

Comments on Job Applications

You are trying to impress someone in your letter of reference. That means that impeccable grammar, spelling and punctuation are essential. Some employers might just read over it and not care. But many would just react, 'How can anyone who spells so badly know anything?' The employer would think, 'An applicant who doesn't take 10 minutes to get these little things right must not care much about the job.'

(I wasn't sure whether the second to last sentence should be punctuated:

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or

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It took me less than a minute to find the answer on the web.)

1. Take advantage of your specific degree. Computer Science majors in MSCS have usually taken more theoretical courses that give them a background to adapt to changes in software practice and to understand various kinds of languages. This is your edge over someone who just knows how to program in several languages. Mention it.
2. Be positive but not too positive. People who say they are 'perfect' appear arrogant.
3. The practice regarding letters of reference varies by industry. (Some employers expect you have letters sent; some want names; some want: 'references on request'). Try to find out what is appropriate for the job you are applying for.
4. Vitas often contain a heading: Objective. If this is a mass mailing there is nothing wrong with 'to obtain a job in computing'. But that looks a little funny if the rest of the vita is tailored for a very specific position.
5. Avoid abbreviations that may not be known to the employer: e.g. UIC, MSCS, or SACNAC. If you only use the term once, just write it out. If used again, you can put the abbreviation in parentheses and use it later.
6. There are a fair percentage of 'old fogeys' who cringe at the word 'utilize' which almost always is used when 'use' is actually meant. It is safest to avoid it altogether. Similarly, be careful with "hopefully". Don't write something like "Hopefully, you will be able to interview me next week." Correct is, "I hope you will be able to interview me next week."

7. Include date on letter. (E-mail automatically includes a date so people tend to forget to insert a date in a written letter.)
8. Spell the name of the company correctly. Spell course names correctly too. Some people wrote Second Derivative Hedge Fund or took a course in Deferential Equations.