

The dos and don'ts of protecting your privacy while job hunting

When you search for a job, you're often asked to provide a lot of personal information. But how do you know that information ends up in safe hands? We asked cyber safety and HR experts to explain what information employers can ask you for, and steps you can take to keep it safe.

Personal information is information that identifies details about you, such as your name or address. Some personal information can be sensitive—details about your race, ethnicity, political opinions, religious beliefs, sexual preferences or health information.

When you apply for a job or join as a new employee, employers have the right to request personal information that's relevant to the role you're applying for. "Most employers must ensure that they comply with the Privacy Act and its obligations," says Natasha Hawker, Managing Director of Employee Matters and author of *From Hire to Fire and Everything in Between*.

Make sure the employer is legitimate

Before you share any information about yourself, it's important to know who you're sharing it with. "Check that they're a legitimate employer before you share your personal information," says Elizabeth Hampton, Deputy Commissioner at the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner. "You should do this using publicly available sources, such as a web search or the phone book. This is particularly important for anyone applying for a job with a smaller or less well-known private sector employer or an organisation based outside Australia."

The information employers can ask for

According to Hawker, employers will most commonly request:

- Your personal information such as your full name, email address, phone number and emergency contacts
- Your employment experience including achievements, educational and qualification history, your expectations, skills and references.

In addition to that, for some roles, employers may also require:

- Driver's licence and another form of identity such as a Medicare card
- Evidence of your right to work in Australia such as visa documentation and proof of identity (for example, your passport)
- Subject to the position, employers may ask for a police check or Working With Children Check if you are working or caring for children under 18 years of age.

Employers have a legal obligation to employ only people with the right to work in Australia. This is why they ask to see and take copies of passports and identity documents.

“Sharing personal documents regularly online can expose job seekers to some risk,” says Xavier Russo, General Manager of [Certsy](#), a digital platform where job seekers can securely store their private documents such as the right to work and drivers licenses. “We created Certsy so that job seekers can pre-verify their credentials for employers while keeping their documents safe.”

The information employers can't ask for

Employers must not ask for information that may be used to discriminate against you. “You should consider whether you need to include your address or date of birth in your resume,” Hampton advises. These details are not usually relevant to your ability to perform a job—except if the information is required for a non-discriminatory reason, such as if you need to be over a particular age to operate machinery.

At certain stages of the recruitment process, an employer may ask for your identity documents—for example, to carry out a police or qualifications check. “If being an Australian citizen is an eligibility requirement in a particular role, you may be asked to provide your passport to verify your citizenship,” Hampton says. “This is generally permitted under the Privacy Act, which allows an organisation to collect personal information that is reasonably necessary for its functions or activities.”

Employers shouldn't ask for irrelevant information, either. “If the employer is requesting information such as bank statements, your credit card history or medical reports you

need to know why,” Hawker says. “You have a right to be updated on the relevance of them obtaining such information, as this could be invasive and highly irrelevant.”

What to do if you have concerns

“If you have any concerns, we encourage you to talk to the prospective employer about why they need the personal information,” Hampton says.

You should ask questions such as:

- Do you have policies about how employee personal information is collected and handled?
- What kind of employee personal information do you keep?
- Is employee and candidate personal information stored securely and how long is it kept for?

If you have concerns about how your personal data may be used, it's important to be careful when sharing information online. Ways to safeguard your information include not including your address on your application and not responding to suspicious emails where offers seem too good to be true.

What happens to your information if you don't get the job?

If your application isn't successful, your personal information rights will continue to apply to all the information you provided. “In most situations, the Privacy Act gives you a right to ask for access and corrections to the personal information an organisation holds about you,” Hampton says.

The recruitment process is continuously evolving, and the good news is that many businesses are prioritising data protection. Some businesses are starting to leverage technologies such as [Certsy](#), a government-accredited encrypted digital wallet where you can easily and securely store essential information such as your right to work, police checks and driver's licence.

Certsy is a SEEK-owned platform that makes the verification process safer for job seekers to share their information online and simpler for employers who require verifications. “Certsy helps you stand out to employers when applying for jobs on SEEK, without revealing your passport or other identity documents at that early stage in the process,” says Russo.

Providing your personal information is an essential part of the job seeking process, but it's important to remember your personal information is just that—personal. Being mindful of the information you share and knowing how it is protected can help you ensure that it stays safe. Learn more about how SEEK protects your personal information [here](#).

If you suspect fraudulent activity, please:

- [Report it to SEEK](#) - so we can remove any fraudulent ads and alert other jobseekers or advertisers.
- [Report it to Scamwatch](#) - who will use your report to work with organisations to remove scams and potentially warn others in the community.
- [Report the fraud to the OAIC](#) – you have this option available where you think a fraud may have resulted in the mishandling of your personal information.