



PERSONAL
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RICHMOND

"IF THE BIRD SINGS ONLY FOR ITSELF, DOES THE BIRD HAVE A RAZOR BEAK?"

Posted in: [Applying for jobs](#), [Business writing](#), [CV writing](#).
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Why write if no one wants to read what you write? It is the first question anyone writing anything can and should ask. Believe me, when I write these blog posts I have my audience very much in mind. That doesn't mean there is nothing of me in them, there is a lot. But I do consider my readership.

Frankly I am writing to impress.

So, why do so few people writing CVs, covering letters, LinkedIn profiles or other personal marketing material not consider this? Perhaps it is because that question - "who is reading this?" - involves choice. It reduces the options. You have to put your money on a certain number. That's scary. It might also be because once you've answered the question you need to hit the target. That requires insight, knowledge, empathy and probably a dash of talent.

Scary it may be, hard it probably is, but it is also very necessary. If you don't consider your audience, perhaps because you feel more comfortable kidding yourself you want to address everyone, you are really only talking to yourself. The results are probably banal and insular, but even if they are not you have still wasted an opportunity to impress.

I met someone recently in an executive search firm who reckoned that of every 1000 CVs he'd seen, probably only a dozen or so were really any good. He didn't seem a particularly fussy individual and I doubt he was such a stickler for grammar that the inevitable minor slips we just about all make had turned him off 98.8% of the CVs he saw.

I agreed with him, although I did get him to concede that the dozen he liked probably were very different from those that would be picked by other consultants.

So, how do we address this issue? I don't normally do the "Top 5 things you should consider" routine because it's artificial. The truth tends to be more complicated than a stack of bullet points, and instincts and insights are not always so easily communicated. However, I am going to try.

- If you are applying in response to an advertisement you really need to gut all the key requirements from it and make sure you address them. Look at all the "essentials" and the "desirables" and if you can pick up any sense of the "type" of person they are after, make clear you are such.
- Probably for just about any job you go for, advertised or not, you need to do some research on the organisation. If something has happened there recently that you can allude to, either as a motivation for wanting to join that organisation or as a problem you believe you can help solve, it will grab their attention. Everyone likes to be made to feel special when they are being flirted with, even if it's a fraud. Make sure they think you think they are unique!
- If you are writing a CV to give to a recruitment firm or agency, and not for a particular job, think about that company and the clients they have. What is the image of that firm? Very professional, international, dynamic or more technical, even work-a-day? Don't come across as a barnstorming whiz-kid if their website is 5 years old and most of their clients are pension funds.
- If you are writing a LinkedIn profile, you are really broadcasting rather than addressing a very closely definable audience. However, you can at least ask yourself, who do you want to look you up the most, and be impressed by what they see? There is only so much time and so much space so you are going to have to make selections. Do try to visualise an audience and think of them. It's a better strategy than just slapping something down and hoping someone takes a fancy to you.
- Finally, think at least as hard about what your readership does not want to see, as about what they would like to read. Don't put in acres of stuff about sales if you are not going for a sales role, even if you are good at it. Some people get seduced here by the notion of "transferable skills", that things learned in one industry can be moved into another. This isn't wrong at all but the onus is on you as the writer to explain how this can be done, rather than leaving the recruiter to work it out.

I hope that helps. We actually have a free, downloadable graphical guide that addresses this issue. Feel free to look at it. You can find it here:

http://www.richmondsolutions.co.uk/files/knowledge/good_cv_poor_cv.pdf

Good luck putting this into practice. If it still seems daunting, well, there is this boutique

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David Welsh (with apologies to Juliet Turner)

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