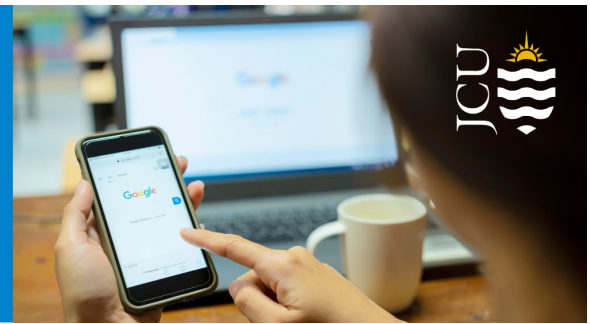


# Beyond the job ad

## Understanding employer expectations and priorities



To craft a powerful written application, start by unpacking the job ad and role description. But don't stop there! Explore the organisation's website to find insights into their core business, values and future direction. The more you understand what the employer stands for and what the role involves, the better positioned you are to tailor your application with purpose.

"37% of employers report that candidates lack an understanding of the organisation when applying for a job."

Australian Association of Graduate Employers

### Unpacking the job advertisement and role description



#### Key responsibilities

The key responsibilities outline what your day-to-day work will entail. Look for words that signal the level of responsibility expected, for example "support", "coordinate", "implement" or "lead".



#### Technical knowledge and skills

What industry-specific knowledge and skills is the employer seeking? This might include competencies such as proficiency with specific software applications, project management skills or implementing evidence-based approaches. Reflect on how you have demonstrated these through your coursework, work experience or extra-curricular activities.

Some advertisements, particularly those for government roles, will include support documents that make reference to frameworks and legislation you are expected to understand and apply. There may also be reference to strategic plans, service delivery models or policies unique to the organisation. See if these are published on their website to better understand the role and workplace expectations.



#### Transferable skills

Transferable skills, also called "soft skills", are the interpersonal, cognitive and emotional abilities that shape how you engage with others, navigate challenges and manage your responsibilities. These can include:

- Communication and collaboration skills e.g. teamwork, cultural competency
- Self-management skills e.g. time management, reliability, resilience
- Critical thinking skills e.g. problem solving and ethical judgment

Consider situations in which you have demonstrated these skills rather than simply listing them as strengths i.e. "Show don't tell".



#### Qualifications, registrations and experience

Scan the job advertisement for expected qualifications, registrations, licences or experience. Essential requirements are typically non-negotiable. Not meeting the desirable requirements isn't always a deal breaker. Consider transferable skills or experiences, or how you can show your potential to meet these in time.



#### Selection criteria

The key responsibilities for the role often align with how your performance will be assessed. Note the experience expected, for example "capacity to..." implies potential, where "demonstrated ability to..." suggests proven experience.



#### Language

Note the language used – key terms, phrases and action words. Incorporating these into your application strengthens your alignment and increases your Application Tracking System (ATS) fit if the recruiter is using AI to shortlist applications. Mirror the employer's language, but be cautious not to go overboard with jargon or buzz words as that can make your application sound generic and impersonal.



#### Tone

The tone of the advertisement will give clues about the workplace culture. Use these cues to guide your application – whether you go with a more formal, conventional approach or whether you include more personality and creative flair.



#### Application requirements

Pay attention to the employer's expectations, for example the length of your resume, cover letter and response to selection criteria, if applicable.

## Digging deeper on the organisation's website

Use the organisation's website as a strategic tool, not just to gather facts, but to reflect on your alignment and how you could be a valuable employee. Here are some key areas to explore:



### About Us / Mission / Values

What is the organisation's purpose, guiding principles and priorities? Does this align with your own values? You could draw on this synergy in your cover letter, connecting your shared goals, motivations or values with the organisation's.



### Vision / Strategic Direction

What are the goals of the organisation? Is this something you are motivated to be involved in? Understanding how your skills could contribute meaningfully to the "bigger picture" can help strengthen your application.



### Services / Projects / Initiatives

What does the organisation deliver and to whom? Who are the stakeholders that you would work with through your role? Again, this can help you better understand how your role contributes to the organisation's outputs.



### Team and leadership profiles

What are the leaders' backgrounds? What are their areas of expertise? What do they stand for? Leaders and mentors have an important role in shaping your early career and professional growth!



### News and social media content

How does the organisation present itself publicly? What are their achievements? These insights can help you develop a personalised statement about your motivation that reflects genuine interest by referring to what inspires you.

## Reach out to the recruiter

After spending some time familiarising yourself with the role and the organisation, consider reaching out to the contact person on the advertisement (ideally via phone, not email). This can serve several purposes:

1. Give you nuanced insights into what they are looking for in order to polish your application. For example, you could ask, "What would success look like six months into the role?"
2. Fill in any gaps that will help you decide whether this is the role for you. For example, you could ask, "What support or professional development is available as a new graduate?"
3. Put yourself on their radar! They will nearly always ask you to tell them a bit about yourself. Have a concise, confident introduction prepared that highlights your experience, strengths, motivations and what draws you to the role. If you capture their attention, they'll be eagerly awaiting your application.

## Identify the key language for ATS and AI compatibility

ATS, or Applicant Tracking Systems, are software tools used in recruitment to streamline recruitment by automating elements of the process. Traditional ATS scan applications for key words, qualifications and experience to filter out less suitable applicants. More advanced, AI-powered ATS can analyse applications using contextual and semantic understanding and rank candidates accordingly.

To support ATS compatibility, highlight key words and phrases in the job ad and any support documents:

- Core skills (e.g. proficient in Excel, SEO / SEM, team-oriented, critical thinking)
- Qualifications or professional registrations (e.g. Bachelor's degree in Finance, AHPRA registration)
- Industry terms (e.g. patient-centred care, KPIs, CRMs, multi-disciplinary teams)
- Jargon (e.g. agile methodology, stakeholder engagement, brand equity)

Once you've done your own analysis, try the following AI prompt to confirm your understanding:

*"Here is a job advertisement for a [insert role]. Can you analyse this job ad and give me a checklist of important keywords and phrases I should include in my resume to improve ATS compatibility?"*

Paste the full job advertisement below this prompt or upload the job advertisement as an attachment.

As you develop your application, aim to mirror the language from the advertisement, for example use "project management" instead of "managing projects". Integrate key words and phrases naturally into your application to maintain clarity and authenticity. Use [Big Resume](#) to review your ATS key word compatibility. Create your Big Resume and Big Interview account using your JCU email address.

## Seek expert support from the JCU Careers and Employability Team

Book your personalised one-on-one appointment for tailored assistance with job seeking, resumes, cover letters or preparing for interviews through our [CareerHub](#).

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 JCU Careers

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