



Grammar Guide: For use with CVs, cover letters and applications for jobs or academic courses

Articles – a/an/ the or no article

Common errors and some advice:

- I am keen to specialise in International Relations and eventually to become diplomat.
Use the indefinite article 'a' before jobs. Example: 'a' diplomat, 'a' doctor, 'a' flight attendant.
- My previous job enabled me to have the opportunity to learn more about biomedical science.
Use 'a' or 'an' when you first mention something. Example: My previous job enabled me to have an opportunity to learn more about biomedical science
- I lived for three years in USA before coming to UK to study management.
Use 'the' before plural country names and before words like republic or kingdom. Example: 'the' UK and 'the' USA. Do not use 'the' in front of most other country and continent names.
- A job in marketing in your company would be most interesting challenge following my degree.
Use 'the' with superlatives. Example: the most interesting challenge, the biggest company,

Confusion over word class (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs)

These errors frequently lead to confusion in the mind of the reader:

- In my MA dissertation I analysis the importance of MIS in retailing.
Use a verb (a word like have, run) not a noun after I. Example: In my dissertation I analysed.....
- I would like to make a contribute to the research.
Use a noun after a verb in this structure. Example: I would like to make a contribution to the research.
- I am not confidence in my ability to write academic English.
Use an adjective after a verb like 'to be' (to seem, to feel etc). Example: I am not confident in my ability
- When I return to my country I would like to run a successfully company.
Use an adjective before a noun – this example shows an adverb, which is wrong. Example: I would like to run a successful company.

Tenses

Here are a few of the most common errors and examples to show you how to avoid them.

- I study at university in China from 2002 to 2006.
Use the past simple - this is needed for something in the past which is finished. Example: I studied at
- Since I came to Royal Holloway I joined two societies and did some voluntary work.
Use the present perfect – this is needed to show your action started in the past and is still continuing now because you are still at Royal Holloway. Example: Since I came to Royal Holloway I have joined two societies and have done.....
- I am interested in this company as it is owning factories in many different countries.
Use the present simple, not the present continuous, to express a situation you see as permanent, as well as for repeated actions and routines. Example: I am interested in this company as it owns

Singular and plural nouns

Here are some errors which make formal written work appear careless and will not impress the reader.

- I have taken several relevant course in biological sciences. Several means more than one so your noun must have an 's'. Example: I have taken several courses
- Egham is investigating the problem of pollutions. Some nouns are not 'countable' so the rules are different and you must not add an 's'. Example: Egham.....problem of pollution
- Note that some nouns can be either countable OR uncountable so if you are in doubt check in a dictionary. Example: I hope to acquire a lot of experiences in order to run my own business. Experience used in this context is uncountable so should not have an 's'.
- Your noun must 'agree' with its verb. If you are writing in the present simple tense be very careful. Example: I wish to apply to some large companies as they often has branches in different parts of the world. As the subject 'companies' is plural you must write have.
- My present job focus on customer service. Here the subject 'job' is singular so the verb should reflect this and be written focuses.
The 's' or 'es' at the end of the verb indicates the third person singular (he,she,it) and should not be confused with the 's' at the end of many nouns where it usually indicates the plural.

Prepositions

These are often small words but getting them wrong does not look good on your CV or job application form. Here is a very small selection.

- I hope to find a job about marketing after my degree. This should say a job in marketing.
- I plan to make a contribution in reducing food shortages in my country. A contribution to.....
- My research is on the impact from multi-national companies on small businesses. The impact of....
- I wish to apply for your company to the post of..... You apply to a company for a post or job.

There are many prepositions so try to identify those which you find difficult. A good dictionary will help you to be accurate, as will grammar books and websites.

Spelling and Typing errors

Applications which are full of these errors are likely to be turned down without further consideration. Spell-check on your computer may alert you but sometimes the word you have typed is actually an English word, although not the one you wanted. Careful proof reading is therefore essential.

- I have kept a dairy of my experiences while working in South Africa.(diary)
- I would like to become a departmental manger. (manager)
- I did a lot of preperation before I took my gap year in Uganda.(preparation)
- I have gained experience of liasing with a large number of different departments.(liaising)

You will note that the first two examples are real words and therefore not highlighted by spell check which is why you must read through all your writing carefully before you submit it.

NB British and American English may spell the same word differently. As you are applying for jobs or courses from the UK it is best to choose the British spelling. Example: centre not center, licence not license and organise not organize.

Other errors which will reduce your chances

- Emotional phrases - language should remain formal. Do not write, for example, 'I have long admired your company. Simply say 'I am very interested in your company because.....'

Do not end your application with a phrase like – 'Please consider my application favourably. Thanks very much!' write simply 'I look forward to your reply.'

- Wrong use of 'could'. I hope my application will be successful and I could have an opportunity to study in your university. I will be able to have an opportunity...
- Wrong use of apostrophes. My previous job's have all been in sales. Here the noun job should be written in the plural (jobs) and it does not need an apostrophe as it is neither a possessive (the department's website) nor a contracted form (I've visited many countries).

This handout covers some of the most common areas that we have noticed international students find difficult. It is by no means intended to be exhaustive