

How Recruiters Read Resumes In 10 Seconds or Less



The 10 or 20 seconds it takes to read a resume seems to always generate a lot of controversy. Candidates comment on how disrespectful it is, how one can't possibly read a resume in that time and some get angry at recruiters when we talk about this. I hope this article will help everyone understand how we do this. I realize that some still may not like it and will still be angry, but at least you can understand how it works.

First, let me say I've been a recruiter for 30 years. I'm sure I have reviewed over 500,000 resumes. I can't prove this but I'm reasonably confident that this is the case, as this is only an average of about 46 a day. I know many days I have reviewed hundreds of resumes and most in less than 20 seconds. I would say the average is probably around 5 to 7 seconds.

So for the record when you hear or read about, "reading a resume in 20 seconds," that isn't completely true. It is more than likely, "reviewed the resume in 20 seconds."

Here is my process for getting through 100's of resumes in a short period of time. Others may have different ways and I welcome your comments.

I set up a hierarchy of certain "must haves" or you're out, so at first I'm really just box checking. Generally, 80% of the time these are my knock out blows. There are exceptions to each of these, but I'm dealing with the 80/20 rule. These are not cumulative times. This is box checking, if I see any one of these as I scan your resume you will be excluded.

1. **Location.** If the client is in Los Angeles, CA and you aren't – goodbye. Few if any clients want to relocate anyone in this economy, and I believe most shouldn't have to. Especially in a huge metropolitan area like Los Angeles. If they do have to consider relocation the position has to require some very unique experience that few jobs do. I can do this in about 1 second.
2. **Industry.** If my client is in banking and your background is primarily manufacturing – goodbye. These two often are so different that the client isn't open to considering such different industries. This works both ways, if you have a manufacturing background I'm not going to consider someone with banking. 2-3 seconds to determine this.
3. **Function.** If I'm doing a sales search and your background isn't sales – goodbye. Generally companies are paying recruiters to find them a perfect fit. We never

do find a perfect fit, but we have to be very close. They don't need a recruiter to find them someone in a completely different function. 2 seconds to figure this one out.

4. **Level.** If I'm doing a VP level search and your title is "manager" and you have never been a VP – goodbye. There are exceptions to this, but again it is the 80/20 rule. Again, clients pay me to find them the perfect fit. It is generally way too big of a jump from manager level to VP level, all other things being equal. It works the other way too. If I'm looking for a manager and you are a VP – goodbye. I know you are qualified to do a manager level role, but it is clear you have grown past. Most clients and recruiters aren't willing to take the chance that when a VP level position comes along that you won't be gone. Less than 5 seconds to figure out.
5. **Recent Experience.** There is some overlap on this one. If I'm searching for someone with international sales experience in the aerospace industry and the last time you held an international sales position in this industry was 20 years ago and since then you have been in retail – goodbye. I can find people with more relevant experience and that is what my client expects me to do. 5 seconds to do this.
6. **Education.** Like it or not, I will only work with people that have a college education and most of the time a master's degree. This is mainly because, as I indicated before, I need to find the very best for my clients. I realize an education doesn't mean by itself that the candidate is the best, but it is one qualifier of many. Also all of my clients require at least a BA.
7. **Turnover.** If you have had 6 jobs in the last 4 years, or have a track record of high turnover – goodbye. I realize there are good reasons for turnover and that falls into the 20% of the 80/20 rule. I can't define high turnover, but I know it when I see it. 3 – 5 seconds.
8. **Functional resume.** I don't read them. It is obvious when one has a functional resume they are trying to hide something and I'm rarely going to take the time to attempt to figure it out. 1 second.
9. **Obvious things** such as, spelling errors, poor format, errors in grammar, too long, verbose and rambling. If after reading it I still can't figure out what you do, goodbye. 5 – 10 seconds

After all this, 80 – 100% have been eliminated. If there are any left, then I will take the time to actually read them in detail.

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