

Scruffy Shoes and Job Interviews

You have no doubt heard many times the advice to dress “professionally” for job interviews. Save your (perhaps preferred) scruffy shoes for other occasions. You realize that this advice is offered in awareness of “first impressions.” The first thing the prospective employer sees will begin a mental file on you. If your shoes are scruffy at an inappropriate moment, the first entry in the file will be unfavourable. So it is with first impressions conveyed by your text on the page.

Yes, in “The Five Myths of Grammar” we argue that grammar is a skeleton, not a surface. Nevertheless, even we realize that many mechanical errors are trivial apart from their impact on first impressions. The most seasoned professional authors may write “it’s door was half open” or “its a matter of life and death,” and not catch the errors until the editing stage. But if a prospective employer sees these two errors in your cover letter, chances are your application will go in the proverbial “file 13.” You will seem to be lacking in formal education, attention to detail, ability to adapt to occasion, and respect for your reader. Your words on the page *do* create a major first impression and can cost you success if they are non-standard. This is equally true if your ink is faded, your font style is eccentric, or your margins are too narrow or too wide. Judgements based on first appearance may be unfair and unfortunate, but they are an ongoing part of human affairs. Whether you wish to secure employment, challenge and change norms, or achieve any number of other communication goals, why jeopardize your chances simply by underestimating the power of first impressions? As “The Five Myths of Grammar” suggests, learning to correct grammar and related mechanical points is not only possible, it is even fun and fulfilling.