

Seven Screening Tools HR Uses to Cut You

It's true - for every posted job, the HR department is expected to cut 90% of all candidates before a hiring manager sees a single resume. While you want to use all your research skills to send your resume to the hiring manager, navigating the screening process is just as important.

Every single HR department will use simple tricks to screen out the majority of the candidates, including the qualified applicants. However, once you know these seven screening tools, you can easily sail to the top of the candidate pile.

Cut #1 - Can you follow directions?

This is a simple test: can follow simple, clear, written instructions. The HR thought process is *"If you can't follow written directions, I don't want to talk to you."* Passing the test is easy - send them everything they ask for, in the way they tell you to send it. Seems obvious, doesn't it? You would be shocked at how many people fail this test! More than 50% of all candidates are cut because they did not apply in the requested manner.

Following directions includes sending your materials to the correct email address or filling out their online application. It encompasses what they ask you to send. Pay attention if they ask for your salary requirements or your references in the ad; failure to send them could easily screen you out. However, if they ask for a salary history, reiterate your salary range instead of disclosing too much on an initial communication.

One tip: always send a cover letter, even if they don't ask for it. Candidates who don't send cover letters are seen as sloppy, ineffective and unprofessional.

Cut #2 - The Yes / No Factor

It is true that some criteria are an absolute yes/no in the employers' mind. Maybe it is a critical skill for the job. Perhaps it is a specific college degree. If you are missing that crucial piece, you will be rejected and there is nothing you can do to change the employer's mind. If you think about it, some of these are obvious. For example, it is impossible to get a job as a Registered Nurse if you don't have a nursing degree. It is highly unlikely for you to land an Executive Assistant position if you have never worked in an administrative support role before.

However, you cannot tell from the job posting what the vital criteria are. In many cases, the HR department will add criteria to match their formatting. A classic example is the college degree; many hiring managers just want someone who can do the job, regardless of education. But the HR department adds the education requirement because that is their standard format.

You have nothing to lose by applying to any job that interests you, even if you don't have all of the criteria. Don't screen yourself out before the HR department does.

Be conscious of the tips and tricks we use to cut you and you will always be in the top 10%.

Cut #3 - Do you know what you're doing?

An uneducated or inexperienced candidate often misuses common industry jargon. Letters transposed in licensing acronyms, misinterpreted duties and badly written descriptions are all clues to the HR department. This is a sure-fire way to get cut. Nobody wants to put a sub-par candidate in front of the hiring manager; it reflects poorly on the screener. And of course, grammar and spelling errors are death on any resume.

Cut #4 - How Annoying Are You?

If you really get on the HR department's nerves, they will search through your resume to find the one mistake to cut you - or they may even invent one. At the screening level, HR people have a lot of power. They are expected to cut the majority of candidates, with minimal oversight, especially in the initial rounds. All the more reason for you to send your resume to the hiring manager at the same time.

Believe it or not, calling the HR department is not annoying, even if the ad says "*No phone calls.*" You just have to ask the right questions. Confirming that your resume was received is fine; flat-out asking for an interview is very annoying.

Cut #5 - Relevance

Everyone knows the importance of using the right key terms and jargon. However, your resume must be more than a jumble of buzzwords. The employers must understand the relevance of your past experience and how it applies to their needs. You may feel that your experience selling widgets at company X has prepared you for a management position, but if you don't tell them why it matters, nobody cares. If HR is scratching their heads trying to determine why you applied for a job, you lost.

Cut #6 - Difficult Communication

When the HR department starts calling candidates, they are still in the screening process. A common practice is to gauge how long it takes for you to call them back. The top picks get called first, but if they have to leave a message, they do keep calling other candidates.

If you don't call back within a day, you might miss your chance. If they are really interested, they may call you again. However, no HR department will call the candidate a third time without at least getting a message back. At that point, they have moved on to someone who was more receptive.

Cut #7 - Gut Reaction

When the candidate list is narrowed to the top picks, instinct plays a part. The best HR recruiters and hiring managers often choose calling one candidate over another because "*it feels right.*"

Hiring people is a risk, and employers are cautious. They want to feel confident in a person's abilities, even before they pick up the phone for the first contact. If you keep your materials professional, accurate and relevant, these subconscious feelings will react to your presentation. You appear to be someone who knows what they are doing. That's the instinct pull they are looking for; the ability to put them at ease.

Confidence comes across on paper. Self-respect is a tangible element in the job search, and it shows in the way you write and speak about yourself. Most employers want someone competent and interested in their specific job, not just “*any old job*”. That’s the “*spark*,” the “*magic bullet*” to pierce the corporate veils. Be conscious of the tips and tricks we use to cut you and you will always be in the top 10%.



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