: +61 (0) 2 9922 6175 for their fixed line and +61 (0) 419 907 088 for their mobiles. This is not only confusing and unnecessary, but, quite frankly, can be construed as a bit of a pose. People who do this seem to be trying to make it look like they regularly receive calls from international recruiters or firms in order to elevate their importance. Please don't do this unless, of course, you are applying for overseas jobs and receiving international calls. If you are in Australia and you are applying for jobs with Australian based organisations, just the STD code and phone number are sufficient. In fact, you really don't even need the STD code if your business location is in the same state as the organisation advertising the job, although for clarity purposes, it's probably good to include it.

Email Accounts and Addresses

Many people use Gmail, Hotmail or Yahoo or other free web-based mail services to send and receive emails. If you are sending emails and documents to recruitment firms and employers and are expecting emailed responses, I recommend using a proper Internet Service Provider's email service. These are usually more reliable than many free email services, which have a nasty habit of blocking or detaching attachments before they reach their destinations. Free email services also often include advertisements below email messages and you have no control over what that may be. Do you really want your email in which you're applying for an executive position to end with an ad for online dating services?

Another issue to consider is the "name" part of your email address. If your email address is along the lines of hotchick@hotmail.com or bigguy@bigpond.com, I recommend getting another email address that is something a tad more business-like. I know it's boring, but you really cannot expect employers to take you seriously if you use a frivolous email address.

Personal Information

Irrelevant information: Personal information such as your date of birth, age, marital status, country of birth, ethnicity, gender, the number and names of your children and spouses, the breeds and names of your pets and so forth should **not** be included. It is illegal in Australia and in many other countries to use such information to assess a person's suitability for a position. This type of information is therefore irrelevant. In any event, if an employer should be biased against people of certain ages or backgrounds, why eliminate yourself at the first hurdle by offering those details?

Special circumstances: However, some employers specifically request certain personal information – usually gender, date of birth, country of birth, citizenship – and have good reasons for requiring this information. Organisations who may require this include the United Nations, international aid agencies, military services, police services, accredited security services, secret services, judicial bodies and some other government agencies involved in national security or defence. If they have such requirements, they are entitled to ask for the information through some form of legislation or other provisions of their legal charter.

Different customs overseas: Employers in some countries still believe that personal information has a place in a professional resume and for some reason, forms a key element of the assessment criteria. You should investigate this if you are applying for a position overseas and are unsure of what is expected.

Photographs

Some people believe that the inclusion of a photograph enhances their application because it allows the reader to "put a face to a name" or some other such unsubstantiated assertion. We do not recommend including a photograph, for the following reasons.

Quality Control

For one thing, if you use a colour photo, the black and white laser printer the recipient uses to print it will eliminate any benefits of colour. And by the time the document is photocopied a couple of times, you might as well have sent in a picture of your pet mongoose. Secondly, unless the photo is of professional quality (taken by a professional photographer under proper lighting with a high quality camera), the end result is usually rather disappointing, not to say unflattering. In addition, resumes are often scanned into databases by recruitment firms and larger employers and you have no way of telling what that software will do to distort your carefully posed image.

Individual Perceptions

More important is that you have no way of predicting the reaction of the reader. Will they like the look of you? Will they think you look too similar to someone they dislike? Will they think you are too attractive for their organisation or work area? ("I'm not employing someone who is better looking than me" or "They'll end up distracting everyone else".) Will they think you are not sufficiently attractive? ("They'll scare away the customers" or "I could not stand to look at that mug all day".) Will they draw erroneous conclusions about your personality or style based on your appearance? ("They look like a crim" or "They look like someone you wouldn't introduce to your parents" or "They look a bit too traditional or boring or radical or way out for our culture".)

Bottom line is, you cannot foresee what may go through someone's mind when looking at your photograph.

If you think that a person's personal appearance has no impact on people's perceptions, talk to a magazine publisher or to a TV or movie producer or a model agency or a psychologist. Why do we dress up and pay more attention than usual to our appearance when we go to an interview? There is no doubt that your appearance does play a large role in how you are perceived.

Risk of Backfiring

A client of mine learned a salutary lesson when she insisted that her photograph be included in her resume because she was considered by many people to be particularly attractive. She assumed that males would want to include her in the shortlist based on her visual appeal.



Feedback from a couple of recruitment consultants to whom she had sent her profile indicated that she was not considered because the employer saw straight through what they said was a "manipulative attempt to ingratiate herself" and that she should let her achievements, not her appearance, do the talking. She missed out on a job for which she may very well have been the best candidate, but the photo had the opposite to the intended effect.

In short, the risks of using a photograph outweigh any potential benefits.

Exceptions

The comments above do not apply if you are applying for positions where a certain type of physical appearance is required for the job, such as modelling or acting or being an extra in a commercial. Of course, they are also not relevant if an employer explicitly requests that photographs are included with applications. In addition, you can ignore the above if you are applying for a job in a country where photographs may be expected or required as part of the application process, such as India or Germany, for instance. Do some research to ensure you know what the custom is in the country where you are applying for a job.

Interests & Hobbies

Consider relevancy to the job. Interests, hobbies and other extracurricular activities are generally not useful inclusions in your resume because they are unlikely to be valid or reliable indicators of your ability to do the job.

Some people believe that, if a person is involved in certain types of activities outside work, it indicates something about their personality or their leadership skills or some other traits. Most organisational psychologists will say that this is nonsense and can encourage typecasting and lead to erroneous assumptions. There is absolutely no basis for making a valid connection between what a person can do on the job and what they do outside work.

In any event, you usually have no way of knowing whether the people reading your resume will view your interests and hobbies as positive or negative. You therefore don't want to give them the opportunity to form a negative view of you at this early stage of the application process.

Exception: The above does not apply to graduate positions, where employers often want to know a person's interests and hobbies since there is usually little work experience from which to draw conclusions.

Employers may assume that people who have been leaders at school or university are somehow equipped to handle leadership roles at work. This is not necessarily true because many people become leaders at school or university because they have a personality and style that makes them charismatic. Whether they are effective in the leadership role is an altogether different question.

Referees

Should You Include Referees?

There is no hard and fast rule as to whether referees should be provided in resumes at all. Unless an employer specifically requests candidates to provide referee details, there is no real obligation on you to do so. I have not heard of someone not getting an interview because they did not provide referee information. That said, there is no harm in providing referees because it signals to employers that there are people ready to vouch for you. Including referees could perhaps work to your advantage.

