More often than not, the first impression you make with a recruiter is in writing. So, if you want to stand out like a dream candidate, write like one.

Many job seekers invest considerable time and more than a little money in developing a well written resume. While such a document can establish your qualifications for an opening, however, it almost never differentiates you from the competition. Why? Because every other qualified applicant has also submitted a resume that is articulate and grammatically correct. You’re just one of the herd.

While seemingly an obstacle to job search success, this situation also creates a window of opportunity. Written communications - in corporate memos, white papers, business plans, research reports and other documents - are the lingua franca of work. And all too often today, even those who excel on-the-job are unable to describe their thoughts, conclusions and results clearly and effectively in writing. There is a pandemic of poor composition in the American workplace, and those who can prove they are not afflicted will stand out from the herd.

How can job seekers demonstrate their ability to write well? Two ways:

- First, always convey your resume with a cover letter that makes a compelling, error-free case for why you should be considered the perfect candidate for the recruiter’s opening.

- Second, treat every email message, Inmail and Facebook interaction with a recruiter - no matter how short or seemingly trivial - as a test of your written communications skills.

Knowing where to demonstrate good writing, of course, is only half the battle. The other half involves actually doing it.

What Are the Hallmarks of Good Writing?

Now, to be absolutely clear, one doesn't have to be a Shakespeare or Hemingway to compose a good piece of writing. All that's required is an adherence to clear, concise sentences that are structured according to the accepted rules of grammar and organized into logical paragraphs.

Sadly, however, many of us have been shortchanged by our schools. We've been allowed to graduate without a basic understanding of fundamental principles of written communication. So, one of the first steps for job seekers should be to upgrade their writing ability.
How can you do that? It's a simple, two-step process;

- First, do your homework. Complete a community college or other course in basic writing skills or dedicate yourself to a self-paced instructional program where you learn on your own. There are many excellent texts for the latter, but one of the most engaging is *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* by Lynn Truss.

- Second, practice, practice, practice. Think back to the work you did in your last position and write a month's worth of the kind of memos and other correspondence you would have authored there. Then, ask a friend to read the communications for clarity of thought and grammatical correctness. The exercise will improve both the level of your writing and your ability to describe your previous work effectively.

A well-crafted resume is only one part of the written communications that shape a person's perceived value as an employment candidate. Demonstrate the same degree of expertise in a cover letter and your online communications, and you'll write your own ticket to success in the job market.

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