



Land Your Dream Job, Without the Folklore

The 20-minute reality check that busts the "75% auto-rejected" myth, fixes your resume for the 7.4-second skim, and scripts your salary talk. Sourced. 2026-current.

Everything that matters, in pointers

This mini gives you the honest map of the 2026 job search in 20 minutes: what actually happens to your resume, how to write it, how to win the interview, and how to negotiate the offer. Read it once and you'll out-prepare most of the pile.

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THE ONE IDEA TO HOLD THE WHOLE WAY

ATS sorts, humans decide; the real enemy is volume — around 242 applications per opening. Beat it with tailoring, quantification, personalization and follow-up, not keyword tricks.

The 2026 hiring reality

- **The "75% auto-rejected" myth:** traces to a 2012 sales pitch by a company called Preptel, which went out of business in 2013 and never published any methodology.
- **What an ATS really does:** it's a database, not a bouncer — it stores, sorts and ranks applications so a recruiter can find strong candidates fast.
- **The truth, sourced:** a 2025 study of 25 recruiters found only ~8% enable content-based auto-rejection; 92% rely on human review.
- **The real failure mode:** parsing errors. Tables, columns and graphics scramble the parser — they cause roughly 23% of parse failures. That's fixable formatting, not a secret algorithm.
- **AI screening went mainstream:** employers using AI to screen resumes roughly tripled, from 11.6% (2024) to 32.1% (2025).

REALITY CHECK

No study, no sample, no methodology ever backed the "75%" figure. It spread because it was frightening and convenient. Stop being afraid of the wrong thing.

The skim, in numbers

7.4s

First-pass skim a recruiter
gives your resume

92%

Of recruiters rely on human
review, not auto-reject

242

Applications the average job
opening now receives

Eyes move in an F-pattern: the top third of page one gets read hardest, then the gaze runs down the left edge. Specific, quantified bullets hold attention more than twice as long as vague ones (2.1s vs 0.9s).

- **Why AI-written resumes get dismissed:** 49% of hiring managers auto-dismiss resumes they suspect are AI-generated — but the trigger is genericness, not the tool. 78% say personalized detail signals genuine interest.
- **The real enemy is volume:** a typical seeker sends 32–200+ applications before an offer, at a 0.1–2% success rate per application. A "no" is math, not a verdict.

REMEMBER

You are not writing for a leisurely reader. You are writing for a 7-second F-pattern skim — front-load your strongest, most quantified proof.

The resume that gets read

- **One page or two:** one page for freshers and under ~10 years' experience; two is fine when earned by senior, relevant achievement history. Never padded.
- **The test that beats the rule:** don't ask "how many pages?" Ask: does every line add relevant signal?
- **ATS-safe formatting:** single-column layout, standard headers, web-safe fonts (Arial, Calibri, Garamond), body 10–12pt. No tables, columns, sidebars, logos or photos.
- **Section order for the F-pattern:** experienced: Contact → Summary → Skills → Experience → Education. Freshers: swap Projects & Education above Experience.
- **Freshers, done right:** treat projects as experience, written with the same action-verb + result formula as a job.

THE PRETTY-TEMPLATE TRAP

Elegant two-column templates with sidebars and icons are the single most common cause of parse failure. Choose plain and parseable over pretty.

CHAPTER 02 · CONTINUED

India vs global: drop the biodata block

The single biggest upgrade for an Indian resume aimed at MNCs, GCCs or remote roles: delete the old "biodata" personal block entirely.

FIELD	MNC / REMOTE / TECH
Photo	Remove
Date of birth	Remove
Father's name	Remove
Marital status, gender, religion	Remove
Declaration line	Remove

- CGPA rule of thumb:** include it next to your degree if ≥ 7.0 ; below ~ 6.5 , omit it and just list degree and year.
- The exception:** some Europe-local and Gulf-local roles still expect a photo — follow the norm of the specific employer you're targeting.

Bullets & keywords

Every strong bullet is the same shape: **Action Verb + Task/Context + Measurable Result**. Master this one pattern and every bullet on your resume improves.

- **Start with a verb, not "responsible for":** led, grew, launched, reduced, improved, generated, tripled, spearheaded — verbs that show ownership.
- **Example transform:** "Managed the website" → "Boosted site traffic 40% in six months via SEO and content optimization."
- **The three metric families:** Money (revenue, cost saved) · Time (turnaround cut, hours saved) · Volume (people led, tickets handled, % change).
- **"I have no numbers":** use frequency ("resolved 50+ tickets daily"), scale ("team of 10"), percentage of time, or before/after states — they're numbers too.

WHY IT ISN'T OPTIONAL

34% of hiring managers pass over resumes with few or no measurable results. A bullet without a number reads as a task list; a bullet with one reads as a track record.

Keyword mirroring, done right

- **Paste the job description** and extract the specific hard skills and repeated phrases the employer names.
- **Mirror the job title** and front-load your most relevant, keyword-rich bullets — feeding the F-pattern skim.
- **Verify every keyword is true.** A keyword you can't defend in the interview is a liability, not an edge.
- **Match-score honesty:** tools like Jobscan cite a ~75–80% sweet spot, but match rate is keyword overlap, not a real ATS simulation. Push past ~80% and you risk sounding robotic.