Who Should Be Your Referees?

Referees should be people who know you well in a work context.

Not suitable: Among the people who are of no value as referees on a resume are friends, relatives, personal accountants, personal solicitors, your local church minister and other no doubt well-meaning people, because they have no knowledge of how you operate in a work environment. Some people argue that personal referees can vouch for your integrity and honesty and so on. This is debatable. In fact, work referees can vouch for these attributes even more effectively because they see you more often than your accountant or most of your friends and they see you apply your integrity and honesty at work.

Also not suitable: Work colleagues or peers are also not very useful as referees as they are not responsible for managing your work or performance. Your colleagues usually have no legitimate way of assessing or judging your work or the value of your contributions because they have no responsibility for your performance on a day-to-day basis.

Sometimes suitable: In some cases, clients or customers can be good referees, provided they have dealt with you frequently over a reasonable period of time. But you need to be careful not to rock the boat with your current employer. You don't want clients informing your current boss that you are looking for another job and you don't want to cause clients to switch to another supplier because they think you are planning to leave.

Very suitable: The most useful people to provide as referees for your job application are current and former managers or employers – people who actually know what you did and how effective you are or were.

What if they've changed jobs? If your referees are no longer in the same organisation as they were when you worked with them, indicate their current position/role and the position/role they had when you worked with them.

Referees for Private Sector Roles

Some people want to tell the reader of their resume that referees will be provided on request. Of course they will! It's really not necessary to say so in a resume because it's so obvious. You certainly are not going to get a job offer unless you have referees. Writing in your resume that referees will be provided on request adds no value. It simply goes without saying.

Almost all employers or recruitment consultants will only want to contact referees once they are fairly certain that the applicant is highly suited to the role. It takes time to contact referees and it imposes on your referees' time. Therefore, usually only the referees of applicants on the final shortlist are contacted.

Referees for Public Sector Roles – Applicants from the Public Sector

Many public sector employers require candidates to provide referee information as part of their application. This is not a problem for candidates already in the public sector because it is an established process and because public sector organisations view the public service as a career service. Public sector managers seem to be quite mature and reasonable when faced with the possibility of losing a valued member of their team. It is an expected part of the career advancement process.

Many public sector organisations ask candidates to provide written referee reports against the selection criteria for the position.

Referees for Public Sector Roles – Applicants from the Private Sector

If you are in the private sector applying for a public sector role, this can be a problem. Many people are concerned about their future if their boss finds out they are applying for a job with another employer.

Remember that you can't be fired for looking outside the company to further your career. Did they offer you a job for life when you joined the company? You are entitled to further your career with anyone of your choosing.

However, some people in the private sector are concerned that, once they have indicated their intent to leave or even if word gets out that they are looking around, they will be assigned uninteresting work or projects with no meaning or transferred to very inhospitable and undesirable locations and that they will be overlooked for any upcoming promotions.

Therefore, it may be necessary to explain to public sector employers that you are not able to provide referee details at the time of application, but will be happy to do so further down the track.

Proofreading and Errors

Similar to emailing a document containing a virus, sending a document containing spelling or typographical errors is probably a good way to get excluded without really trying.

The rule is this: Thoroughly read the document yourself first and then have someone else read it to get rid of all errors. A single typographical error can mean the difference between getting an interview and a rejection letter. If you are not confident or competent in grammar, find someone who is. You can even find professionals you can pay to proofread your resume.

Adjust your spell checker: If you are applying for jobs in Australia, set Word to check the spelling using the Australian way of spelling words. If you are applying for positions in the United States or any other country that might spell words differently to the Australian way, make sure that you set the Word program for that country's way of spelling. Some people ask what they should do if applying for an Australian based position in a company run by Americans or owned by an American company. Interesting question!

Use apostrophes correctly: For reasons beyond my comprehension, many people seem to want to apostrophise everything. For example, some people seem to think that plurals need apostrophes. They don't. Some people think that the possessive form "its" (as in "its profits increased" or "its culture needed to change") needs an apostrophe. It does not. It's wrong to use an apostrophe in such cases. In the previous sentence, the apostrophe in "it's" is correct because it reflects something that has been left out and contracted ("it is"). Your spell checker may not pick these things up because the individual words are correct and it may not understand the context in which you are using the words.



Check your capitalisations: Some people want to capitalise just about everything. For example, the word "internet" seems to deserve a capital "I"? Why? Even though it may have started out as this exotic, unknown place in cyberspace, it has become just a plain, ordinary thing like a table, computer, software, system, planet, city, train or dog. Many people want to give words like "server", "system", "program" and other computer related words capitals. Why? These are common, garden variety things and don't deserve capitalisation. Some people just like to capitalise words to add emphasis or draw attention to them. You may think it looks good but it doesn't. It can annoy people and simply isn't correct use of the English language.



Of course, the names of people, organisations, business units, brands, specific products, position titles and places do need capitals. But other, regular nouns don't. It is however quite common practice to capitalise words in titles, particularly in books, newspapers and other publications. For your resume, it is fine if you capitalise the titles of the sections in your document, for instance, "Professional Experience".

D. Is A Good Resume Enough?

Many people think that a powerful, well written resume is sufficient to give them the edge needed to secure an interview. While an outstanding resume is absolutely necessary, it may not always be sufficient. Numerous other factors may be at play in determining whether you will be among the chosen few. Here are just 7 of the more common ones for you to consider. Because if you know what they are, you may be able to predict a bit better whether your application is likely to be successful.

Other Key Issues That May Influence Your Career Prospects

Your Fit with the Job and Organisation

No matter how “good” your resume is, if you don’t meet the requirements of the jobs for which you are applying, you won’t get an interview. If an employer or recruitment consultant is looking for certain attributes, skills, expertise and types of experience that you don’t have to the required level, it really doesn’t matter how good your resume is. A resume is a tool that enables an employer to link your experience and skills to the requirements of the job. If you don’t have what they are seeking, the result is obvious and there is no point complaining that you can do the job and that your skills and expertise are transferable. You might have experience in an industry different to the employer’s, which you think you can easily transfer to the employer’s industry. While this might be true, if there are 20 good quality applicants who do have experience in the employer’s industry and you don’t, and it was your money you were investing in the person’s salary, who would you select? It’s all about finding the best possible match.

