

The background of the top half of the page features several large, overlapping, curved shapes in various shades of green, ranging from dark forest green to bright lime green. These shapes create a dynamic, organic feel.

Thinking of getting hired?

Difference between almost and hired is often found in details no one teaches you.

A practical guide you need to get hired and avoid the wrong offer.



TL;DR

- Start with a self-assessment, both in terms of skills and personality.
- Build a clear, tailored resume that communicates relevance and credibility.
- Keep your LinkedIn profile alive and active. It's your digital storefront.
- Apply wisely and selectively, and always customize your applications.
- Learn to write concise and professional emails and DMs.
- Prepare for interviews with clarity, honesty and a calm mindset.
- Don't be afraid to negotiate but always be respectful and reasonable.
- And finally, trust your instincts and walk away from shady offers and toxic employers.

Author

Onia Rehman

Co-Author

Hashir Jamil

Introduction

I got a message on my LinkedIn, “I just graduated this January and have done some internships. I’m looking for a job. Can you help me?”

Every year, thousands of fresh graduates are thrown into this wild, competitive job market. Some land a role right away. Some take a few weeks. For others, it drags on for months. Is it all just luck?

Honestly, I don’t think so.

I’ve always believed that destiny is just a blank page and we get to write our own story on it. What truly makes the difference isn’t luck. It’s skill and more importantly, how you present it. Showing up with the right skills is one thing. But packaging those skills in a way that grabs attention? That’s where most people lack. I’ve seen it firsthand. I’ve spent a good chunk of my time screening, interviewing and assessing candidates. Some look great on paper but fall flat in person. Others? Their resumes barely say much but the moment they start talking, you realize they’re a solid fit.

The truth is, no one really teaches us how to market ourselves. Schools are focused on what to do once you land the job. They barely talk about how to actually get the job. Workplaces don’t exactly coach people on personal branding either. And let’s be honest, most of us don’t go out of our way to learn these things on our own.

That one DM got me thinking. If this one person reached out, how many others must be feeling the same but not saying it out loud? So I started thinking: What are the real roadblocks? And more importantly, how do we fix them?

Call this a handbook, keybook or a guide. It’s about shifting how you think. Because let’s face it, when we hit a wall, most of us look outward: “The professor failed me.” “Maybe it just wasn’t my day.” But have you thought about it? What if the problem and its solution both are within yourself.

Whether you’re a fresh grad, on a career break or just wanna switch for a better opportunity, this book is for you. It walks you through each stage of the job hunt. From how to show up better, to how to position yourself, to how to actually land the role that feels right. But the question is:

Where should I start from?

You just started your career. Fresh out of the oven. The first thing that you need to figure out is who you are? And what you bring to the table? For this you'll need to do a self assessment. A SWOT analysis, your strengths, weaknesses and opportunities. Knowing exactly where you stand in terms of skill and mindset, it becomes a lot easier to navigate the path.

In my opinion, self analysis has two key parts. One is your personality and the other one is your skillset. For personality assessment, you can go online for free tests. They can provide a general idea of how you may think or how you behave in certain situations and what career paths may be good for you. For skill assessment you can go online too but the most effective way to judge where you stand, is a mentor. You can find a mentor through your network. And LinkedIn is perfect for that. No matter if you're employed or on a job hunt, you should have a strong LinkedIn network because connecting with the right people in the industry provides you with recent insights. So, you get to know about the emerging trends, technologies and where the world is heading.

The second thing is defining your goals. Where do you want to be in the next 5 to 10 years? You don't need to have your entire life figured out, but having a rough roadmap makes everything else more intentional. When your goals are clear, your efforts become aligned. This makes it easy to take control of your career, rather than being driven by external drivers.

Take a moment and define what success looks like for you? This vision will help you take more strategic decisions, especially if you've just started out, you can weigh the choices, what influences the direction of your path.

Once you have clarity on who you are, what you're good at, and where you're headed, it's time to put it all on paper.



What does an ideal resume look like?

Honestly, there's no ideal. It's just the one that is clear, concise and easy to skim. This is coming from someone who is 24/7 in recruitment. Once you know what your strengths and weaknesses are, hop on your laptop and use either a template or make one by yourself. There are hundreds of free tools and templates available online which you can use. And the best template? That depends on the job you're applying to. If you're a bit low with your GPA, you may not want this to be the first thing a recruiter sees. You can place it later on the page. This is not about being sneaky, it's about showing what you're good at first. About length. Keep it concise. Your resume should be long enough to reflect the depth of your experience. Space fillers do more harm than good.

