

GUNTA AHLFORS JA INKA SAARELA

UNDERSTAND THE EMPLOYER – IMPROVE YOUR CHANCES WHEN JOB HUNTING!

A Guide for International Talent Living in
Finland



Leverage from
the EU
2014–2020



Väestöliitto 2022

SISÄLLYS

1. Introduction
2. Language Skills – Talking about Finnish... again!
3. Job Advertisements – Who is an employer actually looking for?
4. Skills and Education – Marketing is the key
5. The Job Interview – Understanding each other
6. In conclusion

1. Introduction

This guide offers international talent living in Finland information on how Finnish employers will approach your job application. Our goal is to give you job-hunting tips that hopefully improve and accelerate you getting employed in the field of your choice.

We have had discussions with various Finnish employers on how they could better recognise skills and education acquired from abroad.

The tools in this guide have been developed by the Recognising International Talent project of Väestöliitto in cooperation with various companies and organisations. We would especially like to thank: Stora Enso, Zoan, Siili Solutions, Academic Engineers and Architects in Finland (TEK), 3stepIT, the University of Helsinki, Aalto University, Metropolia University of Applied Sciences and Fluido.

Recognizing International Talent was funded by the European Social Fund and the Finnish Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations (2020-2022).

Pick the best tips for yourself!

*Gunta and Inka
Recognising International Talent -team
Väestöliitto*

2. Language Skills – Talking about Finnish... again!

FINNISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

Employers often think of an international talent's language skills on the English–Finnish scale. It is easily assumed that the person speaks either English or Finnish as their native language.



Tip 1

Clearly state if you have studied or learned Finnish language! An employer will not automatically assume this.

Language learning is a step-by-step process. First, you learn to understand Finnish, then usually to speak and finally, to write it. Already the ability to understand Finnish helps a great deal to integrate to a Finnish speaking work community.



Tip 2

Consider giving more detailed information about your Finnish language skills when looking for a job. You can briefly describe your skills in all language areas: comprehension, oral and written skills.

You can use a scale such as **1 - Native, 2 - Excellent, 3 - Good / Fluent, 4 - Limited, 5 - Beginner**

Language competence levels

Language	Written	Spoken	Understanding
Finnish			
English			
Swedish			
Other			



SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE!



How have you described your language skills when looking for a job?

GOOD, EXCELLENT OR FLUENT?

Job advertisements usually state what an employer is looking for in terms of language skills. If an advertisement states that the applicant is "expected to speak **good** Finnish", this can mean a wide range of language skill levels, depending on the employer.

What is the difference between **excellent**, **fluent** and **good** language skills? Different employers will give different answers. For some employers, these three descriptions all mean the same thing, while for others, there are big differences between them.

Tip 1



If you think you can succeed at your work in Finnish, state your language skills as good, excellent or fluent. **You know your language skills best**, and if you will be able manage in a Finnish-speaking work community.



Employers' ability to identify levels of language skills varies quite a bit. Learning a language requires a great deal of work and time on your part, but employers don't always understand the grading system of language courses or official language exams.

Vinkki 2



When describing your language level using standards (e.g. A2.2 or B1.2) or if you have taken the National Certificate of Language Proficiency test (YKI test), clearly point out what that level means in your job application. **An employer is not a language teacher** and will not necessarily understand the different language skill levels.



There is not always room to write much in a job application, but it is worth putting some effort into explaining your language skills.



SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS!



How can you explain your language skills in a way employers can understand?



CEFR = COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK FOR LANGUAGES*

A1

Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

A2

Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.

B1

Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.

B2

Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.

* <https://www.aalto.fi/en/aalto-university-open-university/cefr-levels-of-language-proficiency>

C1

Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.

C2

Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.

LANGUAGE COURSE LEVELS*

A1 – A2 Basic level:

- A1.1. Language basics
 - A1.2. Language basics
 - A1.3. You can use the language in simple non-work-related situations.
You can write a little
 - A2.1. You can use the language to run the most common errands
 - A2.2. Your understanding of familiar subjects is reasonably good. You can write in simple language
-

B1 – B2 Intermediate level

- B1.1. Moderate language skills in day-to-day work and leisure situations
 - B1.2. A fluent grasp of language in day-to-day work and leisure situations
 - B2.1. Basic level of independent language proficiency
 - B2.2. Functional level of independent language proficiency
-

* <https://www.infoinland.fi/finnish-and-swedish/language-course-levels>

C1 – C2 Advanced level

Advanced level C – Language skills are excellent or comparable to a native speaker. There is also a more specific level classification for C-level courses, C1.1, C1.2, C2.1 or C2.2.