Level of Competition in Your Industry or Sector

Even though the demand for executives and professionals in certain industries has increased dramatically in recent times, competition for the best positions in high-calibre organisations is still as intense as ever.

The number of employers in almost every industry or sector will continue to shrink as a result of industry shake-ups and consolidations, mergers and acquisitions, corporate collapses, international or multinational companies closing or downsizing their Australian operations, companies outsourcing or contracting out many non-core or even core activities to lower-cost offshore suppliers, the impact of technologies on the requirement for people, cost-cutting measures and so on.

Therefore, expect intense competition for the best jobs in the best companies. If you are finding the competition too intense, a solution favoured by those willing to leave their egos out of the equation is to identify niches, sectors, organisations or roles where you have a distinct competitive advantage and where the competition is less intense. The fun of bashing your head against the wall soon diminishes. Seeking to work for a high profile, blue-chip organisation without a strong competitive advantage is a recipe for frustration and disenchantment.

Conservatism of Many Large Employers

Employers tend to favour candidates with experience within their industry or arena. Many employers who had previously been convinced to take on employees from outside their industry, only to find out that these employees lacked sufficient industry know-how and expertise, have instead decided to take the safer route of employing people with specific industry experience.

We frequently hear the argument that employers should be prepared to employ people on the basis of their more enduring and transferable qualities and attributes. However, it's not an argument that finds favour amongst many employers.

In addition, recruitment consultants are reluctant to forward applications from candidates outside their clients' industries because they will inevitably receive a terse reaction such as: "Why did you send me someone who is clueless about my industry? I can't afford to give them six months to get up to speed. They have to hit the ground running."

If you want to move into a different industry, there are two partial solutions. First, patiently seek out employers who have a reputation for employing people with qualities and attributes not linked to industry experience. Second, explicitly demonstrate how your skills and experience can be an advantage in a different industry or sector.

Bias of Many Employers Against People From Other Countries

Even if you have experience in the same industry or sector as the employer's, if that experience is from another country, you can expect the employer to prefer people with local experience. Of course, the logic from the candidates' perspective is that it should not matter whether the experience has been gained in Australia or in the US, South Africa, the UK, India, Indonesia, France or Iceland for instance.

However, if you try that argument on employers, many of them will tell you that there is no way you can possibly be as productive as quickly as a local who understands the idiosyncrasies of the industry, market and culture and the way business is conducted.

Whether you think it's fair or not, it is a fact that this happens to many overseas candidates. Compared to a local job seeker, overseas job seekers can expect to wait 2 to 4 or more times as long to get a job as a local and may only get 20% of the number of interviews for the same types of jobs as locals. Of course, if you do strike an organisation that has managers from your country in influential or decision-making positions, you will be better off. There are also employers who are more enlightened.

Potential solutions are to identify employers that have people from your country in decision-making positions, make sure you have sufficient funds to mount an extended campaign, work for free to get local experience or identify employers where experience in your home country could be an advantage.

Applying Below or Above Your "Level"

Many people are surprised that they don't get interviews for jobs they could do blindfolded with one hand tied behind their backs, standing on their heads. We are not sure why they should be surprised that employers favour employees who are more likely to stick around, see the job as a forward career move and will be challenged by the opportunity.

Employers think that people who apply for jobs 2 to 3 or more levels below their most recent position will want to leave as soon as something better comes along. Why do they think that? Because that's what often happens. It's very difficult for someone who has been a Director of Finance in a \$500m corporation for the past 5 years to convince an employer they would be willing to take a job as an Assistant Accountant in a \$5m business. In addition, there is always the totally irrational and unreasonable fear among bosses that these people might "want my job"!

Of course, it is obvious that if you apply for a job above your current level with a different employer, you are less likely to get interviews because you will probably be competing with people who have already been operating at that level for years. Why would an employer consider you if there are a dozen applicants who can demonstrate that they can operate at that level? If you are applying for roles in organisations other than your current employer, consider applying for positions at around the same level of responsibility, proving yourself in the new organisation and then applying for internal promotions.

Although it will take longer to get to the level you want, it may prove to be a more successful strategy than consistently missing out on opportunities because you are up against people who can prove they are capable at that level.

Bias of Employers Against Entrepreneurs

People who want or need to “get a real job” after running their own business for a decade or more face problems because employers believe that they will not fit into the culture, won’t take direction, won’t sit still, will want to change things the minute they arrive and will see how the organisation can be managed much more effectively.

Of course, the employers are right! Entrepreneurs and independent business people can make poor employees because they won’t be told, can’t take direction, have no patience and are always looking to change things. Why do you think they went into business for themselves in the first place?

Although not impossible, it is more difficult for someone who has been in the self-employed workforce for many years to get interviews than people who have been in the employed workforce. Many employers ask: “If they are so good at running a business, why are they looking for a job with my company? They should be out there making squillions or sitting on the beach with all the money they’ve made.”

Potential solutions include identifying organisations who employ former self-employed people in decision-making roles, identifying organisations who value independent thinking and entrepreneurial approaches, identifying start-ups and smaller firms who don’t want conservative employees, finding ways to get a seat on the board of a smaller firm or investing in a business where you can have a substantive impact.

Recruitment Consultants Who Lack Imagination

At the risk of alienating colleagues, as a rule, most recruitment consultants do what their clients tell them, do it efficiently and don’t deviate from the brief. It’s safer that way. Many do not influence the brief. They just accept what their client tells them they should look for.

Many recruitment consultants do not see it as their place to advise employers about the type of person who would be best and rarely suggest people who do not fit the typical mould. This is because it isn’t their role. It’s not what they get paid for. It’s much easier to earn a commission by suggesting candidates who meet precisely the requirements and specifications set out by their clients.

Their approach is not to reason why, but simply to do or risk not getting paid. It’s riskier recommending candidates from outside the square. In addition, recruitment consultants generally don’t have much of a clue about analysing an organisation’s human resource needs to the level of sophistication required to make meaningful recommendations about the type of person best suited to the role. It’s not what they get paid to do and most don’t have the expertise or experience to do it.

In many cases, recruitment consultants don't have much management experience, are often not qualified in human resources and are usually not lateral thinkers. They are typically linear thinkers who prefer logic and are happiest when they can fit a candidate neatly into a box. And if you don't fit what they interpret as their client's specifications you don't get into the box. You can argue until you are blue in the face, but this is what typically happens.

