

## Spell it out

Recruiters say applications stuffed full of grammatical errors are depressingly common.

Make sure your CV isn't among them, say Emma-Jayne Jones and Robert Ashton

Rhythm really has your two hips moving. The car was stationary. Paper is stationery.

Sound like gobbledygook? Some people feel that mnemonics like these to remember simple spelling rules can be the difference between getting a job and losing it.

Around half of all CVs received by recruitment consultants, says the Recruitment and Employment Commission (REC), contain spelling or grammatical errors, and these are most likely to be made by those aged between 21 and 25. In this age group, graduates are twice as likely to make mistakes as those who did not go on to university.

"The feedback we have received from recruiters is that there are worrying shortcomings in the written communication skills of this age group. You would expect that by the time students reach universities they would have good basic written skills, but the results show that this isn't the case." Tom Hadley, director of external affairs at the REC

Formal written communication is, in part, being eroded by our text and email culture.

These methods of communication are instantaneous, so no time is taken to proofread messages before they are sent. CV errors give the impression that university qualifications may not meet the standards demanded in everyday work, says Hadley.

"Having a degree is one thing but it is no substitute for basic skills. If people can get into university and graduate without needing them, it is a bad sign for the future." In the workplace, today's graduates are not alone in their literacy shortcomings. Anyone who went to school between the late 60s and the late 90s is part of a 'lost generation' when it comes to any kind of formal education in grammar and punctuation. Both were missing from the UK school curriculum for more than 30 years. Writing sentences with different verb tenses, or no verb at all, using nouns and verbs which don't agree, leaving out apostrophes, or putting them in when they are not needed, punctuating quotes

incorrectly, forgetting commas or using too many: all of these are common failings in people's writing. Spelling tends to be less of a problem, thanks to spellcheckers. But how would the average office worker fare if those were taken away? There is no doubt, both inside and outside the workplace, people are gaining a more acute awareness of language - and are irritated by its misuse. Companies are responding by seeking help with grammar and punctuation for employees at every level.

How do you rate your grammatical prowess? See if you can spot the grammar, punctuation and spelling mistakes in the following extract from a change consultant's report to management.

*Management wants to introduce new measures to combat the noticable increase in sick leave. The average annual number of sick days has risen from five to 10 which is seen as a considerable embarassment to the new HR director. But I wonder if the responsibility should lay solely with her? And even if management does agree who's responsibility the problem is they also have a seperate - and justified concern that any action taken should be carefully-considered.*

*Meanwhile, although the employees are hoping for a decent pay rise its likely that their going to be disappointed. The CEOs arguement is that they got one last year and there's been no corresponding improvement in performance so he's not prepared to consider another rise. He said "The pay rise has had the opposite affect. People have become more lethargic, since we started paying them more." However other board directors might feel that higher pay will accelarate performance, although it will take time.*

*Whatever happens with regards to pay rises, the principle point here is that it's time the Board announced it's decision. The uncertainty is effecting staff morale, less people than expected are supporting company events, as theres a general feeling that the responsibility for making these events a success is not their's.*

Robert Ashton, chief executive of business writing consultancy Emphasis, gives a breakdown of the errors:

## **Misspellings**

noticable *noticeable*

embarassment *embarrassment*

seperate *separate*

arguement *argument*

accelarate *accelerate*

## **Grammar and punctuation**

### *Paragraph one*

Second sentence:

\* There should be a comma before "which".

Third sentence:

\* "The responsibility should lie solely with her," not "lay". Lay is a transitive verb, so it must be followed by an object - for example: "She lays the table."

\* The question mark is unnecessary as it is not a direct question.

Final sentence:

\* There should be a comma before "even if" and the one after "problem is" to denote that this clause is extra to the main idea.

\* The first part says "management does agree", whereas the second part says "they also have a concern" (strictly speaking, management is singular, but avoid mixing singular and plural).

\* It should be "whose", not "who's". Who's is short for who is or who has whose is about possession.

\* Add another dash after "and justified" to show that this is an aside.

\* Also, never use a hyphen after adverbs ending in -ly

### *Paragraph two*

First sentence:

\* A comma should follow "pay rise" to denote that this clause is extra to the main idea.

- \* "It's likely", not "its likely". Use an apostrophe only when it's is short for it is or it has
- \* "They're going to be", not "their going to be", because the meaning is "they are" and is not possessive.

Second sentence

- \* There should be an apostrophe for "CEO's " because it is possessive and a comma between "performance" and "so" to denote a natural pause.

Third sentence

- \* A comma or colon is needed to introduce the quote.
- \* "Effect ", not "affect". A person can be affected by an incident, whereas an effect is the result of an incident.
- \* The comma between "lethargic" and "since" should not be used, as there is no natural pause here.
- \* A comma should come after the "However", to give the reader the correct sense of the sentence.

*Paragraph three*

First sentence:

- \* "Principal", not "principle". A principle is a fundamental truth or a standard of personal conduct. "Principal" denotes something which is most important.
- \* "Its decision", not "it's decision" (see above).

Second sentence

- \* "Affecting" not "effecting" (see above).
- \* Two separate sentences. Ideally, use a semicolon as the two sentences are very closely linked, but you could get away with a full stop.
- \* "Fewer", not "less". Fewer refers to a smaller number of something less refers to a smaller quantity. For example: "There was less milk in the bottle than before."
- \* "There's", not "theres", as it's an abbreviation for "there is".
- \* "Theirs", not " their's". The word their's does not exist (other than in the headline on

page nine of one tabloid newspaper last month: "Hell family banned from all 900 homes apart from their's").

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/careers/cv-mistakes>