

Writing Samples from Undercover Recruiter

Below are a number of extracts from samples written for a variety of clients, selected to demonstrate a range of writing voice and subject matter.



Thankfully Disconnected
(Client: a young talent-focused web property)

As Thanksgiving approaches here in the United States, and we turn our thoughts to the many things we're grateful for, and spend some quality time with people close to us, let's stage a small and quiet revolution.

If you carry a mobile that gets your work email, power it off or leave it at home. If the device in your pocket is used for both personal and work, turn the work account off. Or at least adjust your settings so that you don't get 'pinged' every time an email lands in that account. And as you take whatever time off that you have, resist the temptation to check. It's very seductive: Just one quick peek to make sure everything's okay. One little look won't hurt. Right? Wrong. The moment you look, you think. And in thinking, you're sending your brain right back to work. You might as well be sitting at your desk.



Assess This
(Client: Recruiting firm, US)

So when it comes time to decide what candidate should be hired, we rely on qualifications and previous experience, we ask the best questions we can, we check references to verify what we're seeing, and at the end of the day, we often use gut feel.

But we've got an additional tool in our toolbox now. Candidate assessments have been used for years by recruiting firms and hiring companies to introduce some scientific validation to the otherwise subjective process of determining whether someone would be a good fit for the job and the company. And hey - what hiring manager wouldn't want a crystal ball, of sorts? Something to take away the guesswork, and tell them whether a prospective hire will 'gel' with the rest of the team, whether they have a leadership style that will fit well into the organization, and whether they're likely to be a long-term high-performer.

Just like any other product or service, there are good assessment tools and bad, and some are better for some situations than others.



A Resume that Really Sells
(Client: Recruiting firm, Australia)

Far too many people write their resumes as they'd write a spec sheet for one of these purchases. Your work experiences, the responsibilities you've held in your jobs; those are your 'features'. It's not that they're not important – they are. But only to the extent that they demonstrate the benefits you'll bring to a prospective employer.

When writing or updating your resume, think like a salesperson. Your 'customer' is a potential employer. What are they really looking for? What value are they hoping to get from bringing on someone new? What benefit will they be looking for you to provide? The answers to these questions will depend on the kind of work you do, but generally speaking, they're usually about improving the company somehow. Your resume should show that you can increase revenue for the company, or lower their costs, or make things run more smoothly and efficiently.

Every part of your resume can be viewed through that lens. When you describe a previous job, you don't have to mention every single thing you did in that role. A resume that really sells you focuses on the aspects of your work that brought the most value to your previous employer and are of most relevance to your next employer. It should provide more detail about those, and less about things that are less directly related.



Attracting the Best Part 1: The Employee Experience
(Client: Recruiting firm, Australia)

This is the first in a two-part series, focusing first on the employee experience. It makes sense to approach this from the inside out: if a company can't retain great employees, it won't be able to recruit great employees either. This was always true, to a certain extent, but it's even more so now. Between social media generally, and employer-rating sites (like Glassdoor) specifically, word gets around more quickly and widely than ever before. This is great for transparency, of course, but it puts more pressure on employers to make sure that the experience they offer their employees is a good one.

When considering this question, it's tempting to jump to 'culture'. While it's true that corporate culture is part of the equation, it's a bit of a red herring, for several reasons. First, because it's subjective: what constitutes a 'good' or 'bad' culture varies from employee to employee. Secondly, because culture is something that management can influence but not entirely control or create. Culture develops organically within an organisation (or within various parts of an organisation) as a result of day-to-day practices and decisions. Below are the five most controllable elements that influence culture and can create a great employee experience that attracts and retains top performing employees.



Combating Candidate Fraud
(Client: Staffing Industry Association, US)

Happily, just as those who would commit fraud are using technology in their schemes, technology can also be used to stop them.

Employers and recruiters are borrowing from the education sector, using online proctoring software that was initially designed to remotely monitor students taking exams. This software has many ways to ensure the user is doing what they're supposed to do. It can analyze eye movement to ensure that the user isn't looking at different browser windows, tally up the user's time away from their chair (to make sure that a 'bio break' isn't actually a study break), and listen for background noise that would indicate someone else is assisting them. For identity verification purposes, there's software that employs biometric technology to examine

facial movements and vocal tone to ensure that the person on screen is actually the one responding.

Because there's an immigration law aspect to the problem of candidate fraud, the government also works to protect and support employers. When a previously vetted employee moves from one company to another, the USCIS cross-checks documentation, comparing new documents against those submitted earlier to ensure consistency. There are extremely severe penalties for document fraud, and there's a tip form in place to report incidents of fraud involving immigration visas.



Do Diligence
(Client: Employee Background Check Platform, NZ)

We humans are pretty good at making decisions, for the most part. In fact, we're better than we give ourselves credit for: our brains have enormous capacity for weighing the pros and cons of relative courses of action, often without us even being conscious that we're doing so. It's impressive.

There's one hitch, though; a trick that our brains pull on us. Every one of us. It's called confirmation bias.

In simple terms, our brains like it when we make a decision. I mean, they really like it, and they take every opportunity to show us evidence that we've made the right one. (It's probably a holdover from our cave-person days. When faced with a sabre-toothed tiger, the last thing the brain needs us to do is stand there dithering about whether it's better to fight or take flight. Evolution rewards decisiveness.)

Think about the last time you decided to buy a certain kind of vehicle. I'd bet that you started to see a lot more of that specific make and model on the roads. That's confirmation bias at work. Same for the heady days of a new relationship; we're all aglow with the reasons this person is the right one for us, and we blissfully overlook any flaws there may be.

So what does this have to do with recruiting and hiring great people?



Competing as a New Grad in the COVID-era Job Market
(Client: Recruiting Firm, UK)

As a new graduate in 2022, you're entering one of the most challenging job markets there's ever been. The challenge arises mostly from its complexity. In simpler times, the job market was either generally good or bad, depending on how well or poorly the economy was faring. In either case, there was relative uniformity. If the picture was rosy for some, it was so for most people. Of course, the opposite was also true.

This isn't the case now, and if it's confusing to you, it's also confusing to hiring companies. On the very same day, you may see a headline about high levels of unemployment, and also one about talent shortages. Both are true. The market isn't uniformly good or bad, it's 'patchy', and highly dependent on the types of jobs you're looking at, the level of experience required, and the location.

Likewise, there's both good and bad news on other job-related fronts. The salaries you can expect as a new grad are up over previous years, showing that employers are ready to compete for talented people like you. However, the number of applications companies receive for each vacancy are also up. In a survey conducted by the Institute of Student Employers (ISE), companies reported an average of 91 applications for each graduate vacancy. That's 17% higher than the previous year, and a record high since ISE began collecting this information in 1999. This means that you're going to face more competition for the job you want.



2 Questions

(Client: Employee Background Check Platform, NZ)

This first question, albeit a very fair one, takes some candidates off guard. Job seekers are coached to highlight their value to an employer in a job interview, they don't always prepare to talk about what's in it for them. Of course, the pragmatic answer is 'meaningful employment and a salary', but a good answer will be much more.

Why it's important, and what to listen for

This is a candidate's opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of both your organisation and the role. Every job seeker should go into an interview having conducted at least some research on both. It's concerning if they haven't: taking a job is one of the most important decisions an individual will make throughout their lives; considering the ease with which information can be found online, what does it say about a candidate who hasn't taken the time to do this before the meeting? The level of knowledge the candidate can be expected to have varies with the stage at which you ask this question, of course. Someone won't know as much in their initial interview as they should in the final round.