There are many recruitment consultants who have come unstuck because they recommended candidates from outside the square. Whatever their limitations, recruitment consultants are fast learners about what matters most to them – the size of their bank accounts. You therefore have to show them how to present you to their clients in a way that will make them look good!

3. Interview Tips

If you have put time and effort into sending out a superb resume, then don't throw everything away at the interview stage. Even if you think you know the company you are applying to and that you are a perfect match for the position on offer, and you feel confident about your interviewing skills, there is no excuse for not being as prepared as you can possibly be for this event that may be about to change your life.

I have seen many executive-level candidates who think they can 'wing' the interview process but have overestimated their interviewing skills and are not invited back for a second round discussion.

Preparing for an important job interview is the key to securing the job of your dreams. Yes, not only is it possible to practice rigorously for a job interview – you need to. Don't leave things to chance when there is so much at stake.

I have put together some pointers to help you prepare for important interviews. Some of these may seem very basic and common sense, but you would be surprised how many candidates make simple mistakes that can mean the difference between a job offer and a rejection letter.

If at all possible, try to get an interview in the morning rather than later in the day. Everyone will be fresher and more alert in the morning and interviews are likelier to be running on time in the morning. You will be able to make a better impression in the morning. Also, it has been shown that interviews held mid to late week are often more successful, so keep this in mind if you are able to influence the day of your interview at all.

E. INTERVIEW PREPARATION – BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Research to Learn About the Company, Interview Panel and Job

Before attending a job interview, it is imperative that you have completed your research about the company. You need to learn as much as possible about the organisation and the people that will be interviewing you. And no, I am not talking about a quick whizz over the company website on the morning of your interview! You will not gain any competitive advantage over your fellow candidates by doing just that.

The Company

Spend time researching the company in earnest. You can do this by going through their website thoroughly to find out important information, reading their annual reports, shareholders' reports, checking press coverage and leveraging your contacts.

Interview Panel

The more you know about who will be interviewing you, the more comfortable you will be. So always confirm the names and job titles of the people who you will be interviewing with. It is relatively easy to find out background information about these people via a Google search and a quick check on LinkedIn, or you could also simply ask the recruiter for more information about who you will be meeting. The more information you have, the better you will be able to prepare.

Job Description

I also recommend to candidates that when they apply for roles via other recruitment firms, they always ask for a job description to assist with their interview preparation. If this is not available, it can make preparing for the interview considerably harder.

Preparing for the Questions

Interviews are predominantly framed on 'competency-based' interview principles. This means that the interview questions are designed to assess whether the candidate can do the job, whether you would be able to hit the ground running once on the job, and whether you fit with the company's culture and management team. To judge this, the employer will want to assess your competencies, skills, capabilities and past experience.

To prepare for your interview, you should anticipate what questions you may be asked and rehearse quality responses that address these. Preparing for the main questions is relatively easy – I can almost guarantee that the questions you will be asked will broadly cover 5 key areas that the employer will be looking to address during the interview process.

5 Key Areas The Employer Will Want To Address in an Interview

(although you may not always be asked direct questions about these issues!)

1. Why are you here; why do you want to work for us?
2. What can you do for us?
3. What kind of person are you? Can you fit in with our organisation and do you have the same values as us?
4. What distinguishes you from other applicants? For example, will you go the extra mile; do you have better work habits?
5. Can we afford you? Where do you fit into our organisation chart?



“

Preparing for an interview means considering the many different questions you may potentially be asked and rehearsing your answers to those questions. Don't get caught out – make sure you know what you will answer. We have listed a large number of [sample interview questions](#), grouped by skill and mostly focused on your behaviour in specific situations, in [Chapter 5](#) of this e-Book. Use these questions to rehearse for your upcoming interview so you are well prepared.

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Know the Interview Venue & Arrive on Time

If you have prepared adequately for the interview, you will find that you won't be overly nervous or anxious about the meeting. Here are a few more pointers to ensure you won't arrive stressed out or get off to a bad start.

Time

Always get clear instructions in writing from the recruiter or employer as to the time and location of the interview. Arrive early, at least 10-15 minutes before the time of your interview appointment if possible. I cannot stress this enough! Being late for an interview is rarely acceptable, and it creates a dreadful first impression that is almost impossible to recover from. Personally, I will not shortlist candidates who have turned up more than 20 minutes late for an appointment with me without a valid reason. It is just plain bad manners and poor management to show up late.

Location

Also check that you have written confirmation from the recruiter as to the exact location of the interview. Make sure you know exactly where the interview location is and how best to get there. If you are driving, factor in extra time for traffic and parking problems. Find out in advance where you will be able to definitely park your car. If you are taking public transport, find out exactly where to get off and how to walk to your destination from the train station or bus stop. I recommend you do a test run a few days prior to your interview if you are going to an unfamiliar location. Wouldn't you rather sit in an office lobby for 20 minutes, feeling relaxed and being able to review some company information or rehearsing your responses in your head while waiting, rather than having to rush to get to a venue and find a parking spot, feeling stressed about being late? There is simply no reason for leaving everything to the last minute.

Cancellations

Another point I will make here is this: if you have decided at the last minute to not proceed with the interview, do everyone the courtesy of attending the meeting. Last minute cancellations create a very poor impression with the recruiter who has set up the meeting for you, as well as the employer who is looking forward to meeting you and has allocated the time for the interview. You would be best advised to attend the meeting rather than cancel less than 3 hours before the appointment. I have had candidates call me up and cancel less than 20 minutes prior to a scheduled interview, or worse still, just not show up! This in my opinion is extremely bad form and indicates that you were never really serious about the opportunity in the first place, which is a waste of everyone's time and efforts. Naturally if you are seriously ill, or an emergency comes up, contact the relevant people involved as soon as possible and explain the situation.

Making a Good Impression – Physical Preparation

I always stress the importance of appropriate corporate dress for most interviews and paying attention to all the details such as clean shoes, a clean shirt, wearing a tie etc. First impressions can make a significant impact on your overall success in the interview, so wear clothing that makes you feel comfortable, confident and at all times be well groomed.

Interview Appearance Checklist

- Wear a dark suit – conservative corporate style dress is usually recommended
- Be freshly showered
- Wear freshly laundered clothes
- Ensure your pants have sharp creases
- Wear shoes that have been polished
- Have clean finger nails
- Make sure you have fresh breath (absolutely essential for smokers!)
- Don't wear too much cologne/aftershave/perfume
- Avoid smoking before your interview
- Ladies: avoid clothes that are revealing – dress conservatively



F. During The Interview

When you arrive for your interview, be polite and show consideration to the receptionist or secretary. If you move to a coffee shop, show courtesy to the waitress at the coffee shop. It's the little things that count and you are on display from the moment you arrive.