AIM FOR RELEVANCE, NOT A PERFECT SCORE

If your resume truthfully mirrors the role and front-loads real, quantified proof, the match rate takes care of itself.

Cover letters — the comeback

- **Yes, they still matter:** ~94% of recruiters say cover letters influence hiring decisions; 73% read them even when marked optional.
- **Non-negotiable for:** startups (~65% require it) and comms-heavy roles like marketing/PR (~70% consider it essential).
- **The ~150-word structure:** 1) the hook — one specific reason you want the role · 2) the proof story — one quantified achievement mirroring the JD · 3) why this company — one line only they could hear · 4) the close & CTA.
- **The anti-rejection key:** 62% of employers say un-personalized AI letters are likelier to be rejected; 78% say personalized detail signals genuine interest.

PRO INSIGHT

Roughly 89% of hiring managers expect a cover letter. Skipping it isn't neutral — it reads as low effort for 20 minutes of work.

Interview mastery: STAR

- **STAR:** Situation → Task → Action → Result. Spend ~60% of your airtime on the Action — what you personally did.
- **Build an 8–12 story bank** across six competencies: leadership, teamwork, problem-solving, communication, adaptability, time management.
- **"Tell me about yourself":** Present → Past → Future, capped at ~2 minutes. It's a trailer, not the film.
- **Employment gaps:** state the reason in two sentences, no apology, then close on readiness.
- **Closing questions matter:** 92% of hiring managers are more impressed by candidates who ask thoughtful questions — prepare 4–5.

VIRTUAL-INTERVIEW BASICS

Camera at eye level · light in front, never backlit · look into the lens, not the screen · notes taped only above the camera.

Salary negotiation

- **Leverage peaks once:** the moment they say "we want to hire you" — and before you sign. 5–10% flexibility is built into almost every offer.
- **Give a range, never a number,** and never reveal your current salary first — deflect to the role's budgeted range.
- **State your number, then go silent.** The next person to speak concedes.
- **India switch hikes:** IT services → IT services 20–35% · IT services → product company 40–100% · hot skills (cloud, AI/ML) 30–50%.

SCRIPT: THE SALARY-EXPECTATION DEFLECT

"I want to find a number that works for both of us — could you share the range budgeted for this position?"

CHAPTER 06 · CONTINUED

India CTC decoded

The biggest India-specific trap: negotiating on headline CTC instead of fixed pay. A ₹10 LPA CTC can hide a base far lower than it looks.

40–60%

Basic pay as a share of CTC
— drives PF, gratuity, HRA

70–80%

In-hand as a share of CTC,
after PF, tax and TDS

21–24%

Average increase from
negotiation (650+ coached
cases, 2025)

- **Negotiate the fixed component** — that's what actually lands in your account, not the CTC headline.
- **Beyond base:** joining bonus, variable-pay guarantee, ESOPs, relocation, notice-period buyout are all often negotiable too.

Follow-up & offers

- **The thank-you email:** only 24% of candidates send one, yet 80% of hiring managers say it influences their decision. Send within 24 hours.
- **The cadence:** Day 0 thank-you → Day 5–7 first check-in → +1 week second nudge if needed → stop at three total touches.
- **Evaluate the whole offer:** total comp, work-life balance, culture fit, growth path and — above all — the manager, not just the salary line.
- **The 72-hour window:** you typically have ~72 hours to respond. Negotiate before you sign, never after.

HANDLING REJECTION

32–200+ applications per offer at a 0.1–2% success rate — a "no" is arithmetic, not a verdict on your worth. Reply gracefully; it's a relationship in waiting.

Your job-search system

- **The spine of the book:** ATS sorts, humans decide; the enemy is volume — beat it with tailoring, quantification, personalization and follow-up.
- **LinkedIn must match your resume:** 90%+ of recruiters check LinkedIn before the initial screen. Month-level date mismatches trigger silent rejections.
- **The weekly loop:** Monday source & shortlist → Tue–Thu tailor & apply → Friday follow up & network → weekend prep & recharge.
- **Track every application:** company/role, date applied, status, contact, next action + date, notes — read the funnel to fix the leaking stage.

THE PROMISE

Tailor every resume, quantify every bullet, personalize every letter, prepare your STAR bank and always follow up — and you out-prepare the overwhelming majority of applicants.

YOU'VE GOT THE MAP. NOW GET THE TERRAIN.

This was the 20-minute version.
The full guide is the whole journey.

You now know more than most applicants competing for the same role. The complete **Resume & Interview Hack Book** takes every chapter above and gives you the worked templates, the full STAR story bank, and the exact scripts.

- **The full 8 chapters + FAQ & Glossary** — every concept above, illustrated and expanded.
- **The full worked cover-letter template** filled in line by line, ready to adapt.
- **The complete before/after bullet library** across sales, engineering, ops, HR and fresher projects.
- **Every salary script** — first-offer response, expectation deflect, competing-offer leverage.
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