Career Services

Common Grammatical Errors in Job Applications

A resume or cover letter is a formal representation of your work experience, expertise and qualifications - so clear, correct and formal language is required.

Affect / Effect

"Affect" is a verb – an action word. "Effect" is most often a noun.

Examples

- "Avoid the negative effect of grammatical errors in a cover letter given to potential employers."
- "How we write affects how people perceive us."

A lot / many / much

"A lot" is acceptable as informal language, but your resume and cover letter should be considered formal documents. Use "many" (for countable nouns) and "much" (for uncountable nouns) as better options than "a lot".

Informally:

- "I worked in a lot of different roles."
- "A lot of my time was dedicated to…"

Formally:

- "I worked in many different roles."
- "Much of my time was dedicated to…

It's / Its

"It's" is a contraction of "it is", while "its" signifies ownership or belonging of what follows. The test is to check if "it is" fits in place – if so, you can use "it's". If not, no apostrophe is needed; use "its".

However, in formal writing, it is best to avoid contractions likes "it's" and use the full form "it is".

Example:
- **"The company rewarded its best employee for the month."**

- In this case, "it is" would be incorrect, so "it's" is also incorrect. Also, "the best employee" is a member of "the company". Therefore, "its" is correct.

Your / You're

"You're" is a contraction of "you are". "Your" is the second person possessive adjective used to describe something belonging to you.

Example:
- **"You are going to get excellent advice from a career advisor."**

- While "you're" could be used, "you are" is more formal.

Example:
- **"Be sure to get others to check your resume to avoid common errors."**

- In this situation, "your" is correct as the resume belongs to you; and saying "you are resume" wouldn't make sense

There / Their / They're

Be careful not to confuse the contraction "they're" for "their" or "there". They sound the same, but they are very different.
- "There" signifies a specific time, place or incident.
- "Their" means something belongs to a person or group. "
- They're" is a contraction of "they are".

Then / Than

"Then" is used to refer to a point in time, or indicates a sequence.
"Than" is used to compare things.

Examples:
- "I was seeking a more challenging career than reception."
- "After struggling in several job interviews, I then decided to get professional guidance."

To / Too

"To" is a preposition meaning 'in the direction of'. "Too" is an adverb meaning 'also', 'very' or an excess.

Examples:
- "All too often, we make simple mistakes due to rushing."
- "Try not to fall into the trap of rushing too much."

Subject verb agreement

When speaking or writing, a sentence must have subjects and verbs that agree in number. If the subject is singular, the verb must be singular. If the subject is plural, the verb must be plural too.

Example:
"Excellent writing skills is valued by employers."

This is *incorrect* - the subject (writing skills) is plural, but connected as though singular (is). This should be **"Excellent writing skills are valued by employers."**

Use of apostrophes
Contractions
Contractions use apostrophes to indicate letters removed in shortening or joining the full words of a phrase.
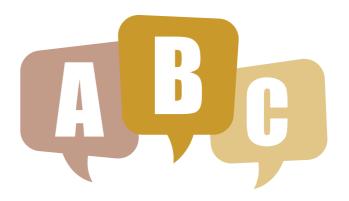
Example:
"This course isn't completed yet."
However, remember to avoid contractions for formal writing.

Possession

Example:
- "I helped set the department's sales targets for 2022."

- "Everyone's role on the committee was acknowledged."

Use of capitals

Capital letters are primarily used for the first word of every sentence, proper nouns (names), and the word "I".

Use italics or bold for emphasis; not capitalisations.

Example:
"Your Company has a strong record of Environmental responsibility while achieving Economic growth."

This is *incorrect* - there is no need for capitals for "Company", "Environmental" or "Economic" in this instance for these common nouns.

Example:
"I met several people while volunteering at the Australian Agricultural Forum."
Here, the "Australian Agricultural Forum" is the official name of an event, so capitalisation applies.