Be positive going into your interview and think of the discussion as a peer-to-peer meeting instead of you having to hard-sell yourself and/or beg for a job. Use the meeting to demonstrate to the interviewer that you are the solution to the company's needs and problems.

Practical Matters

What to Bring

Bring a briefcase and/or have a notepad or paper and a pen with you so you can take notes based on your discussion.

Introductions

During the initial introductions and formalities, walk in with a smile on your face, your head up and your shoulders back. Shake the interviewer's hand firmly. A weak handshake is often seen as a sign of weakness or nervousness. Repeat his or her name with a smile when you're introduced. Also address the interviewer by name at appropriate opportunities throughout the conversation, as every person responds to hearing their own name – it makes the interviewer listen more intently.

Seating Arrangements

Demonstrate good manners and do not sit down until you are asked to do so. If you are given a choice of seats, avoid the sofa, as you'll sink into it like quicksand! It would be much better to choose a hardback chair. Sit upright with your hands on your knees. Don't cross your legs or your arms. Crossed limbs subconsciously signal defensiveness. It's best to keep your hands placed on your lap.

Your Demeanour

Display a positive attitude, be enthusiastic and look alert and interested at all times. Maintain eye contact with the interviewer – but don't overdo it, you don't want to make anyone uncomfortable by staring at them. Be responsive. While the interviewer speaks, show you're listening carefully by nodding your head and thoughtfully rephrasing sentences.

Behaviours To Avoid

During the interview, the employer will assess you not just by your looks, your skills and your answers to their questions, but also by your conduct and the way you interact with other people. They will try to get a handle on who you are as a person and what your key values are.



You are highly **UNLIKELY** to get the job if you demonstrate any of the following values in your behaviour:

- Arrogance
- Aggression
- Tardiness (late for appointment)
- Complaining or blaming, especially about previous employer
- Any sign of dishonesty or lying
- Irresponsibility
- Inappropriate humour
- Not following instructions
- Lack of enthusiasm
- Any sign of instability



Speaking

Use proper English and avoid using slang. Never, ever, use profanity. Speak slowly and distinctly and don't rush your answers. Don't speak too softly or too loudly. You should avoid using the word "OK" or "yeah" throughout the conversation. Prepare and plan what you are going to say before starting to speak to ensure you articulate your thoughts well.

Length of Answers

If you're not sure how much you should speak versus the interviewer, use the 50/50 rule. Talk for at least 20 seconds but make sure you answer each question within 2 minutes. Practice this timing beforehand to make sure that you do not under-answer your questions, but you also do not ramble on and lose the interviewers' attention.

Topics to Address

The employer or interview panel will typically set the agenda for the interview and take the lead in asking questions. However, it would be good to also ask some questions yourself. It's usually best to wait until the later part or the end of the interview before asking questions, as some may already be addressed and answered in the course of your meeting.

You should not let your resume become the agenda for the meeting. The idea is to expand on this in the meeting. You should be giving relevant examples to illustrate your experience and weaving evidence of your past success into the conversation. And everything you say and every example you give should be framed in terms of how you can benefit the organisation.

Remember that the employer or HR is trying to screen candidates out in the interviews, so every single answer you give needs to be great or at least better than average.

Further Pointers For What To Say In Your Interview

- Be able to articulate why you want this job and express an interest in the position.
- Ask pertinent questions to show interest in the job, the company and the industry.
- Be ready to discuss specific examples of your major professional accomplishments.
- Think of yourself in terms of how you can solve company problems. You are the solution, so use language to reflect this.
- Illustrate the way you have conducted your job search and why you want to work for the company. You should try to make them feel special.
- Avoid speaking negatively about present or previous employers or co-workers.

Stay On Topic – Answer The Actual Question!

You should answer questions in a direct and concise manner and not stray off the subject at hand. When you are under pressure during an interview, it is easy to dive in and answer a question without fully understanding what you have been asked.

In a number of situations, candidates will not actually answer the question they have been asked. During interview practice with my candidates, I will pull them up straight away when they have not actually answered the question that I asked. This is a reasonably common mistake, and it can result in the interviewer not being given the information that they are looking for, especially if you consistently manage to stray away from the questions that are being asked.

I strongly recommend practicing with a colleague, or engaging a professional interview coach to assess your answers – and remember that practice makes perfect!

“Is succeeding in this interview crucial to you? Consider Executive Interview Coaching sessions to learn the core skills, methods and techniques of highly successful executive job candidates. You will be taught proven interview behaviours and approaches that lead to success. Kylie Hammond offers an exclusive [Executive Interview Coaching Package](#) that prepares you for important interviews, panel interviews and psychological testing. See our [Job Interview Coaching Details and Price](#).”

Topics to Avoid

Do not discuss salary, benefits, religion, politics, or spousal issues unless the topics are initiated by the interviewer. See Chapter 4 of this e-Book for further information about how to deal with talking about salary.

It's also worth reiterating that you should always avoid speaking negatively about your current or any previous employers, supervisors or colleagues.

5 Key Pieces of Information You Should Try to Get Out of the Interview

As a candidate for the position, you are not only attending the interview to answer the employer's questions but also to find out more yourself about the position, the company and the people who you would be working with.

There are a number of crucial issues that you should try to find the answers to and satisfy yourself with in all job interviews you attend. If you should be the successful candidate and get offered the job, you will have to make the decision whether to accept it. To enable you to make that decision, you need to feel confident that this is the right match for you.

From your perspective, you need to keep these 5 essential issues in mind during your interview:

1. What does the job involve exactly?
2. What are the skills that a top employee in this job would have?
3. Are these the kind of people you could and want to work with?
4. Can you show that there is something unique about you that will differentiate you from other candidates?
5. Can you persuade them to hire you on the sort of salary that you want?

Closing Interview Questions

At the end of the interview, you should have a couple of prepared questions ready, as you are very likely to be asked if you have any questions for the interviewer.

Only ask questions that you otherwise could not research easily yourself and don't ask any questions about employment terms or conditions. These types of questions can be asked at a more appropriate time, and in some cases they should be directed to the recruiter or HR department when an offer is issued.

