7 Common Job Application Mistakes You Might be Making

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No matter how stellar your skills, small goofs on your cover letter or resume could keep you from even being considered for your dream job. Typos are obvious application-killers: According to a CareerBuilder survey, 58 percent of employers identified typos as one of the top resumes mistakes that would lead them to automatically dismiss a candidate. But even if you're a pro with spell check, make one of these other common slip-ups and you can kiss any hope of an interview good-bye.

1. YOU DON'T FOLLOW EVERY. SINGLE. INSTRUCTION.

"Copy your resume into the body of the email." "Attach three examples of your work as PDFs." "Include salary history for the last three jobs you have." Yes, applying for some gigs can feel like jumping through hoops. But here's the thing: Most hiring managers are sorting through so many applications that scrapping any applicant who didn't submit his or her materials in the right format is an easy way to cut the candidate pile in half. If you want to make sure you wind up in the stack that gets considered, follow application instructions to a T—even if they seem persnickety.

2. YOU SKIP THE WEIRD QUESTIONS.

Does the hiring manager really need to know your hometown—or your favorite color? Probably not, but bizarre questions are becoming more common. "Some employers ask strange questions within the online application, mainly to weed out those candidates who don't follow directions," says Lisa Quast, author of *Secrets of a Hiring Manager Turned Career Coach*. Applications with a blank field may get discarded without even a glance. "So even if you're asked to answer 'What's the capital city of Lesotho?' do your research and fill in the blank with the correct answer." (It's Maseru, by the way.)

3. YOUR TENSES TIME TRAVEL.

Spell check might save you from an embarrassing typo, but it won't do anything to fix your sloppy grammar. The easiest goof to make: switching tenses, so half your resume bullet points are in the past tense (led a team, managed a project) and half are in the present tense (organize fund-raisers). It might seem like a small mistake, but to a hiring manager it can signal that you're not careful—and might not be worthy of an interview. For the record: Descriptions of all past positions you've held should be in the past tense, while your current position's responsibilities can be in the present tense.

4. YOU MENTION SALARY, EVEN THOUGH IT WASN'T ASKED FOR.

If the application asks for your salary history or requirements, by all means include it. But stating how much you'd like to make in a cover letter or resume when the application doesn't mention money is a huge faux pas, says career coach Lavie Margolin, author of *Winning Answers to 500 Interview Questions*. "It can make it appear that monetary gain is your primary concern, and it could hurt your chances of being called in for an interview," he says.

5. YOU FORGOT IT'S 2016.

Some resume and cover letter conventions come across as outdated, like using the salutation "Dear Sir or Madam," stating that you'll provide references upon request, or listing Microsoft Word as a skill. And in some industries, like tech or design, those stuffy flourishes can make you look even more out of touch. If you're not sure what the norms are for your industry (do graphic designers have objective statements?), do some research or ask a few colleagues in your field to share insights.

6. YOU PASS UP THE OPTIONAL COVER LETTER.

The truth is, it's not really optional. "If you really want to work for the employer, take the time to write a customized cover letter," says Quast. "Explaining why they should consider you for the job can help you stand out from other candidates." Especially those candidates who took the lazy path and punted on the cover letter.

She recommends including the cover letter as an attachment and copying it into the application field as well. An attachment might be easier for the hiring manager to print and read, but including it in the field helps ensure the database algorithms can catch any keywords you may have in your cover letter.

7. YOU RUSH THROUGH INFO THAT'S ALREADY IN YOUR RESUME.

Think filling out those education and experience fields are a total waste of your time? You're wrong. "Those sections populate into a database that then helps recruiters and hiring managers as they assess you against other candidates," says Quast. Even if you've already uploaded a resume with the exact same info, take the time to copy and paste it into the application fields in order to better the odds that you get noticed.

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