In universities, the requirement for education leading to a degree is language skills C1 – C2.



SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS!



Have you used the skill levels of the Common European Framework in your job applications? How do you open the language level so, that the employer understands it better?



3. Job Advertisements – Who is an employer actually looking for?

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STATEMENT

It is common that many job advertisements use a diversity and inclusion statement, which describes the values of the entire company. For example, it might look like this:

"Our organisation values the diversity of its employees and recognises/appreciates multilingualism in the workplace."

What does this sentence say about the company? The employer wants to express that the organisation is open to recruiting people from different backgrounds.



Tip 1

The employer can still be inclusive even if the advertisement has no diversity and inclusion statement.



Tip 2

It is very popular and common for a job advertisement to have a diversity and inclusion statement. However, this never directly shows how diverse and open the organisation really is. So, always apply for jobs according to your interests!



SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE!



Have you noticed these diversity and inclusion statements (often located at the end of the job advertisement)? Does a diversity and inclusion statement encourage you to apply for the job?

HIDDEN JOB OPPORTUNITIES

A large proportion of jobs are unadvertised or so-called "hidden" jobs. Up to 80 % of jobs are said to be unadvertised and do not show up on, for example, the TE services' Job Market Finland website (Työmarkkinatori.fi) or Oikotie.fi. This means that there are many more applicants for open vacancies than for unadvertised jobs.

Tip 1



Participate in mentoring programmes! They will provide you with important networks that can further your career chances in Finland. Väestöliitto organises mentoring for highly educated women (Womento). Also other organisations have mentoring programs in Finnish and English.

Tip 2



Talk openly and often about your professional interests with people you meet – even in social settings unrelated to job hunting, such as at parties or when chatting with your neighbours. In this way, your personal contacts will know what your professional ambitions are. You might hear about unadvertised jobs in your field through people you know!



SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS!



Can you think of other ways to find hidden jobs?



RECRUITMENT PROCESS

The recruitment process is not usually explained in the job advertisement, and it may still be unclear at the interview. Sometimes employers think the recruitment process is self-evident and therefore do not open it up. However, in Finland there are several different models to follow.

Tip 1



Ask directly how the recruitment process proceeds, whether there will be many interviews, who will be conducting the them and when the decisions will be made.

Tip 2



If the recruitment process is not clearly planned, interview invitations and decisions can be delayed. This happens quite often – so don't worry!



SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE!



Do you have any experience with a recruitment process that was unclear?



SALARY AND YOUR SALARY EXPECTATIONS

Finns are not good at talking about salaries! Things are slowly changing, but people can get anxious if you ask them what their salary is. Salaries are not always discussed, even within the family, and the situation is the same in the workplace.

This is also often seen in job advertisements, which do not state the salary but ask for the jobseeker's salary request, even if the company already knows what salary can be paid for the job in question.

How is salary indicated in job advertisements?

- By asking the applicant for their salary expectations.
- By providing the pay grade according to a collective agreement.
- By providing a task-specific salary with individual performance-related percentage
- Some advertisements may show the actual monthly gross salary!



Low salary expectations do not always motivate an employer – a low salary expectation will not guarantee a job interview!



Tip 1

If the job advert asks for a salary expectation, don't hesitate to ask a mentor, trainer or teacher for an estimate, who can help you find a suitable salary. Trade unions also provide average salaries. You can also check the salaries of different sectors at <https://duunitori.fi/palkat/>, although not all jobs can be found there



Tip 2

If a job advertisement asks for a salary expectation, be sure to include it! Employers expect you to provide your salary expectation as a number.



Tip 3

In Finland, salaries are **always** referred to as gross salaries. The money paid into an account is called net salary. Gross salary minus taxes = net salary.



4.

Skills and Education – Marketing is the key

Explaining skills may pose difficulties to international talents, as education and qualifications from abroad are not as easily recognised as those acquired in Finland.

Employers will mostly understand a Finnish degree, but may not recognise or understand the content of a non-Finnish education, even if it has been awarded by a prestigious university.



Tip 1

A non-Finnish degree obtained abroad needs to be "sold" more than a Finnish one. Always remember to give detailed information about your degree and the university/school you studied at. If you have done an internship or project work as part of your degree, you can tell more about it in your application.



Tip 2

Put a link to your school's or programme's website in English. The employer doesn't know what level your school is, so let them know that too!



Tip 3

If you know that you can study for a similar qualification in Finland, consider adding this information to your application: "An equivalent degree in Finland would be _____."



