

Resume Screening Hacks

From Sci.bio

You've "*wordsmithed*" your job description to make it stand out, shared your posting on social media, and found a few likely candidates who could be perfect for the role. You're off to a great start but then what happens once the resumes start pouring in?

It's a great problem to have, but the sheer volume can make the selection and screening process daunting.

The goal of resume screening is not to find your perfect candidate. It is to separate the qualified from the "not so." Once you've done this the next stage will be more qualitative and will involve comparing candidates.

A good Applicant Tracking System (ATS) will quickly pay for itself with time saved in organizing and pre-vetting candidates. Most systems (such as the ones we use at [Sci.bio](#)) will have customizable screening questions that will take much of pain out of the selection process. Screening questions are not foolproof, however, and some candidates will try to game the system by claiming experience or qualifications they don't have.

Other important features to look for in your ATS: easy candidate importing, robust Boolean candidate search, and (customizable) candidate snapshots that display critical screen-out criteria.

An ATS will be your best friend when it comes to selecting candidates and a good ATS will allow you to view candidate snapshots en masse, dramatically accelerating the screening process.

By utilizing basic ATS "quick" screening features you will be able to rule out candidates based on experience, educational level, educational focus, years of experience, and required skills. This alone enables you to eliminate a good percentage of the unqualified candidates very quickly.

The next stage of candidate elimination will require a deeper dive into the resume assessment. This is more of an art than a science and the more often you do it, the better you will get at it. When scanning resumes, look for "red flags" that signify attributes you don't care for.

These may include:

- History of job hopping or job gaps (i.e. being at a job for less than 1 year)
- Long tenure at a company, but little or no career progression
- Cover letters that clearly are templates
- Lack of attention to detail. Are words missing in sentences that a quick proofread would have caught? How about cut-and-paste errors?
- Spelling, grammar, or word use errors
- Not following directions: If you've asked the candidate to follow simple directions such as answering a specific question like "Why do you feel you are a stand-out candidate for this

position?” or asking for a resume in a PDF form, as an example. This tends to denote someone who doesn’t care about or isn’t good at following directions.

- Verbosity! Does the candidate take 5 lines to describe something that can be described in a few words? This is a sign of lack of efficiency and can be a red flag.
- Lack of accomplishments. Experienced candidates should have some wins highlighted, hopefully in a quantifiable way. For example, salespeople who hit 100%+ of quota, or years of experience in a certain field.
- Missing or vague dates of employment next to each position. This often means the candidate is hiding something. Many employers don’t follow up on checking dates of a candidate’s employment at previous employers. Some candidates will embellish and overstate this.
- References listed are not immediate managers, or are other individuals who did not directly work with the candidate
- Lack of creativity. Some positions require a good degree of creativity. Did the candidate use a cookie cutter resume or play it too safe in describing what they do? A lack of creativity often limits career progression.
- Lack of team involvement. If a candidate fails to acknowledge team members or over accentuates his or her own accomplishments, it’s a sign that they may not be a great team fit.

Again, at this stage, you aren’t looking the complete package –you are trying to pare down the volume by selecting the most qualified profiles.

A next logical step is an email to set up a phone screen with the remaining candidates.

Now that we’ve considered some of the red flags, here are some other hacks to expedite the resume selection process.

Look for Knowns

As you scan through applicants’ job histories, there may be some known entities. Competitors or sister companies, places you’ve previously worked, etc. Any known entities like that help you get an understanding of the person without having them in front of you. It may be a point for or against the applicant, but either way, it will help you know what to do.

Seek the Unique

After reading through dozens of resumes, they can all start to look and feel the same. Look for unique hobbies, interests, or experiences. Perhaps someone was in the Peace Corps or flew a rescue helicopter, etc. Again, these unique factors help you get an understanding of the applicant before you ever talk to them. This also may be in their favor, or not, but helps you narrow your selection.

Listen to Your Gut

As you’re reading through cover letters and resumes, you’re likely going to get an intuition about each of them. A tightening in your stomach or a feeling of excitement. They may not feel logical, but those reactions have value. Listen to them.

Get Organized

Create folders and sort resumes into yes, no, and maybe. The yeses you'll bring in for an interview right away. The maybes are your backup plan if none of the people in the yes folder are the right fit. As for the noes, they may not be the right person for your current job listing, but they may be perfect for something that opens up in the future. Folders also provide you a visual reference for how many interviews you can expect to conduct and make it easy to find resumes if you need them again.

Take Breaks

Spending hours sorting through resumes can be mind-numbing. Instead, review them in short spurts. This helps you stay focused and truly understand the pros and cons of each applicant. It also helps ensure you're fairly evaluating each resume.

Narrowing down resumes to find the applicants you want to bring in for an interview takes time. Be patient with the process and follow these five tips to make it easier.