



Test Your Resume Grammar and Punctuation I.Q.

How do you stack up in presenting yourself to prospective employers in writing? We examine resumes on a daily basis, and 90 percent of them have typos or grammatical errors. Here are some examples:

"I am an extremely fast leaner."

"As indicted, I have over five years of analyzing investments."

"Instrumental in ruining entire operation for a Midwest chain store."

While the errors above seem humorous, you would be surprised at how frequently these types of mistakes appear in resumes. Since the errors involve usage rather than spelling, "spell-check" won't catch these blunders.

If you're like most of us, time in English class was more likely spent daydreaming than wrangling with the intricacies of our native language. How many of us thought it would really matter in our later lives whether a period or comma should be placed inside or outside quotation marks? Or when it was appropriate to use an apostrophe to show possession? How about when to use "there," "their," or "they're"?

Despite our lack of interest in grammar skills during our school years, written presentation is crucial in marketing to a prospective employer. Your resume represents YOU, and it is the key to whether an employer will put you on his or her "short list." Just as it is when you meet someone in person, initial impressions are made from your resume and can be difficult to reverse. You want to make sure your resume presents you in the best way possible.

You always want to proofread your resume several times-ideally, at several different times when your mind and eyes are fresh. If your word processing program has spelling and grammar checkers, by all means use them-but, as noted above, recognize they are only tools and cannot catch all errors or will sometimes "catch" things that are not errors. Use a good reference manual as your ultimate guide. Do your best to ensure your resume presents you well; you will be glad you did.

Reference for this quiz was *The Gregg Reference Manual, Eighth Edition*, by William A. Sabin, published by McGraw-Hill, New York, 1996. This is generally considered to be "the" reference manual for grammar, usage and punctuation and you can find the answer to virtually every question you might ever have with regard to the written word. I would highly recommend its purchase as one of your main reference books, along with an up-to-date dictionary and thesaurus. Most importantly, use these books; don't let them collect dust on your bookshelf.

A Writing Skills Quiz

The answers are at the bottom of the quiz. Good luck!!

In each instance below, select the answer that illustrates the correct way to write the sentence.

1.
 - a. Served as the company's "labor specialist".
 - b. Served as the company's "labor specialist."

2.
 - a. Increased sales revenue by five percent.
 - b. Increased sales revenue by five %.
 - c. Increased sales revenue by 5 percent.
 - d. Increased sales revenue by 5%.

3.
 - a. Served as liaison/mediator between management and staff.
 - b. Served as liaison / mediator between management and staff.

4.
 - a. Brought the company a 'fresh' viewpoint.
 - b. Brought the company a "fresh" viewpoint.

5.
 - a. Served as sales manager, president, and as a member of the board of directors for ABC Company.
 - b. Served as Sales Manager, President, and as a member of the Board of Directors for ABC Company.

6.
 - a. Provided leadership for the Advertising Department, Manufacturing Division, and the Finance Committee.
 - b. Provided leadership for the advertising department, manufacturing division, and the finance committee.

7.
 - a. Extraordinary success in the functional areas of Finance, Strategic Planning, New Product/Services Development, Business Process Reengineering (BPR), and Total Quality Management (TQM).
 - b. Extraordinary success in the functional areas of finance, strategic planning, new product/services development, Business Process Reengineering (BPR), and Total Quality Management (TQM).
 - c. Extraordinary success in the functional areas of finance, strategic planning, new product/services development, business process reengineering (BPR), and total quality management (TQM).

8.
 - a. March 6th, 2004
 - b. March 6, 2004
 - c. Mar. 6, 2004
 - d. the sixth of March

e. the 6th of March

9.

- a. one, two or three-page report
- b. one-page, two-page or three-page report
- c. one-, two-, or three-page report

10.

- a. Before my hire, the company had not reached its full potential.
- b. Before my hire, the company had not reached it's full potential.

11.

- a. Developed a state-of-the-art installation.
- b. Developed an installation that reflected the current state-of-the-art.
- c. Developed a state of the art installation.

12.

- a. Their was a need for more efficient organization in there sales department.
- b. There was a need for more efficient organization in they're sales department.
- c. There was a need for more efficient organization in their sales department.

13.

- a. Sales increased dramatically for September 1988.
- b. Sales increased dramatically for September, 1988.

14.

- a. Sales catapulted to \$4 million, higher then ever in the company's history.
- b. Sales catapulted to \$4 million, higher than ever in the company's history.

Answers to the Quiz

1. **B.** We all know that most rules have exceptions. But this rule does not. Periods (and commas) always go inside the closing quotation mark(s), no matter what the context of the sentence and no matter if there is a quote within a quote. (Colons and semicolons always go outside the closing quotation mark.) This is in contrast with question marks and exclamation points, which are dependent on how the quotes are used in the sentence as to whether they go inside or outside the quotation marks. Even sentences with several quotes in a row follow the "always inside the quotation marks" rule. For example: Developed a plan that was called "brilliant," "innovative," and "successful."

