

How to Know if you're Under-Qualified or Unqualified for a Job (There's a Difference)

You're Not at All Qualified if You Only Have One Qualification

I made this mistake plenty of times earlier in my career when I wanted to be a paid writer. I'd identify the one requirement on a job listing that I had and say to myself, "Hey, this is perfect for me. I'm smart and can learn the rest as I go." However, as much as employers understand that candidates won't know *everything* there is to know about a role, there is an expectation that they'll know a majority of the things they need to do it well. If you're on the other side of the equation and don't have experience in most of the bullet points of a description, roll up your sleeves and get the experience you need before getting your hopes up too high.

You Might Only be a Little Under-Qualified if There Are Only One or Two Qualifications You Don't Have

I'd argue that you'd be hard-pressed to find a recruiter who only interviews candidates who check off every single bullet point on a job listing. If you find your dream job and notice that you don't have experience in an obscure technology (that you're sure you can learn), this is not something that should keep you from applying. In fact, a candidate who has just one missing qualification makes many recruiters say, "Oh thank goodness. This person's learning curve will be incredibly small." So, go ahead and submit an application.

You're Not at All Qualified if the Company Wants Someone to Hit the Ground Running

The truth is that sometimes, companies just need someone who is (mostly) qualified to do a job and hit the ground running. It's not illegal to source this way, and when the need is intense enough, it's perfectly understandable for a company not to be as willing to take on someone more junior. When I was recruiting, we'd make it clear when we just could not support someone who didn't have the experience we needed. If you notice a job posting that's very clear about this, don't spend too much time debating whether or not to apply.

You Might Only be a Little Under-Qualified if the Company Prefers Lifelong Learners

All of the things that you should consider before applying for a job that you're slightly under-qualified for still apply, but many companies make it a point to explicitly state that they support people who seek out learning opportunities. If you find a job that you aren't an exact match for at a company that encourages perpetual learning, don't be afraid to throw your hat in the ring. And when you do, make it clear in your cover letter that you're up to the task of learning as much as necessary—plus some—starting on day one.

You're Not at All Qualified if the Gig is a Senior Level Role in a New Field

I'm all for pursuing a career change. I've done in a handful of times, and it took a couple of tries to get it just right. However, let's say you want to switch from a finance role to a marketing role. That's great, especially if you've done your research and understand what that'll take. However, if you're in a manager-level finance position and are looking exclusively at manager-level marketing jobs, you'll quickly discover that being a more senior person in one industry doesn't automatically qualify you for the same level in another.

You Might Only be a Little Under-Qualified if the Only Thing Holding You Back is You

At the end of the day, it's impossible not to look at a job that sounds amazing and think, "No matter how many qualifications I have, I'm nothing but an impostor." And sure, there will be jobs at every point in your career that you're just not qualified for yet. But in a lot of cases, the only thing holding you back is you—and mostly because you're just convinced that you're not qualified to do any job. If you've looked at a handful of jobs that sound incredible, only to pass out of a fear of being rejected, take the leap and throw your hat in the ring.

It's never going to be an exact science to know when you are (and aren't) qualified for a job. Sometimes you find what looks like your dream job, and when you do, it's hard not to send your resume and cover letter ASAP. However, it can also be deflating to get your hopes up, only to get radio silence. Be bold, but also be smart when you're applying for jobs when you don't check all the boxes. And as difficult as some of these points might be to hear now, you'll eventually get the idea when you should go ahead and submit an application.

Written by Richard Mo: www.themuse.com/advice/how-to-know-if-youre-underqualified-or-unqualified-for-a-job-theres-a-difference