I recommend asking thoughtful questions that demonstrate that you are genuinely interested in the role and the opportunity.

Examples of such questions include:

- Why is this position vacant?
- How will you measure success in this role?
- What are you looking for in candidates for this position?
- What challenges would I have to tackle first?

At the end of an interview, it is also common and acceptable to ask questions about your chances and what will happen next (only if that hasn't been explained to you already, of course).

Closing interview questions to ask could be phrased as follows:

- Given my skills and experience, is there an opportunity for me here?
- Can you offer me this job?
- When can I expect to hear from you?
- Can I ask when is the latest that I can expect to hear from you, what is the process from here?

And if things go well during the job interview, don't forget to ASK for the job!

At the end of the interview, you should thank the interviewer or in case of a panel, each of the interviewers personally with a handshake and a smile.



G. After The Interview

After your interview, there are two things left to do.

Post Interview Debrief

As soon as the interview is over, do a debrief with yourself and take notes about the meeting to gather your thoughts and impressions and to assess how you performed in the interview. Make a note of who you talked to, how long the interview took, what questions were asked and the quality of your answers. Jot down points concerning your thoughts about the company, the people and company culture, your level of interest and fit to the position.

Thank-You Note

Follow up the interview with a thank-you letter to the recruiter and the interviewer. Sending a thank-you note is a very important extra effort that will help you get noticed and stand out from the competition.

In addition to thanking the employer and/or recruiter for the interview, you can also use the opportunity to reiterate why you are interested in the position and a few key points on your value proposition to the company.

However, keep it brief, you do not want to appear to be writing another application letter at this stage. Send the thank-you note by email within 24 hours after the interview. You can send it to each of the interviewers if you have their individual email addresses. If not, just send it to the one you do have and ask that person to pass on your thanks to the others. If you don't have the employer's email address, send your note to the recruiter asking them to pass on your message.

4. Salary Negotiation

Salary negotiation can be one of the trickier aspects of the job search process and the area where many candidates can slip up even before they have got to first base.

Here are some tips for dealing with the salary issue at different stages of the recruitment process – when applying for the job, during the job interview and when you are offered the job. The main message to take away from this is to try never to discuss salary until the end of the interview process when the employer has definitely said that they want to hire you.

H. During The Job Application Process

Information About Your Current Salary

The first stumbling block many people encounter is an online job application that expressly states that you must include your current salary package information. The inference of this being compulsory is that your application won't be reviewed without including your salary expectations.

This is complete nonsense and my advice is to skip over this question unless you have no option but to enter something in that field. If that is the case, you should state a salary range rather than a fixed figure.

Many recruitment ads will ask for information about your current salary package as part of their preliminary screening process. However, by stating a figure that is too high or too low, you may eliminate yourself from the recruitment process altogether.

The reality is that if you are a qualified candidate, the employer or recruitment firm will not ignore your application because you have not supplied any salary information.

Risks of Revealing Salary Expectations Too Soon

In the employment world there is substantial room to move when it comes to salary packages – especially if you are the best candidate for the job. However, many candidates make the mistake of revealing their salary expectations too early in the discussions before the company has decided that they really want to employ you.

I have seen substantial salary offers increase dramatically once a company realises that they might miss out on a candidate that is just right for them, so your bargaining power increases substantially when we get down to serious business.

Bottom line is that employers can always make exceptions to salary arrangements if they feel like you are the best candidate and you will not take the proposed offer as it stands. All salaries are negotiable. Even if the employer can't increase your salary, you may be able to negotiate benefits or bonuses to sweeten your entire compensation package. Cash is not always the most important thing. What about benefits, bonuses and quality of life? Does the job offer you the opportunity to do what you want to do and still have a life after hours?

I. During The Job Interview

As mentioned before, you should try to avoid any discussion of salary until you have proven your worth and the company has decided they really want to hire you.

You should therefore never bring up the issue of salary yourself during an interview.

It is possible that your interviewer will ask you about your salary expectations during your meeting – particularly if they have requested this information in the job application form and you have left the field blank.

How to Answer Salary Questions

Don't let questions about salary catch you off guard. You should have rehearsed for your interview and have an answer ready so you can confidently ward off such questions or frame your answer in a way that you're not pinning yourself down to any particular figure at this point. If at all possible, you should try to avoid being the one to bring up a number.

Here are some suggested ways to answer questions about your salary expectations:

1. "Until you have decided that I am the preferred candidate and I can demonstrate that I can help you, salary discussion is probably premature."
2. "I'll gladly come to that but firstly could you help me to understand what the role involves?"

Or if the above two options fail:

3. "I'm looking for a salary in the range of X to Y."

Remember if you're applying for a position at executive level, many employers will expect you to be skilled at handling this part of the discussion and may even use this process to assess your negotiation skills and ability.

The Best Time to Discuss Money

If there is no option but to discuss salary, remember that your bargaining power for your salary packages increases gradually after:

1. The employer knows who you are
2. They decide that they like you
3. They decide that they love you
4. They decide that they MUST have you

Obviously, if you have arrived at point 4, that is the best time to negotiate your salary. And that point usually doesn't come until after the interview stage, when the employer has had a chance to consider and compare all candidates.



J. At The Job Offer Stage

This is the preferred stage at which salary negotiations should take place. The purpose of negotiating your salary package is to work out what the most is that the employer is willing to pay and to secure the best possible overall remuneration package.

The Initial Offer

Many interviewers will use the employment offer stage as a way to see how you sell your merits and negotiate your own salary package. Very few candidates actually accept what is offered in the first instance, and you should always negotiate the initial offer because it is just a starting point.

Most employers plan for negotiation and start the offer at a lower salary to begin with. Once you have the offer in writing, this is a strong indication that they want you to join the company.

Knowing Your Position

In order to feel confident when negotiating your salary package, you need to know not only what you want but also, very importantly, what the industry trends are. Do some research into salaries paid by various companies in your field for positions at a similar level of responsibility. Also take into account how much experience you have and the value you are bringing to the company. Remember that as a general rule, big name companies will pay lower salaries than smaller, less well-known organisations.



Your Response & Counter Position

My preferred negotiation technique is this: Take at least 24 hours to think any offer over, but try to avoid any horse-trading, i.e. going back and forth several times negotiating various points. I recommend trying to go back one time only with a counter position and to use this opportunity to address any legal issues with the contract.

