

Good grammar does matter

I've become increasingly concerned about the grammatical ignorance of many Americans.

These days I often see egregious (horrible, outrageous, astoundingly bad) grammatical errors on resumes, cover letters, Web sites, signs and e-mails, regardless of the writer's management or income level.

Some are written by people in the job market hoping to land an interview, and their paperwork is full of punctuation and grammatical mistakes. Were they careless? Or do they not know? Maybe it doesn't matter. Maybe the hiring authority doesn't know the difference either.

The other day I saw the back of a company shirt that said "providing quality service since 10 years." A company shirt? How many were printed and are worn by employees who walk around advertising that this particular company has someone in an upper-level management position who didn't catch the error or didn't know the difference?

Here's a sign I saw in a store a few weeks ago: "We do not

except credit cards." (It should be "accept.")

Last week, a senior-level manager e-mailed me and wrote,

"Thank you for looking at my resume's." It wasn't a typo, because "resume's" was typed that way — with an unnecessary apostrophe — three times.

A new rule seems to have come into effect in the last year: if in doubt, add an apostrophe. People all over America apparently have lost their understanding of the simple

difference between plural and possessive (possessive gets an apostrophe, plural does not).

Your resume and cover letter are not just a packaged synopsis of your background. They are a brochure, and they are selling a product, and the product is you.

If you were shopping for a new car, what would you think if all the Honda or Lexus or Toyota brochures had apostrophes in the wrong place? Or misspelled words? Would you know?

What about a flier from your local grocery store? Or a promotional piece from your state representative?

On some level it's going to

make a difference as to what you think of that company or person. If they aren't careful enough about their literature or sales material, what else don't they pay attention to?

Don't rely on Microsoft Word's grammar check program. It isn't able to discern if a word is spelled correctly but used out of context.

The grammar checker won't help you unless you have a fundamental understanding of grammar to begin with. In fact, if you defer to the grammar checker's advice, you may increase the number of mistakes.

When it comes to grammar, don't tell yourself it doesn't matter. Don't tell yourself that your skills are more important. Above all, don't tell yourself that everyone speaks poorly these days and the hiring authority won't know or care.

The ability to communicate, written and spoken, is of paramount importance — certainly in business. And it becomes more valuable as fewer people are able to demonstrate it.



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