Resume or CV?

Usually CV and resume both are often considered the same. But there's a difference.

- CV is a document containing detailed information about your experiences and qualifications.

- A resume is a tailored document and only has the relevant information of the individual just for a particular job.

Formatting and ATS

About the format if it needs to be formal or not? If you do not belong to the arts, you essentially don't need to be creative with it.

- Use a simple format that is easy to skim for both the ATS and the recruiter.
- Include keywords from the job description.
- Avoid using creative headings; What I've achieved, My journey, etc. Rather use commonly used phrases.
- Customize your summary. This should be keyword rich and ideally, tailored for the role.
- List skills separately.
- Don't make spelling mistakes.
- Use consistent margins, spacing and readable fonts.
- Always convert the doc into PDF and rename the file properly.

Tailoring the resume

People throw their resumes everywhere without taking this into account that not every size fits all. If you have multiple experiences or have done certifications, you can exclude the ones that are not relevant to the job. Some even don't update the resume with their skills and latest projects. It's a red flag if you show up saying "I think I haven't shared with you the updated one."

Mistakes to avoid

Apart from the ones mentioned above, here are some mistakes I've seen people make.

- Mentioning incomplete tech stack or skills.
- Overusing buzzwords.
- Listing full home address. If you're targeting a remote role, just mention your country. For onsite or hybrid roles, including your city and state is enough.
- Putting references available upon request, this is outdated. It goes without saying. Use this space for something more impactful.
- Using paragraphs instead of bullets creates a bit of strain on the eyes. Bullets keep it clean and easy to read.

- Putting job descriptions in the experiences. Just put 2-3 bullets that define the core responsibilities.
- Skipping the career gaps. Address them in one line with a logical reason, that's it.
- Ignoring typos, spacing issues, etc. All of this drops your aura by -1000 points.

What does the ideal LinkedIn profile look like?

Just as I said for the resume, there's no ideal LinkedIn profile either. Just like staying stagnant with your current skill set isn't sustainable, this is a continuous effort that you'll need to put in and improve your profile. Here's what I think you should do:

- **Profile photo**

Clean background, straight headshot.... Cut the crap. I would like to call this a business casual photo. It totally depends on your own vibe and how you present yourself. Just be real. Use the one you think you look the best in.

- **Headline**

This is a one-liner, with 2-4 words, that defines what you're and what you do. Do your research and use keywords that are relevant and mostly used by recruiters, because this increases your profile visibility.

- **About section**

A short story about what you're doing currently, what you've done and what you're looking for. Keep in mind, just keep it real.

- **Experience**

Add brief bullets under each experience, explaining what you learnt and how you feel about it.

- **Add skills**

Add the industry relevant skills, technologies, softwares, etc. This makes it easy for the algorithm to put you on the front when someone searches for any of those.

- **Stay active**

Show some activity on your profile by commenting and posting once in a while so, anyone visiting your profile should know that you're actively engaged.

- **Custom URL**

Keep your URL clean by using your name. It helps in SEO and also is easy to copy paste anywhere. e.g. linkedin.com/in/jhon_b15a28 (looks odd), linkedin.com/in/jhon (looks clean).

- **What about “Open to work”?**

If you've built your profile correctly, it would surely come up on recruiters searches without the status. So, in my opinion it doesn't make any huge difference.

How to apply?

While applying to jobs, one should keep in mind to spend good time searching for the relevant job. One strategy that I personally recommend to people is connecting with people in the same niche as you on LinkedIn. So, you can have them as a referral or they could recommend a job to you as well.

Another thing that you can do is being present at multiple job boards, like Glassdoor, Indeed, Monster, Naukri and Rozee.pk etc. Keep your profile complete and updated. Use keywords from job descriptions. Enable visibility settings and job alerts for faster access to new postings.

Once you're done searching for the job. Before applying, tailor your resume for each job. This takes a bit of effort but this multiplies your chances for getting hired. Because you've read the job description and tailored your resume according to it, there are less chances for you to get screened out. Also, read the job description carefully.

You can look for the following red flags in the job descriptions:

- Use of vague language and unclear responsibilities.
- Lack of transparency in compensation and benefits.
- Low salary and fewer benefits.
- Unpaid probationary period.

- The job is reposted multiple times. This indicates high turn-over.