I also put a strong emphasis on being very positive and professional in all communications regarding salary. We need to keep in mind that this is a sensitive issue and the wrong approach can bring about fairly dramatic results.

Salary Negotiation Techniques

My advice is to call the person in the company responsible for issuing the offer and to say two things:

- “Firstly, I would like to thank you very much for the offer of employment. I am very excited about the prospect of joining XYZ Company.”
- “I have read through the offer of employment and I am happy with the majority of the terms and conditions, however I would like to ask you if there is any room to move on the base salary” (or whatever the major issue is from your point of view). At this point you could say something to the effect that it was lower than what you were expecting and wanted to discuss if there is any room to move.

By approaching it this way, you are not putting a hard and fast figure on the table, such as 'the offer needs to be XYZ for me to accept'. However, it does give you an indication if the company is willing to negotiate on this point to help you confirm your negotiation strategy moving forward. At the same time, you are confirming to the company that you really want to join them, and that you are serious about finalising the offer process.

Room to Move

When handled this way, the company will usually respond with 'what do you have in mind?' and this is where you need to give an indication of where the offer needs to be for you to accept. Remember my comment about horse-trading. There is nothing worse than someone going into bat for you to get a \$10,000 increase, only to find out that you really needed \$15,000 to accept the offer. Be very clear and specific in your language. A good way to get the offer to where it needs to be is to say something along the lines of: 'if you can increase the base salary to XYZ, I would be willing to accept and sign the offer.'

No Room to Move / Alternatives

Alternatively, if the company says that there is no room to move on the base salary (for example), you could ask whether the company would consider some alternatives, such as a starting bonus, a pay review in 3 months' time or some other mechanism to address the shortfall.

I always advise my candidates to try not to give a strong 'yes' or 'no' answer until they are 100% happy with the offer.



Engage a Coach: If you are not fully confident about your salary negotiation skills, it's a good idea to hire a coach. You can engage Kylie Hammond to be your personal Career and Salary Negotiation Coach. For the small financial investment required you can receive potentially very high returns as Kylie can provide salary benchmarking information and can work with you confidentially and discretely throughout the negotiation process. [Contact Kylie directly](#) for a confidential discussion about salary negotiation services.



Negotiating Other Employment Conditions

The letter of offer and the employment contract can contain a large number of legal terms of reference. Many candidates simply read through these and willingly sign the documents without even a second thought to negotiation and without proper legal advice.

Everything is negotiable, and if there are legal terms in the contract you're being offered that are not acceptable, this is your one and only chance to address these.

Key things to watch for are probation periods, notice periods during probation and the length of employment notice once you have passed probation. Also watch for non-compete clauses and make sure you understand exactly what they mean.

I am seeing an increase in employment contracts that stipulate very lengthy notice periods, i.e. 3-6 months. While this may sound great at the outset, it can be a major issue when you want to leave the company as it can reduce your ability to accept roles that can come up with immediate and quick start dates.

Commission structures or bonus plans should always be reviewed, especially if a large component of your income is derived from commissions. Don't accept an offer that says commissions are paid at the company's discretion if this is a major source of your income – it needs to be written into the employment contract what your potential remuneration is and that needs to include commission and bonuses.

When considering your employment terms, keep in mind that most basic terms, such as sick leave and annual leave, are protected under Fair Work legislation even if the company does not meet the minimum requirements.

Knowledge is Power

Knowledge is power and knowing that you have room to negotiate will help you to ask for and get the salary you deserve. Remember that the first offer from an employer is usually not the last and final offer. There is always room for negotiation.



5. Sample Interview Questions

Practicing for your interview and rehearsing answers to questions you may expect to be asked is crucial to your success, as explain in Chapter 3.

Many of the questions you will be asked will focus on your behaviour in certain workplace situations in order for the employer/interviewer to assess your proficiency in different skills that may be essential for the position you are applying for.

Below, you will find a list of commonly asked questions in interviews for executive positions. The questions are grouped by the type of skill that they relate to and often revolve around the way in which you handled a workplace situation in one of your previous jobs.



Hire a professional Interview Coach to help you prepare even better. Studies show that candidates who have taken interview coaching sessions are more successful in securing job offers. Kylie Hammond Executive Search & Coaching Group can teach you the proven techniques and behaviours of highly successful executive job candidates. Find out more about our [Executive Interview Coaching Package](#) and sign up to ensure you go into your interview in the confident knowledge that the meeting will be a success.



K. Behavioural Interview Questions Grouped By Skill

Adaptability

- Tell me about a situation in which you have had to adjust to changes over which you had no control. How did you handle it?
- Tell me about a time when you had to adjust to a classmate's or colleague's working style in order to complete a project or achieve your objectives.
- How was your transition from high school to college? Did you face any particular problems? How did you handle them?

Analytical Skills / Problem Solving

- Describe the project or situation that best demonstrates your analytical abilities. What was your role?
- Tell me about a time when you had to analyse information and make a recommendation. To whom did you make the recommendation?
- What was your reasoning? What kind of thought process did you go through?
- Why? Was the recommendation accepted? If not, what was the reason?
- Tell me about a situation where you had to solve a difficult problem. What was the problem and what did you do?
- What was your thought process? What was the outcome? What do you wish you had done differently?
- What steps do you follow to study a problem before making a decision? Why?

Communication

- Tell me about a recent successful experience in making a speech or presentation. How did you prepare? What obstacles did you face? How did you handle them?
- Have you ever had to "sell" an idea to your classmates or co-workers? How did you do it?
- Did they accept your idea?
- Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa). How did you handle the situation?
- What obstacles or difficulties did you face? How did you deal with them?
- Tell me about a time in which you had to use your written communication skills in order to get an important point across.

Creativity

- When was the last time you thought "outside the box" and how did you do it? Why?
- Tell me about a problem that you've solved in a unique or unusual way. What was the outcome? Were you happy or satisfied with it?
- Give me an example of when someone brought you a new idea that was odd or unusual.
- What did you do?

Decision Making

- Tell me about a time when you had to make a decision without all the information you needed. How did you handle it? Why? Were you happy with the outcome?
- Give me an example of a time when you had to be quick in coming to a decision. What obstacles did you face? What did you do?
- What is the most difficult decision you've had to make? How did you arrive at your decision?
- What was the result?

