

HOW RECRUITERS READ RESUMES IN 30 SECONDS OR LESS

The 10 or 30 seconds it takes to read a resume seems to always generate a lot of controversy. Candidates comment on how disrespectful it is, how one can't possibly read a resume in that time, and some get angry at recruiters when we talk about this. I hope this information helps you understand how we do this. I realize that some still may not like it, but at least you can understand how it works.

First, let me say I've been doing recruitment for over 30 years, and while I cannot validate it, I'm sure I have reviewed over a million resumes. I know many days I have reviewed hundreds of resumes and most in less than 20 seconds. I would say the average is probably around 5 to 10 seconds. So here are a couple of tips to consider: 1) the resume basics – black ink on white paper or background with font size NEVER below 10 or greater than 12, except for some occasional 14 point headings, have remained the best over time; 2) most resume attention is focused on the top one-third of the first page; if that captures the recruiters attention, they might read more. Your summary or profile statement must be sharp and concise, like the headlines of a newspaper; 3) does your resume answer two basic questions – “how are you going to make or save me money?” and “why should I hire you?”; 4) If you make the recruiter work hard to follow your resume flow, you're done.

For the record when you hear or read about, “reading a resume in 20 seconds,” that isn't completely true. It is more than likely, “reviewed the resume in 20 seconds.” Recruiters have to quickly go from the many resumes to the few, and it is the few that receive a more detailed reading.

Here is my process for getting through the initial review of 100's of resumes in a short period of time:

I set up a criteria of certain “must haves” or you're out, so at first I'm really just box checking. Generally, 80% of the time these are my knock out blows. There are exceptions to each of these, but I'm dealing with the 80/20 rule. These are not cumulative times. This is box checking, if I see any one of these as I scan your resume you will be excluded.

1. **Functional Resume.** I don't read them. It is obvious when one has a functional resume they are trying to hide something and I'm rarely going to take the time to attempt to figure it out. 1 second.
2. **Location.** If the client is in Boston and not interested in relocating a candidate and you are not from Boston – sorry, you're out. Few if any clients want to relocate anyone in this economy, and in most cases, they shouldn't have to. Especially in huge metropolitan areas like Boston, New York or Atlanta. If they do have to consider relocation the position has to require some very unique experience that few jobs do. 1-2 seconds.
3. **Industry.** My focus as an Executive Recruiter is to find the best candidates with experience, leadership and cultural style that aligns with the client company; industry-specific experience is important but not necessarily or always a top requirement. However, if the client specifies they want candidates only from their industry, our hands are tied. 5 seconds.

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4. **Function.** If I'm doing a sales search and your background isn't sales – sorry. Generally companies are paying recruiters to find them a “perfect fit”. We never do find a perfect fit, but we have to be very close. They don't need a recruiter to find them someone in a completely different function. 3 seconds.
5. **Level.** If I'm doing a VP level search and your title is “manager” and you have never been a VP or your scope of responsibility as a manager does not align with that of the VP – sorry. There are exceptions to this, but again it is the 80/20 rule. Again, clients pay recruiters to find them the perfect fit. It is generally way too big of a jump from manager level to VP level, all other things being equal. It works the other way too. If I'm looking for a manager and you are a VP – sorry. I know you are qualified to do a manager level role, but it is clear you have grown past that level. Most clients and recruiters aren't willing to take the chance that when a VP level position comes along that you won't be gone. Less than 5 seconds.
6. **Recent Experience.** There is some overlap on this one. If I'm searching for someone with international sales experience in the aerospace industry and the last time you held an international sales position in this industry was 20 years ago and since then you have been in retail – sorry. I can find people with more relevant experience and that is what my client expects me to do. 4 seconds.
7. **Education** With few exceptions, clients prefer candidates that have college education, and many times a master's degree. We need to find the best of the best for clients. I realize an education doesn't mean by itself that the candidate is the best, but it is one qualifier of many. Most of our clients require at least a Bachelors degree. 3 seconds.
8. **Turnover.** If you have had 6 jobs in the last 4 years, or have a track record of high turnover – sorry. I realize there are good reasons for turnover and that falls into the 20% of the 80/20 rule. I can't define high turnover, but I know it when I see it. 3 seconds.
9. **Obvious things** such as, spelling errors, poor format, errors in grammar, too long, verbose and rambling. If after reading it I still can't figure out what you do, sorry. 4 seconds