

# Using AI in job applications: what Australian employers are really asking for

## A National Careers Week perspective

Artificial intelligence is becoming a normal part of how Australians work, learn and plan their careers. From automated rostering and data analysis to generative tools that support writing and problem-solving, AI is no longer on the horizon, it is already here. Against this backdrop, many job seekers are surprised to encounter a seemingly contradictory message during recruitment: *do not use AI in job applications*.

For individuals navigating a competitive labour market, this advice can feel confusing and even unfair. Applying for work takes time, emotional energy and confidence. AI tools promise to make the process more manageable by helping people structure résumés, clarify selection criteria responses or articulate transferable skills. For people changing careers, returning to work, living in regional areas, or balancing caring responsibilities, these tools can appear to offer genuine support.

Yet when Australian employers caution against AI use, they are rarely rejecting technology outright. Instead, they are expressing a deeper concern that aligns closely with Australia's career development principles: the need for authenticity, self-awareness, informed decision-making and ethical practice.

### Authentic voice and career identity

A core principle of career development in Australia is that individuals actively construct their career stories over time. This includes understanding who they are, what they value, and how their experiences connect to learning and work opportunities. Employers want to see evidence of this reflection in applications.

When AI-generated content dominates an application, it can obscure the individual's career identity. Language may sound polished, but it often lacks personal insight, context or meaning. From an employer's perspective, this makes it difficult to understand how a candidate has made sense of their experiences or how they might apply learning in real workplace situations.

Career development is not about producing the "perfect" application. It is about communicating genuine skills, interests and motivations in a way that reflects informed self-knowledge. Employers are looking for that clarity, not generic excellence.



### Ethical practice and trust

Ethical practice is central to career development in Australia. This includes honesty, accuracy and responsibility in how career information is used and shared. AI tools can unintentionally blur these boundaries by overstating skills, misrepresenting experience or generating examples that are not grounded in reality.

Employers assess applications not only for capability, but for trustworthiness. If an application contains claims that cannot be confidently explained or expanded upon, this raises concerns about judgement and integrity. In both public and private sector recruitment, trust is foundational.

From a career development perspective, using AI ethically means ensuring that any support tool enhances, rather than replaces, truthful self-representation.

### Equity, access and inclusion

National Careers Week highlights the importance of inclusive career development for all Australians. While AI can increase access to support for some, it can also create new inequities. Not everyone has the same digital literacy, confidence or access to emerging tools.

Employers are increasingly mindful of fairness in recruitment, particularly when working to broaden participation for First Nations peoples, people with disability, migrants, career returners and young people.

Applications that appear heavily AI-generated may raise questions about whether technology is being used to gain advantage rather than to support genuine capability.

Career development principles emphasise empowering individuals to build skills and confidence over time, not masking gaps through technology.

### Where AI fits within career development practice

Importantly, Australian career development principles do not reject technology. In fact, digital literacy and the effective use of career information are essential capabilities in a changing labour market.

Used well, AI can support career development in appropriate and constructive ways. Many job seekers use AI to help interpret job advertisements, understand selection criteria, identify transferable skills or prepare for interviews. These uses align strongly with the principles of informed exploration and career learning.

A balanced approach is for individuals to develop their application content themselves first, drawing on reflection and self-knowledge, and then use AI to refine structure, clarity and presentation. In this way, AI functions as a support tool, not a substitute for career thinking.

This mirrors good career development practice, where tools and resources are used to support, not replace, individual agency and decision-making.

### Career development as a lifelong capability

National Careers Week reminds us that career development is not a one-off activity linked only to job applications. It is a lifelong process of learning, adapting and making sense of change.

The conversation about AI in recruitment is ultimately a conversation about capability. Employers want to know whether individuals can communicate clearly, exercise judgement, act ethically and reflect on their experiences. These are the same capabilities emphasised in the Australian Blueprint for Career Development, which highlights self-awareness, opportunity awareness, decision-making and transition skills as essential across the lifespan.

AI may shape how work is done, but it does not replace the human skills at the heart of career development.

## A National Careers Week message

For National Careers Week, the message is not "don't use AI". The message is: *know yourself, tell your story honestly, and use tools wisely.*

When employers ask candidates not to rely on AI, they are asking to see authentic career stories, grounded experience and thoughtful communication. These are not barriers to opportunity, they are foundations for sustainable careers.

AI can be part of the journey, but your career belongs to you.