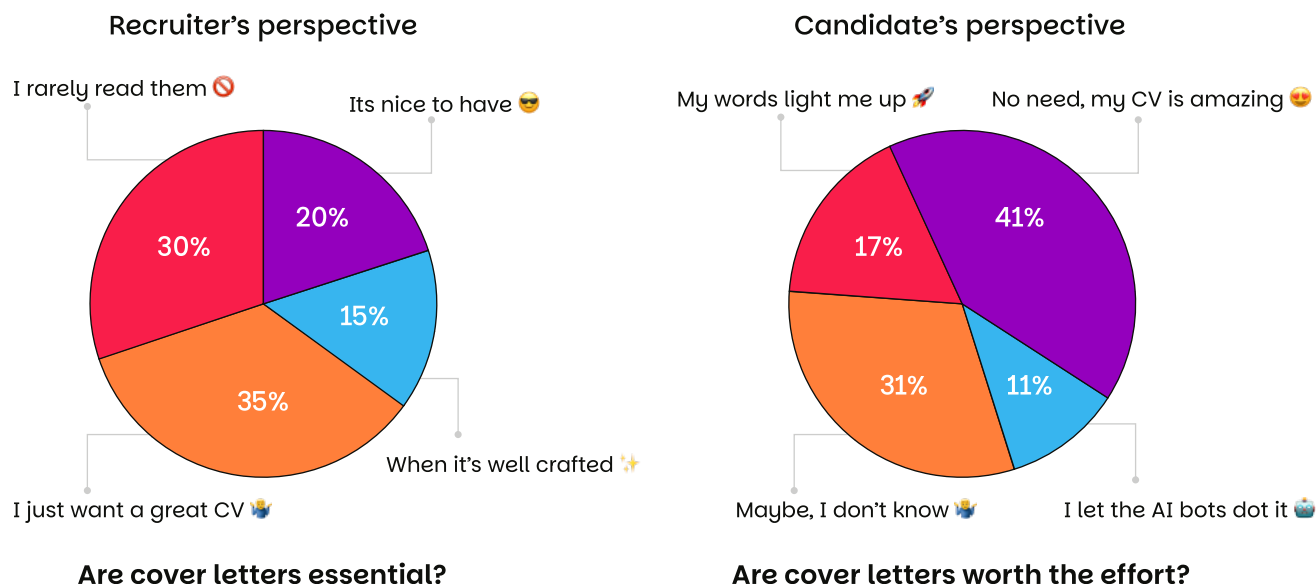
After applying, you can reach out to individuals or organizations who are actively hiring. Send a personalized and professional message. This should include a brief introduction of yours, highlighting your core expertise along with portfolio and recent achievements.

Is cover letter relevant anymore?

Honestly, it depends on the organization that you're applying to. But in most cases it isn't relevant as it was before and here's why I think so:

- **Hiring managers rarely read them:** For instance, a role posted on LinkedIn has hundreds of candidates, each has a resume, maybe a portfolio and a LinkedIn profile, that needs to be reviewed. A cover letter won't make any sense for a recruiter because it would only increase their workload.
- **Employers have shifted priorities:** Portfolios, case studies and skill based assessments impress the recruiter. Putting up a formal page about your expertise is a great idea but this won't be the deciding factor.
- **It creates a barrier:** Candidates value ease. The easier your process is, the higher the chance to get good talent. Professionals who are not actively looking for opportunities may not write a cover letter. That's a loss for the company.

In my personal opinion, one should focus on their resume and LinkedIn profile because that makes the real difference. But still if an employer asks for a cover letter, don't just copy-paste something generic. Personalize it. It shouldn't just repeat your resume. Instead, use it to tell the story behind the most relevant experiences. Focus on the problems you helped solve, how you approached them, and what outcomes you delivered. That's what makes a cover letter worth reading.



Importance of an email

Writing an email is simple yet people make mistakes. A poorly written email is your first bad impression. Recruiters and employers pay attention to these minute details that candidates often don't care about. Here's what you should know about writing the right email:

- Clear subject.
- Keep the spacing right. One idea per paragraph.
- Keep it short and stay to the point.
- Use bullet points for clear formatting.
- Make a professional email signature, containing your name, LinkedIn and contact etc.
- Proof read and avoid any typos.

While applying, use your email wisely. Write a brief, personalized message that highlights your most relevant experiences. This shows intention and professionalism and gives more weightage to your application.

Does sending a personalized DM to a recruiter work?

It's like sending a cover letter but in a different format. Though some argue that it's a good practice. I would say, it works only if you're the right fit for the job.

