

What Makes You Different From the Other Job Seekers?

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You're special.

Your mom and dad told you. Your Little League coach told you. You tell yourself in the mirror every morning.

Anyone who encounters you must recognize what a unique snowflake you are, right?

Maybe, but not necessarily. If you're looking for a job, don't assume the hiring [manager](#) is going to look at your cover letter and think, "This job candidate is The One." That could happen, but you should do all you can to make that realization occur.

In the interest of spreading the word about your unparalleled qualifications and stunning personality, we've compiled some questions you should ask yourself at each stage of the job-hunting process. Some of these questions can apply to each stage.

When writing the résumé

Q. What about my education sets me apart?

A. Although degrees are more common than they once were, not each one is created equal. Most programs have enough freedom built in to them to allow students to customize their courses. The combination of your major and minor or your courses can give you a background that no one else has.

Q. Do I care about all of this?

A. This résumé is about you, so you probably have more interest in it than the average employer, but if you're bored, everyone else will be, too. If your attempt to show how unique you are results in a dense list of your jobs and skills that make the page look like one huge block of text, you're probably not focusing enough. Keep details short, informative and, above all else, relevant. Your paper route in junior high doesn't matter if you're 25 and have a college degree.

Your GPA, awards and recognition are good examples of items that do set you apart. They won't land you the job by themselves, but they are additional assets that can differentiate you from the next résumé in the stack.

When writing your cover letter

Q. What's implied on the résumé but not explicitly stated?

A. Have someone else read your résumé and explain your strong points to you. If you don't hear something you were expecting, figure out why. You might think your extensive work history painted a clear picture for readers, but it might not. The cover letter is your chance to connect the dots and (eloquently) tell the hiring manager, "Hey, look what I have to offer!"

Maybe your [internship](#) with an employer was more involved and relevant to the position you're seeking than the résumé suggests. Go into details and prove why that experience matters to this job.

Q. Does this sound like me or like Janet Q. Jobseeker?

A. Professionalism is key in a cover letter, but so is your personality. Now is not the time to be a comedian, but if your cover letter could have been written by any other applicant and been about any other applicant, then it's not special. As a result, the employer won't think you're special.

If you have extensive knowledge of the industry, have a contact at the company or possess strong [communication](#) skills, don't be afraid to let it shine through.

When interviewing

Q. Would I hire me?

A. An interview is basically an extended, interactive form of this question. If you get an interview the employer thinks you fit the job requirements, but whether or not you're the perfect candidate is still in question. In addition to elaborating on your skills, only one thing can make or break you at this point: your personality.

Your personality is unique to you, so don't be scared to let it show. As with the cover letter, don't be so casual that you come off as unprofessional, but now is the time to show your sense of humor and your interpersonal communication skills. Fading into the background will only help you be forgotten.

Q. What is the one thing I want the hiring manager know about?

A. Hiring managers don't know you, so they're probably asking you the same questions they asked other candidates. If you want to prove that you're a three-dimensional person who exists beyond undergrad business courses, have an actual dialogue. A hiring manager doesn't need you to echo everything he or she already read about you.

The time you helped your group tackle a problem during a brainstorming session? The interesting marketing book you just read that has given you some new ideas? Let these facts out if they're relevant to the conversation.

Q. Why do I want to work here?

A. Interviewers often ask this question of candidates, and candidates have learned to come armed with a response. But do you know why you want to work there or do you just know what you want them to think?

Everyone wants to be hired so they can get a paycheck, add another line to their résumé and move up the chain. Do you want to transition into a new industry? Do you think you can bring a fresh perspective to the company (without sounding arrogant)? Does the position sound like the one you've been preparing for and you have the experience to show for it? You need to know the answer and believe it before you walk into the interview.

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