



Active Reading for Job Search Success

For Job Seekers

Active listening involves paying attention to the person with whom you're speaking. While the term recognizes the role of your ears, it's actually a two-sense technique. You make sure you hear exactly what the other person is saying, but you form your interpretation of their statement with their tone of voice and what you see in their body language as well as their words.

Active reading is also a two-sense technique. In fact, William Zinsser, the author of *On Writing Well* and the acknowledged guru of nonfiction writing, says "People read with their ears, whether they know it or not." They see the written words, but listen to the author's voice.

Active reading recognizes that truth so you accurately comprehend what a recruiter is saying in an email or Inmail. It involves three basic techniques:

- Read deeply.
- Read out loud.
- Read inquisitively.

Let's look at each of these steps in a bit more detail.

Read Deeply

Most of us are in a rush these days. If we're in transition, we're juggling applications and networking and meetings and research and dozens of other activities that all take time. In order to get everything done, we race through each of them.

Rapid reading, however, limits the time we give ourselves to understand what's being said and that, of course, increases the odds of misunderstanding. It can cause you to answer a question incorrectly or reply in a way that diminishes your credibility. In either case, you undermine your positioning as a qualified candidate.

What's the best way to slow yourself down? Read deeply. Force yourself to read each email or Inmail three times, taking two deep breaths between the first and second repetition and three deep breaths between the second and third. You'll have to keep track of your breathing count of course, which will require that you concentrate on what you're doing. And that concentration, together with the repetition of the message, will help ensure you pause long enough to "hear" what's being said.

Read Out Loud

While reading deeply, also read out loud. Don't whisper the words, but pronounce them in a normal speaking voice as if you're engaged in a conversation with the recruiter. Yes, that means you probably shouldn't check your email and Inmail at the local coffee house, but that too has its benefits. Doing your reading in private will help you avoid distractions and pay closer attention.

Equally as important, reading out loud enhances your understanding of a communication in at least two ways. First, you're adding another sense to your interpretative arsenal. Words or phrases that might have been rushed through or gone unnoticed in silence can suddenly seem more emphatic and important when heard out loud.

And second, reading out loud takes more time. Simply pronouncing the words correctly and string them together in a coherent sentence forces you to slow down, and as with reading deeply, that will improve your prospects of accurately "hearing" a recruiter's message.

Read Inquisitively

Recruiters aren't cubicle Hemingways so it's important to recognize that they may not communicate clearly or precisely. And, as Lynne Truss points out in her classic guide to grammar, *Eats, Shoot & Leaves*, even the simple omission of a comma can cause a sentence to be completely misunderstood.

So, it's also important to read inquisitively. If you don't understand what a recruiter is saying in a message, craft a reply which respectfully asks for clarification. You might, for example, say "Just to be sure I understand what you're asking, do you want me to provide additional information on ...?"

Reading inquisitively will tell the recruiter that you're giving their message the attention it deserves and enable you to start a conversation with them. That back-and-forth dialogue will separate you from others who simply reply to the recruiter's message and lay the foundation for building a stronger connection with them.

Studies have shown that half of all written communications on the Web are misunderstood, so careful reading is absolutely essential to success in today's job market. Practice the three techniques of active reading and you'll ensure your communications enable recruiters to get an accurate read on who and your qualifications.

Thanks for reading,

Peter

Visit me at Weddles.com

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