It'll be effective only if:

- You research the recruiter's profile.
- Stay to the point and clearly state your interest.
- It demonstrates interest not desperation.
- Personalize it for each receiver.
- Follow-up politely.

For example:

Hi (Recruiter's name), I've applied for the (Job title). Based on the requirements shared, I believe my background aligns well with what you're looking for. With (Years) of experience and strong grip in the (Core skill/technology), I'm confident that I can add value to the team. Here's my portfolio attached (Attach link). And/or Here are my achievements at (Mention previous job/degree).

Looking forward to connecting!

This is what you shouldn't do. Recruiters already have a lot on their plate. Reaching out with a vague or effort-heavy message just adds to their workload. What you should do instead is make their job easier, give them a clear and concise snapshot of your experience and relevance. Here's how:

Hi! I saw your job post for the Digital Marketer role and was immediately interested, since your company is SaaS-based. I strongly believe that I'm a fit for this role because:

- I started out my career as an associate at X, where I built core marketing skills by managing content, optimizing posts and supporting multi-channel campaigns.
- At Y, a SaaS company I executed integrated campaigns across SEO, paid, lifecycle and product-led growth.
- I'm ready to lead performance-focused marketing efforts, manage cross-functional projects, and scale what works at your company.

The point here is to provide the recruiter what they need to find themselves. This is typically the exact type of information a recruiter is looking for to identify the right candidate quickly. By offering it upfront you're bypassing and making it easier for them to move you straight to the hiring manager's desk.

Let's talk about the interview

If I were to summarize this in one sentence, I would say, be honest! But first let's take a look at what you should do before the interview:

- Practice speaking slowly and clearly.
- Ask yourself the questions given in the next section.
- Research the company, role and its culture. Use resources like the company's website, LinkedIn, and career pages etc.
- Think about the problems you faced at your job or previous experience and how you managed to solve them.
- In case of an onsite interview, make sure you check the route for the interview to avoid getting late.
- In case of an online interview, make sure to have your technology settled up.
- Just before the interview, practice to relax and be comfortable.

Now, let's talk about how would you answer the most commonly asked questions:

- **How would you describe yourself?**

Practice your elevator pitch. A brief one minute introduction of yours highlighting your key strengths and achievements.

- **What are your strengths and weaknesses?**

You already did your SWOT. Elaborate strengths with examples of you successfully implementing those. For weaknesses focus on how you're coping with them and improving now.

- **Why did you leave your previous job?**

Never talk bad about your previous employer. Focus on what you learned and how you grew. But be honest with the reason you left.

- **What are your salary expectations?**

To answer this, first know your own worth by talking to industry experts or take a look at the industry benchmark. And for their budget too. Based on this you can quote a number that suits both the parties.

- **Do you have any questions for us?**

Make sure to do your research about the company before stepping in the interview. Ask questions about your day-to-day tasks, what they expect from you and ask about the company's culture.

Try answering the above mentioned questions to yourself and analyze which one feels the most difficult to answer and improve accordingly. You can use the following framework to better structure your answers.

**Challenge**

The problem?

**Action**

What did you do?

**Result**

What happened?

During the interview keep this in your mind:

- Greet the interviewer with a smile.
- Make eye contact and avoid fidgeting.
- Keep answers concise but meaningful.
- Be honest and authentic.
- Take meaningful pauses to stay relaxed and clear.
- Give examples of the initiatives that you took.
- Don't overshare personal details.
- If you don't know the answer, be honest and apologize.
- While concluding, ask about the next steps.
- Thank them for their time.

After the interview:

- Follow-up politely for an update.

I got an offer, what to do?

First of all, congratulations. It's okay to ask for sometime to respond. You should be sure about your financial, professional and personal success at the job.

Understand the job offer:

- **Base salary**

Understand if this is net or gross salary. Calculate your net after taxes.
Compare the base salary with the industry average.

- **Bonuses**

Performance bonuses and annual incentives etc.

- **Benefits**

Health insurance, provident fund, retirement plans and paid time off (vacation, sick leave, holidays).

- **Job role and growth opportunities**

Clear responsibilities, reporting structure, learning opportunities and growth.

Analyze based on the above criteria and compare other offers or industry benchmarks. Now you will have an idea if you need to negotiate or not.

How would I negotiate?

