

Cultural expectations and practices in the Australian workplace

The job application process

Australian employers use two main methods to short-list applicants for interview – resume/curriculum vitae (CV) and cover letter/letter of application.

Resumes

Your resume should be no more than three pages. List your education, employment history, relevant experience, skills and some carefully selected interests or achievements.

- Avoid long paragraphs and keep language concise.
- Keep the style simple – don't use too many fonts and symbols. Use Resume builder for an Australian format www.deakin.edu.au/resume
- List your qualification or degree first followed by the name of the institution.
- Place all information in reverse chronological order (most recent first).
- Early secondary school experience is not of interest to most employers.
- Help employers see whether you will fit into their organization by highlighting relevant interests and activities, such as playing team sports to show teamwork and cooperation, and voluntary work to show values and community spirit.
- This is your chance to stand out and to highlight the qualities that make you the best person for the jobs – do not be modest and shy. Use verbs to express what you have actually done. For example, 'Designed a system to produce reports efficiently while working at Bloggs and Co'.

Include the names and contact details of at least two referees. Try to have at least one referee that resides in Australia, perhaps a university lecturer or tutor who is prepared to speak on your behalf.

Cover letters

No more than one page. Highlight what you have to offer and how you match the selection criteria. Give brief examples of skills and experience to demonstrate that you fit the job.

- Observe letter writing conventions, placing your name and contact details, the details of the person to whom you are writing, the date and any reference numbers on the top left of the page.
- Address the person by their title and their family name, not their given name. For example, 'Dear Ms Brown', not 'Dear Jenny Brown' or 'Dear Ms Jenny'. Check that you know which is the family name
- Avoid clichés and expressions that may be read as insincere or unprofessional. Rather than using terms such as 'your esteemed company', simply say 'this well respected company' or 'I would appreciate your time' rather than 'your most valuable and precious time'.

Nuances in communication make a big difference to the way you are perceived. Your written language needs to reflect local standards of business communication; mistakes can contribute to negative stereotypes about your communication skills.

Submitting an application

- You may not hear for up to four weeks after submitting your application. You will either be asked to come for an interview or you may receive a response explaining that you have been unsuccessful in your application.
- If you have not had a response within 2 weeks of the application closing date you may call to ask about the progress of your application.
- If you are unsuccessful you may ask for feedback about your application. This can be useful in improving your applications; however companies do not have to provide

feedback. Remain polite and appreciative as you may have an opportunity with them in the future.

Interviews

- You may be interviewed by one person, a panel of two or more, or over the telephone, if a personal interview cannot be arranged. You may have to attend an assessment centre to complete tasks individually or in groups.
- Dress neatly and for business. Women do not have to wear skirts, but should dress appropriately for the organization. Keep make up and jewellery minimal and simple.
- On meeting, men are expected to give a firm, but not too forceful, handshake. Women usually indicate whether they wish to shake hands.
- Show your personality in the interview and speak up clearly and with confidence. Be formal but show humour and try to be relaxed.
- Answer honestly and in keeping with your views and values. Give examples of skills and experience to support your claims.
- Ask questions about the tasks, responsibilities and expectations of the job, not just about the pay and holiday entitlements.
- Ask when you can expect to hear about the result of the interview, and make a note it.
- You may not hear immediately about whether you got the job. If you have not heard by the date they indicated, call to ask and also to request feedback about your performance.

Workplace culture and behaviour

- Most workplaces receive four weeks annual leave, with public holidays including Good Friday and Easter Monday, Christmas Day and Boxing Day and New Year's Day.
- Most jobs are described as being '9 to 5', but many workplaces will expect you to be there as early as 8.00am and work into the early evening. This can be negotiated and time off in lieu is usually given.
- Australian workers receive benefits such as superannuation with employer contributions, sick leave entitlements, paid maternity leave, paternity leave and in some situations, study leave.
- Going to the pub after work is common, particularly on Fridays. Even if you do not drink it is a good way to establish friendships and to help with fit in with your workmates. You may be expected to 'shout' the members of your group, that is, buy drinks for them. Pay attention to if they offer to buy drinks for the group, it will be expected that you do so as well. The office Christmas party is an annual event. It is a good way to network with your colleagues, but you don't feel you have to drink. Most people will respect your decisions if you do not judge theirs.
- The Australian workplace is diverse. Expect a multicultural mix – single and married women and men, sole parents, people with disabilities, those of various sexual preferences, various age groups, and those who work flexible hours, with generally tolerant attitudes to differences. Religious observance and holidays are generally accommodated through special arrangements with management.
- Opportunities may exist to work part-time, from home and to work longer hours one week with shorter hours the next.
- The retirement age is 60-65 although there are moves to extend this due to the ageing population.
- The Australian workplace is not usually overly formal and hierarchical but there are clear lines of authority and decision-making, indicated by titles such as foreman, supervisor, coordinator, head of section or department, manager and chief executive officer (CEO). Know who your immediate superior is and their expectations of you.
- Unionism is well established and accepted as a right to advocacy.
- Promotions in the work place are made on the basis of merit and sometimes seniority.

Careers and Employment

www.deakin.edu.au/careers

- Australians generally prefer to maintain a balance between work and their private lives, believing that people should 'work to live' rather than 'live to work'.
- Links: go to www.deakin.edu.au/career for examples of resumes and letters.

Top Tip: Be yourself and be confident because you are well informed.