

# WHY MANY JOB APPLICATIONS FAIL!

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Last week I received the following email from Charles Agyemang, a job seeker. In it, he asked:

***"I hold a master's degree in political science with a focus on development studies. I have tried for the past one year to look find a job, all to no avail. Madam Anita please, how do I put my best self forward for a job? How do I prepare my CV and covering letter to pass the ten seconds test? How do I polish my interview skills so I can stand out at an interview? Thank you, waiting patiently for your reply."** Charles.*

This is a question I believe many of you would like to know the answers to help you put your best self forward. I cannot cover all the issues in great detail I would never end. I will, however, highlight some points and tips to get you started.

Let me start by discussing some of the reasons why many job applications fail. As a recruiter, I have lost count of the number of poor job applications I have received over the years. A lot of the issues are common mistakes which can be avoided if the job applicant took a bit more time with their application. One thing you have to remember as an applicant is that from the minute you send in your application for consideration, you are under assessment. Therefore, take nothing for granted.

## **Mistake 1. I have I have I have!**

This is common in the majority of personal statements and covering letters. For example, "I have the ability to work in a team". This tells me nothing! It is a claim anybody can make! What job interviewers want is an example of when you have worked in a team, the role you played, etc. So the **solution to mistake 1 is:** you must give practical

examples of when you used the skill or how you gained the experience. Use the STAR approach- State the Situation, Task, Action, and Results.

### **Mistake 2. Long Waffle**

This is the second mistake job applicants make. There is nothing wrong in giving some details about your skills and experience in a covering letter/personal statement. However, it doesn't have to be a book. You have to understand that recruiters read through hundreds of applications forms/CVs at a time and they spend very little time on each. Recruiters hate waffle and a lot of the time they don't read it, they bin it or put it to the side. The longest personal statement I have ever attempted to read on an application form was 20 pages! I read three pages! **So the solution to mistake 2 is:** keep it short and to the point.

### **Mistake 3. Grammatical Errors**

There are often too many spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors in CVs and application forms. What this tells the recruiter is that you don't pay attention to detail nor did you take your time with your application. I could go on further to think that you may bring this lack of attention to detail to the job! I hope you can see my point. Now I know English isn't everyone's first language but we still have to take care. **So the solution to mistake 3 is:** read through your application/CV, get someone else to read it and check for errors and also use the spell check on your computer. If you handwrite it, write it in rough first and then neatly, so the recruiter can read your handwriting.



### **Mistake 4. Poor Presentation**

Applicants often do not present their applications in the best light. If you type your application, check for errors like typos, consistency with font sizes and format. Make sure your work history does not have breaks and where there are breaks or gaps, briefly explain the reason for the break or gap but don't leave it blank! Also, don't list every job

you have ever done as it may have no relevance to the job you are applying for! However, you can make reference to past roles not on your CV in your personal statement or your covering letter if it is absolutely relevant! **So the solution to mistake 4 is:** check for consistency in your presentation, layout and again get someone else to look at it for presentation errors. Make sure you present relevant information about your work experience.

### **Mistake 5. Don't lie!**

Applicants who lie on their job applications are very common in Africa. There is a difference between exaggerating and lying! For example, don't put "I like reading romantic novels" and then when you are asked a question about the last book you read, you cannot answer! Also, don't lie to get a job you are not qualified to do. When you submit an application form/CV the employer could choose to seek references from any of your past employment and some employers do exercise that right. I once had an applicant tell me during an interview when the questions got hard that they did not write their application, we terminated the interview immediately. **So the solution to mistake 5 is:** don't lie! The truth will come out and when it does it may lead to the withdrawal of an offer or employment or termination.

### **Final thoughts**

Some job seekers can be lazy. They do not take the time to prepare all aspects of their application. As I said previously, you have to be relentless and proactive. You are competing with other people who do take the time to make sure they put their best self forward. If you follow the advice I have given you will be on your way to putting your best self forward and ensuring your CV passes the ten seconds test. I also want to encourage you to take some time out to improve your CV, covering letter and interview skills. This will help you put your best self forward. You can also seek professional guidance if you deem it necessary.

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## **Separate the wheat from the chaff!**

**By hiring the right people for the right job the right way with OML Africa**



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