I've written this guide to share some domain knowledge surrounding the hiring process that isn't obvious to all candidates. I've reviewed many resumes where a very talented candidate came across poorly simply because their resume was not put together well. This provides a checklist for resume construction and things you can do outside of your resume to make the process go better for you.

Feel free to make a copy of this checklist and check things off as you put resumes together. If you have any questions, email me.

Important note: This guide focuses heavily on the US tech market as that's what I'm familiar with. I'd imagine much of the information below transfers to other markets, but this is something to keep in mind.

Expectations

Before getting into the checklist, it's important to have the right expectations about hiring.

1. **You might not hear back at any point in the process.** That's okay. There are many applicants to all jobs currently and recruiters are heavily overworked. There are also many non-job related occurrences that impact whether or not your resume is overlooked. Not hearing back doesn't mean you weren't right for the role or the company. Apply again when another fitting role opens. In general, keep applying until you actually have an offer in hand as this can happen at any point in the process.
2. **You have about 7 to 8 seconds to make an impression.** Eye-tracking research (like the 2018 Ladders study, which clocked initial screens around 7.4 seconds) shows recruiters scan in an F-pattern—down the left margin for company names, titles, and dates, and across the first few words of each bullet. Your job is to get your resume picked out in a very short amount of time, so front-load your strongest signal on the left side of every bullet.
3. **You should tailor your resume for each job or job category.** Software engineering is a broad field, so you want your most relevant work up front for each role. The easiest way to do this without burning out is to keep one living, plain-English master CV or "brag document" capturing everything you've built, the problems you solved, trade-offs, metrics, and "quiet work" (RFCs, debugging, mentoring) every few weeks—then pull a tailored one-page resume from it for each role category.
4. **Get every edge you can.** Hiring is a brutal process on both sides, but it's particularly difficult to get noticed as an applicant. Use whatever edge you can including all of them, if possible.

Resume Checklist

- ☐ **No professional summary.** The bullet points under your experience are your professional summary formatted in a much more digestible way. This is unnecessary clutter on your resume. Most recruiters don't read it.

- [ ] **Lead with impact or the distinctive system you built.** Instead of writing “I did this thing,” write “I had this impact by doing this thing”—or lead directly with the impressive system you architected when that’s the bigger hook, followed by what changed because of it. Hiring managers want to know both what you built and why it mattered. For Senior and Staff+ roles, emphasize scope, ambiguous problems you navigated, technical trade-offs, and cross-team leverage rather than a list of shipped tickets.
- [ ] **Include metrics wherever possible—and use concrete substitutes when you don’t have them.** Quantifying outcomes goes a long way in proving your impact. When exact numbers are confidential or weren’t measured, don’t invent them—prove value honestly through scope and scale (users, teams, data volume, QPS), before-and-after workflow shifts, adoption by other teams or leadership, first/only distinctions, or honest ranges (like “~20–30%”).
- [ ] **Keep bolding ultra-sparse (or skip it inside bullets altogether) and weave technologies into your bullets.** Many big-tech hiring managers prefer bolding only structural anchors (section headers, company names, titles) so bullets stay clean and readable. If you do bold inside bullets to help skimmers, limit yourself to at most one short anchor per bullet—your strongest metric or build near the start of the line—and leave trailing tech lists like (Python, Go) in plain text. If everything is bold, nothing stands out. Weave your stack into your bullets instead of a standalone skills section (the main exception is new grads or career switchers who benefit from a compact 1–2 line skills row).
- [ ] **Use a simple resume template.** Resumes should be easy to scan and read. Hiring managers should know within seconds where to read to find information. Simple resume templates make this much easier and complicated resume templates make this more difficult. You need to make this process as easy as possible for any resume reader. If you’re looking for a simple template, check out Jake’s Resume.
- [ ] **Do not include a picture on your resume.** In the US, photos are strongly discouraged because they introduce bias concerns and can get your resume filtered out by HR compliance policies.
- [ ] **For new grads and interns, include GPA in the education section.** If your GPA is strong (typically 3.5+) and you leave it off, hiring managers may assume it was low. Once you have 2–3 years of full-time engineering experience, you can drop it.
- [ ] **Include all modern contact info.** You should have ways to be reached by phone, email, LinkedIn, and likely include your GitHub if applying for software engineering roles even if it’s just to show you have one.
- [ ] **Include relevant experience in reverse chronological order.** Only pick out the relevant experience from your roles to keep your resume succinct and on topic.
- [ ] **Keep the resume to one page.** This helps recruiters scan more quickly and keeps your experience succinct. There are exceptions to this case (L7+ roles, for example, or research roles where a CV might be important), but in general most applicants should stick to a one page maximum.

Outside of the Resume

- ☐ **Reply to InMail on LinkedIn.** InMail is sent more frequently to those who reply to it. Even if you aren't interested, let the sender know and tell them you're happy to connect in case something changes in the future.
- ☐ **Set yourself as "Open to work" on LinkedIn.** Not the profile picture banner, just the backend setting for recruiters. This causes more recruiters to reach out to you. You'll never know when the right opportunity will come along.
- ☐ **Use recruiters.** Cold applying has a very low success rate. Reach out to recruiters and work with them if possible. Any sort of edge is helpful to find a role.
- ☐ **Use connections.** Chat with those working at companies you're interested in. Most people are happy to chat about the company culture and their work experience. Many are even happy to refer experienced candidates. Even if it doesn't help you immediately, bettering your network pays dividends over time.
- ☐ **Meet people.** Go to events and just chat with others. Get to know people and take interest in their work. This can also be done online by sharing some writing, posting on social media, or reaching out to others via DM. Building a network pays great rewards.
- ☐ **Come up with a job preparation program.** Stay on top of interviewing skills to a certain extent at all times. Make this something manageable. You don't need to be in top-of-the-line interviewing shape always, but having a starting point—plus 5–6 grounded STAR behavioral stories pulled from your brag document—is a huge advantage when the right role opens.