Tip 4

Provide details on your work experience abroad. Describe your most important jobs: what industry, how big, how international, etc. You can also provide links to the employers website/LinkedIn page.



Finland is a bilingual country. Some jobs require both national languages (Finnish and Swedish), but you can get by with only one in most jobs. If you find an advertisement for a dream job that calls for Swedish in addition to Finnish, ask how strict the requirement is!



SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS!



How can you describe your education or work experience in more detail?



THE IMPORTANCE OF A FINNISH REFERENCE

If your professional networks and references are from outside Finland, is a potential employer in contact with them? Some are and some are not - it's hard to know in advance.

Tip 1



You should always ask someone from your professional field as a referee, if you have one. You can also consider whether there is someone in Finland (e.g. a teacher, an internship supervisor, an instructor or a mentor) you could add to your application as a referee. However, always remember to ask for permission in advance.

Why should you add a Finnish referee? If the employer is unsure about your level of Finnish language skills, they may check with one of your referees or your previous work / traineeship places **The employer can assess your competence for the job, but is not a professional in assessing language skills** (even if they have been talking to you in person).

Tip 2



Some employers do not pay attention to (Finnish) typos in a job application, while others may take it as a sign that no effort has been put into writing the application. It is difficult to know in advance what kind of employer will be reading your application.



SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS!



Who would you ask to be a referee? Will someone check the writing in your job application?

SOME ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR A JOB APPLICATION

The way a job application is written (the narrative), i.e. the way you describe your work experience, skills and motivation, can vary greatly between countries and different professions.

Learning to write typical Finnish job applications in your field requires previous experience of working in Finland or, for example, "insider knowledge" from a mentor in the same field.

Tip 1



The employer understands the text of a job application better when the writing style is familiar to them. The general format in Finland may differ from what you are used to, but it is worth trying it out.

Tip 2



Do you include a photo with your job application? Employers in Finland have different practices, and they may even vary within the same organisation. All methods are equally common when applying for a job.

Tip 3



Get your LinkedIn profile in order. You can take a look at the template and get inspiration from the profiles of other professionals in the same field. Many Finnish employees and employers use LinkedIn in English, but some also use it in Finnish. Remember to include your LinkedIn profile in your job application. You can also apply for a job directly on LinkedIn.



SHARE YOUR IDEAS HERE!



***What style of writing narrative do you use for job applications?
Who can you ask for tips?***

5. The Job Interview – Understanding each other

Everyone gets nervous at a job interview. There are differences in work culture between countries, but also between different companies in Finland. Work culture and customs are not the same everywhere.

Job responsibilities and the workplace hierarchy vary from country to country. This can sometimes be reflected in the questions and answers between the applicant and interviewer and in the understanding of the work tasks. When the work culture is very self-directed, and responsible work is done in a flat hierarchy, job performance will not be constantly controlled or supervised.

For example, to the interviewer's question "how do you solve problem X at work?" the answer "I check with my manager" can be the "wrong" answer in many workplaces. This question is often asked to find out exactly what your approach is and how you would solve the situation.

Tip 1



If the interview is in Finnish and you forget words, ask for permission to use expressions in English. This is called a job interview in hybrid language.

Tip 2



Employers often ask in interviews why you want this particular job

In your job application or interview, you need to answer this question based on your motivation. In this case, the motivation told to the employer can never be a salary.





Tip 3

You can explain your motivation based on the content of the job you are applying for and/or the company's values.



SHARE YOUR IDEAS!



**Think about how you explain your motivation.
What do you emphasise in it?
How can you calm your nerves before a job interview?**



**An employer will only see the skills
you bring up!**

The following types of questions are often asked in a job interview. You can prepare for them by thinking about your answers in advance, taking your skills and your professional field into account:

- ◆ Introduce yourself and your professional career
- ◆ In your previous role as _____ (e.g. as a project manager):
 - What did the job involve?
 - What were you responsible for?
 - How did you report on the work?
 - What results did you achieve?
 - What kind of decisions did you make independently in your job?
 - How did you solve problems you faced in your work?
 - What were the primary stakeholders and networks in your work? What was the collaboration like?
- ◆ Why do you want to work in our organisation? What in this position interests you the most? (motivation)
- ◆ What kind of skills do you bring to the job?
- ◆ What abilities would you like to develop in yourself?
- ◆ Would you have any questions about the job or the organisation?
- ◆ What is your salary expectation? Think about your salary expectations in advance

6. In Conclusion

Your qualifications and expertise are valuable!

Use the tips in this guide to help you succeed!