2. **C.** Percentages should always be expressed in figures- and the word "percent" should be spelled out. It is all right to use the % symbol in tables, on business forms, or in statistical or technical reports, but in any other written work, such as a resume or supporting document, express a percentage as "5 percent."

- This is an exception to the rule of spelling out numbers smaller than ten and using a cardinal number (12, 56) for numbers 11 or higher.

3. **A.** No space should appear before or after the diagonal mark.
4. **B.** Single quotation marks are only used when there is a quotation within a quotation. Single quotation marks should only be used inside regular quotation marks, never in place of them.
5. **A.** Except in heading situations, as in a resume heading, job titles should not be capitalized when they stand alone or when they follow or replace a personal name. Official titles should be capitalized when they precede personal names (President Sidney Falk, Vice President Smith); however, when the personal name is in apposition (set off by commas), the title should not be capitalized (the president, Sidney Falk, revealed plans . . . Occupational titles (author, surgeon) should not be capitalized when they precede a personal name (author William Shakespeare).
6. **B.** Common organizational terms such as advertising department, manufacturing division and finance committee are ordinarily capitalized when they are the actual names of units within the writer's own organization. They are not capitalized when they refer to some other organization (except in ultraformal documents, such as meeting minutes). For example, a company refers to its "Board of Directors," but "the board of directors" of another company or in a document such as a news release (or resume) intended for a general audience. In listing these organizational terms in a past employment situation, capitalization should be avoided.
7. **C.** The names of programs or concepts should not be capitalized; of course, you should always capitalize any proper noun within the name of the program or concept (Socratic method). When using acronyms such as BPR or TQM, use capitals for the acronyms, but not within the program or concept title itself (unless the acronym stands for a company name or legal title, such as Students Against Drunk Driving).
8. **B.** Dates should be expressed in month-day-year sequence, using cardinal numbers (6), not ordinal numbers (6th, sixth). Days of the week and names of months should be abbreviated only on business forms, in tables or in columns of text where space is tight.
9. **C.** When using a series of hyphenated adjectives with a common basic element (in this example, the word "page"), that element should only be shown with the last term and a suspending hyphen should be used with the first and second (or however many there are in your sentence) terms to indicate that relationship to the common element. Use one space after the suspending hyphen unless a comma is required at that point.
10. **A.** "It's" is a contraction of the words "it is," and therefore requires an apostrophe between the "t" and the "s." However, "its" is a possessive pronoun (like his or hers), and is of itself possessive; therefore no apostrophe is used. As a test, try saying the

sentence using "it is" in place of "its." If it makes sense, use an apostrophe; if not, leave it out.

11. **A.** Phrases used as compound adjectives (a compound adjective consists of two or more words that function as a unit and express a single thought) before a noun should be hyphenated, but not when they appear normally elsewhere in the sentence. To show the difference, "a state-of-the-art installation reflects the current state of the art."

12. **C.** Here's another one that trips up a lot of folks: there, their, they're. "There" can indicate a location ("over there") or a state of being ("there is" or "there are"). "Their" is a possessive pronoun, as in "their company"-belonging to "them." If you can substitute "his," "her," "our," or "its," you can use "their." "They're" is a contraction for "they are." Using the same logic as in number 10 above, if you can substitute "they are" in the sentence, the contraction is the form you want.

13. **A.** Although the year should be set off by two commas in a sentence containing month, date, and year ("On September 3, 1999, we reorganized the company."), omit commas around the year when it follows the month alone.

14. **B.** "Than" is a conjunction to show comparison (older than I am), while "then" refers to a time period (now and then) or your "next" step (if you want to exceed your sales goals, then you need to think "out of the box").

Scoring

13 or more correct:

Excellent! Your written skills are very good, and you present yourself well in written form. Congratulations!

10-12 correct:

Keep those reference books handy and use them to check up on yourself! You can't always depend on having someone who is skilled at written presentation around to proof your work before you send it out to that all-important prospective employer.

6-9 correct:

Perhaps some classes or some personal study in a good reference book like *The Gregg Reference Manual* and its accompanying workbook would benefit you. Your resume/credentials package is the first impression a potential employer or client will have of you; make it a great one!

Joelle Silva, VP Client Support Services and Wizard of the Realm, Corporate Warriors Corporate Warriors provides world-class individual and corporate outplacement services. It is recognized nationwide for its contemporary job search strategies and technologies, providing coaching and resume portfolio development to executives from coast to coast. More information can be found at www.corporatewarriors.com. Joelle can be contacted at joelle@corporatewarriors.com.