Goal Setting

- Give me an example of an important goal that you have set and tell me how you reached it.
- What steps did you take? What obstacles did you encounter? How did you overcome the obstacles?
- Tell me about a goal that you set that you did not reach. What steps did you take? What obstacles did you encounter? How did it make you feel?

Initiative

- Describe a project or idea (not necessarily your own) that was implemented primarily because of your efforts. What was your role? What was the outcome?
- Describe a situation in which you recognised a potential problem as an opportunity. What did you do? What was the result?
- What do you wish you had done differently?
- Tell me about a project you initiated. What did you do? Why? What was the outcome?
- Were you happy with the result?
- Tell me about a time when your initiative caused a change to occur.
- What was the best idea you came up with during your professional or college career?
- How did you apply it?

Integrity / Honesty

- Discuss a time when your integrity was challenged. How did you handle it?
- Tell me about a time when you experienced a loss for doing what is right. How did you react?
- Tell me about a business situation when you felt honesty was inappropriate. Why? What did you do?
- Give a specific example of a policy you conformed to with which you did not agree. Why was that?

Interpersonal Skills

- Give an example of when you had to work with someone who was difficult to get along with. How/why was this person difficult? How did you handle it? How did the relationship progress?
- Describe a situation where you found yourself dealing with someone who didn't like you. How did you handle it?
- Describe a recent unpopular decision you made. How was it received? How did you handle it?
- What, in your opinion, are the key ingredients in guiding and maintaining successful business relationships? Give me examples of how you have made this work for you.
- Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa). How did you handle the situation?
- Tell me about a time when you had to work on a team with someone you did not get along with. What happened?
- Describe a situation where you had a conflict with another individual, and how you dealt with it. What was the outcome? How did you feel about it?

Leadership

- Tell me about a team project when you had to take the lead or take charge of the project. What did you do? How did you do it? What was the result?
- Describe a leadership role of yours. Why did you commit your time to it? How did you feel about it?
- What is the toughest group that you have had to get cooperation from? What were the obstacles? How did you handle the situation? What were the reactions of the group members? What was the end result?

Planning and Organisation / Time Management

- Describe a situation that required you to do a number of things at the same time. How did you handle it? What was the result?
- How do you prioritise projects and tasks when scheduling your time? Give me some examples.
- Tell me about a project that you planned. How did you organise and schedule the tasks?
- Tell me about your action plan.

Teamwork

- Describe a situation where others you were working with on a project disagreed with your ideas. What did you do?
- Tell me about a time when you worked with a classmate or colleague who was not doing their share of the work. How did you handle it?
- Describe a situation in which you had to arrive at a compromise or help others to compromise. What was your role? What steps did you take? What was the result?
- Tell me about a time when you had to work on a team that did not get along. What happened? What role did you take? What was the result?

L. Probes / Follow-up Questions

You should be able to elaborate further on any answer you give in which you use a past experience to showcase your skills and behaviours. Probes or follow-up questions can come in many forms. Here are some examples:

- What steps did you take?
- What action did you take?
- What happened after that?
- What did you say?
- How did he/she react?
- How did you handle that?
- What was your reaction?
- How did you feel about that?
- What was the outcome/result?
- Were you happy with that outcome/result?
- What do you wish you had done differently?
- What did you learn from that?
- How did you resolve that?
- Why did you decide to do that?
- What was your logic?
- What was your reasoning?
- Where were you when this happened?
- What time was it?
- Who else was involved?
- Tell me more about your interaction with that person. What was your role?
- What obstacles did you face?
- What were you thinking at that point?
- Lead me through your decision process. How did you prepare for that?
- Why? How? When? Where?



6. Summary

To be successful as a candidate for an executive-level position, you need to know that you are doing everything just right throughout the recruitment process, from writing a winning resume to wowning your new employer during your interview and negotiating the best possible salary package.

The tips and tricks you have read in this 'survival guide' for executive candidates should help you be better prepared for this process and raise not only your confidence level but your actual chances of being selected as the successful candidate for the position you are after and getting the remuneration package you deserve.

The knowledge we're sharing with you in this e-Book comes from our many years of professional work experience as executive search and coaching consultants. We have been helping senior executives, managers and professionals across all industries to advance their careers for more than 15 years so we know exactly what works and what doesn't.

For executives who really want to lead and take control of their career and their future, we offer a wide range of products and services to help you achieve the best possible results. These include resumes that will give you a clear competitive advantage, interview coaching, career assessments, executive coaching and career guidance sessions – and much more.

Our online shop contains more than **30 professional career management service packages** that have been proven to get results.

Please visit our [Online Shop](#) to view all the products on offer and current pricing.

To speak to Kylie Hammond or one of our other Executive Search Consultants, please call 1800 737 858 or 02 9922 6175.

We look forward to helping you advance your career and achieve amazing results!

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Tom Hannemann – *Executive Resume Specialist*

Tom Hannemann is one of Australia's foremost Executive Resume Writers & Interview Coaches. He has been helping senior executives, managers and professionals across all industries advance their careers since 1993. Kylie Hammond is delighted to partner and work with Tom, who leads our Executive Resume Writing Service in Australia and across the globe. He focuses on helping our senior executive candidates develop cutting edge Executive Profiles, CVs and Director Profiles. Tom has over 20 years' experience in Human Resources, senior management, business development and senior management consulting roles. He is SEEK's resume writing expert and has worked with one of the world's largest recruitment firms. Tom is a specialist in providing career advancement services, with strong business acumen supported by an MBA from Australia's top two business schools. Having reviewed thousands of resumes & interviewed hundreds of candidates, Tom brings his unique experience to the resume writing process and works closely with our clients to develop a resume that secures interviews.



Kylie Hammond – *Principal, Talent Agent, Career Coach*

Principal, Talent Agent & Executive Coach Kylie Hammond has a proven track record of success, working closely with her clients in a wide variety of companies to develop and implement Human Capital Management and Talent Management programs. Kylie has worked in a variety of senior management positions, with a strong focus on building high-performance teams including Cisco Systems, Deloitte, PeopleSoft & The Gartner Group. This background has helped Kylie bring a unique perspective to her clients and the career management process. Kylie is an active member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors, Australian Institute of Management, Australian Human Resources Institute and Recruitment Consulting Services Association. Kylie has coached numerous senior executives and has over 10,000 hours of practical coaching experience, specialising in Executive Career Mentoring & Coaching. As a leading Executive Search Consultant, with unique Executive Coaching credentials, Kylie is well placed to assist you in your next career move.

