

# Grammar and Punctuation in Job Applications

## Quick Tips

These tips have been developed by the Learning and Academic Skills (LAS) Centre in collaboration with Careers & Employability.

Making a good first impression starts with your cover letter and resume. Be aware of these grammar and punctuation errors when writing job applications.

### Overuse of capitals

Using capitals incorrectly is in resumes and letters. Formal names and proper nouns need capitals such as someone's name and title, your course and university. Your list of skills do not need capitals.

For example, see if you can spot the problem capitals below:

*engineer with expertise in Robot  
Programming.*

*enjoys the Manufacturing environment.*

*frequently interacts with the Sales Team  
and the Customer.*

Instead it should look like this: an engineer with expertise in robot programming, enjoys the manufacturing environment and frequently interacts with the sales team and the customer.

### Homophones

Be careful to check your use of:

their and there  
you're and your  
two, to and too.

### Full, clear sentences

When writing a cover letter, always use full sentences. Check that your full sentences can stand alone and make sense. Sentences should also be brief where ever possible.

Below is an example of a sentence that does not make sense:

*Where I work with a wide range of  
members of the community.*

This sentence is ambiguous and needs to more information. A full but brief sentence would look something like this:

*I volunteered at a local charity café where I  
worked with a wide range of community  
members.*

### Fragments or parts of sentences

Fragments or partial sentences are only acceptable in bullet point form. In fact, the use of partial sentences in bullet points is recommended for describing content in your resume. An example could be:

- *Excel at building customer relations and rapport*

These can be used in skills and attributes lists or when describing responsibilities, achievements and additional information under education and employment headings on your resume. Avoid using bullet points in your cover letter.



## GRAMMAR AND PUNCTUATION

### Apostrophes: in plurals, contractions and possessives

Using apostrophes in the wrong way is another common error frequently made in applications. The apostrophe is very rarely used to denote **plurals** but many people use them incorrectly in this way.

For example a common mistake is:

*Supervised a staff of more than 10 employee's*

An apostrophe is not needed here as the plural of employee is simply employees.

The most common correct use of the apostrophe is to show ownership. The example below is of a singular **possessive** form (the strategic vision belongs to the company):

*Implemented the company's strategic vision overseeing people, budget and technology to meet key objectives.*

Avoid the use of contractions (eg. 'it's' instead of 'it is') in resumes and cover letters. Use the full form for example, 'I have' instead of 'I've'.

### Tenses

Be consistent with your use of tenses (denoting the past, present and future). If writing about your present job, use the present tense:

- Supervising a team of five staff
- Assessing client needs

If writing about your past jobs, write in the past tense:

- Supervised a team of five staff
- Assessed client needs

If your responsibilities and duties have changed in your current job, it might seem tricky. However, a way to address this is to list your current duties in present tense and the previous duties in past tense.

A list could look like this:

- Regular and accurate record keeping of client files
- Liaise daily with recruitment consultants and other professional staff
- Provided clients with individual counselling
- Sourced information relevant to course information and local government services

### Colons and semicolons

A colon (:) is used before a list or a quote. For example:

- Apples
- Oranges
- Pears.

This is another common error often found in written applications. For example, it would be incorrect to use a semicolon like this;

- Applies
- Oranges
- Pears.

A semicolon (;) is used in sentences to separate parts of a sentence or when listing lengthy items (instead of using a comma).

### Abbreviations and acronyms

Commonly used by students and should be avoided. Do not assume the reader will know what the acronym stands for. If you want to use an acronym, then ensure that you give the name in full followed by the acronym in brackets in the first sentence. After that sentence, you may then use the acronym alone. For example:

*I have attended a number of workshops offered by the Learning Academic Skills (LAS) centre. I have also attended individual advice sessions run by LAS and found these very useful.*

### Further information

For more grammar tips and other writing guides visit the **Learning Academic Skills (LAS) Centre:** [swi.nu/las](http://swi.nu/las)