



Resume Writing's Deadliest Sin

By Ann-Maree Moodie

First impressions always count. Don't ruin your chances with spelling mistakes and typos in your resume.

A young woman, who recently graduated with top marks from a good secondary school, applied to a recruitment agency. Her resume highlighted her five key attributes, one of which was "attention to detale [sic]". The application was binned.

With the unemployment rate at 4.5 per cent - and tipped to hit 6 per cent this year - you'll need every advantage to beat the tougher competition for fewer jobs.

Your resume is your personal advertisement. If you promise skills but fail to deliver, you'll create an impression inverse to the one you want.

"While it may be stylish in certain quarters to ignore the rules of standard usage, grammar matters elsewhere," says Mignon Fogarty of the award-winning podcast Grammar Girl.

"It matters, for example, when you're applying for a job. In one survey of hiring managers, 75 per cent said it was worse for an applicant to have a spelling or grammatical error on his application than for him to show up late or to swear in an interview. [Good grammar] is about sending a message that shows respect, just as it gets respect."

If you're the sort of person who dismisses correct grammar and accurate spelling as "just semantics", you're in for a shock.

The reason good grammar and spelling are important is that, without them, the subtext of your resume conveys a poor impression of your skills and abilities.



Recruiters say you're unable to prioritise, can't articulate key information, are unable to think logically or you're lazy. Employers will wonder whether you lack commercial awareness because you haven't treated your CV as an important business document.

"Your CV is the first impression that you have of someone," says Amanda Williams of Johnson Executive Search. "A carelessly constructed or grammatically incorrect document is damaging."

Spellcheck software used to be tougher - until consumers became annoyed with the harsh criticism of their work by a computer. The software was downgraded and, as a result, so was its reliability.

It will confirm that a sentence such as "Thank you for your patients," is grammatically correct and that the spelling is flawless. But the impression you leave is one of carelessness. The joke will be on you if recruiters wonder whether your apparent inability to spell-check means you are computer illiterate - or just illiterate.

"A document with spelling and grammatical mistakes is going to create a poor impression on the reader," says Kylie Hammond, who specialises in writing resumes for executives. "It also indicates that the candidate is lazy, or worse, that they are poorly educated."





But a spellchecker is no substitute for sound grammatical knowledge, or knowing how to check the usage of a word. A good example of the unreliability of the computer spellchecker is homonyms: words that are pronounced the same way but are spelled differently, such as site-sight; there-their-their's; its-it's.

If you don't know the difference, you'll send a message that you're ignorant. When was the last time you used a dictionary or a thesaurus? Do you know how to look up the definition of a word or its part of speech? If you opened a thesaurus, would you know the difference between a synonym and an antonym?

Blame can be attributed to a range of culprits: the preponderance of text messaging; falling standards of education; stretched resources in our schools; less time spent by students reading books; too much time spent on computer gaming.

While all of the above might be valid reasons, they're no excuse for a poorly written CV. Give a draft of your CV to a friend or family member to read. And don't forget the red pen.

"A single typographical error can mean the difference between getting an interview and a rejection letter," Hammond says. "I have had CEO-level candidates present documents to me with significant spelling errors, even to the point where they have incorrectly spelled the name of the company that they are currently employed by.

"If a document with significant spelling or grammatical mistakes is presented 'as is' to a potential employer, I have had clients refuse to meet with a candidate. "Clients say, 'If they can't be bothered putting together a quality application, why should we bother interviewing them?' "

Closed doors mean lost opportunities - not a good position to be in when jobs are becoming scarce.

"Spelling is critical - often I short-list people who can spell liaison and liaise correctly," says a respondent to a survey conducted by Aussie Resumes. "Everyone seems to use these words but so many spell them incorrectly. [When someone gets it right] it demonstrates attention to detail."

But the worst impression you can leave is that you're ignorant. Think about the bank robber who passed a note to a teller, stating his intent. "Muny," the note read.

Grammar Girl's Fogarty says: "The bank teller realised that the man was such an idiot that he could be tricked into robbing the bank across the street, where police summoned by the bank teller were waiting."

Hall Of Shame

A running joke in the world of recruitment centres on the best (or worst) grammatical and spelling mistakes. There have been some clangers but here's a selection:

- On a British job website, one applicant boasts of being "consistently tanked (sic) as top sales producer for new accounts".
- A vacancy ad specifies Spanish language but this applicant goes further and boasts of being "bilingual in three languages".
- The top-scoring blooper, however, comes from an applicant for a job in the hospitality industry, who says her "duties included cleaning the restrooms and seating the customers".
- Now that's attention to detale.

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