First understand if negotiation is needed or not? You can compare offers and if one has good culture and opportunities for growth but is paying a bit less, you can ask for a raise but understand that money is not always the priority. Here are some tips on negotiation:

- Acknowledge the offer and negotiate respectfully.
- Start with gratitude, express your interest in the offer and suggest what you want but be flexible.
- Understand that the company may genuinely not be able to stretch their budget. You can ask for early promotion or raise.
- In the worst case scenario, if you have to decline the offer, walk away respectfully.
- Always review the whole package, not just the salary.

Red flags to look for in companies and offer letters

Here are some red flags in companies to avoid:

- **Unprofessional interview experience**

The interviewer doesn't respond to your follow-ups respectfully. They make last minute reschedules. Or no time is given to you to ask questions.

- **No online presence**

They are not available on LinkedIn or have any company website. Or you can't find any active employees.

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- **Underpaying**

Paying way below industry benchmarks.

- **Avoiding clarity**

No clarity on responsibilities and working hours or leave structure.

Here are some for offer letters or contracts:

- **No written offer**

This is a big red flag. No legit company does this.

- **Missing key information**

Like, salary, job title, start date, probation period, benefits, etc.

- **Unfair clauses**

Clauses that only provide protection to the organization.

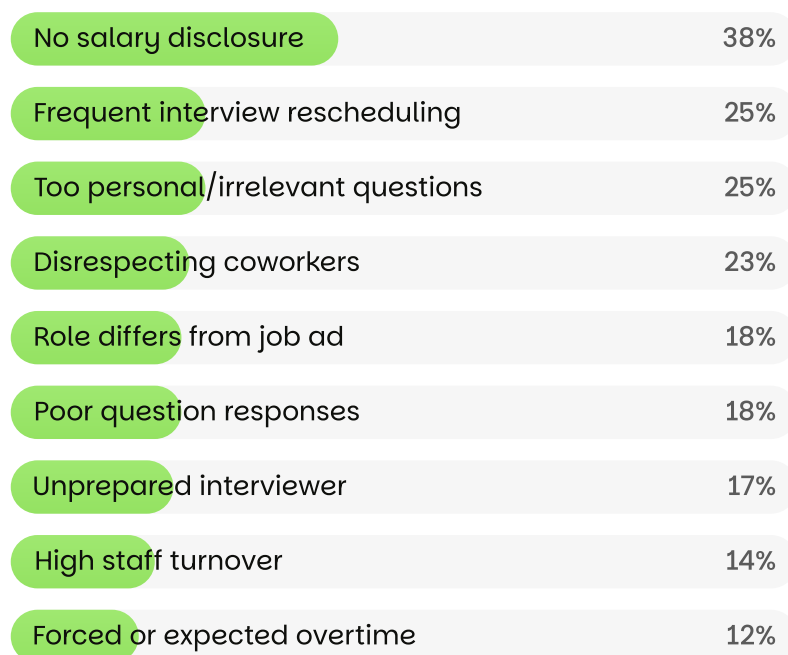
- **Unclear terms**

No mention of termination policy, severance, notice period etc.

- **Pay us to get registered**

No legit employer will ask you to pay them in any case.

If you see any of these red flags, walk away, even if they are paying you a million dollars.



Red flags identified by job seekers

Conclusion

Job hunting is rarely easy but it becomes significantly smoother when you're equipped with the right mindset, strategy, and tools. This handbook walks you through the entire lifecycle of getting hired.

By now, you've walked through everything, from understanding yourself to negotiating an offer. You've seen what a solid resume and LinkedIn profile should look like, how to apply smart, and how to show up prepared for conversations, whether that's an email, a DM, or a full-blown interview.

This handbook wasn't meant to give you magic answers. It was meant to give you a starting point. To simplify what feels overwhelming. To help you take control, step by step.

So be intentional with every piece of it, from how you show up online, to how you talk about yourself in interviews, to what kind of workplace you say yes to. The little things matter. The follow-ups, the grammar checks, the confidence in your pitch, they all add up.

In a world where everyone's trying to stand out, it's your clarity and authenticity that truly make the difference. You're not just hunting for any job, you're shaping your future. And that kind of journey takes time, effort, and a bit of heart. You won't get everything right the first time. That's okay. No one does. But if you've made it to the end of this handbook, you're already ahead of most people because you cared enough to figure things out.

If there's one key takeaway, it's this: Self-awareness and presentation are your strongest allies. Knowing your strengths, communicating them clearly, and continuously adapting your resume, LinkedIn profile, and interview skills to market demands will put you ahead of most applicants.