

Common Application Barriers

(...and How to Address Them on Your Cover Letter and In Interviews)

□ You're Changing Job Function Completely

(for example: you've been an IT analyst and now you want to be a consultant)

- **What the hiring manager is thinking:** This person may want to change jobs, but they have no experience in this function. If I bring them in for an interview, I'm going to look like a fool and they might not succeed in the role.
- **How to address this:** Show that you're serious about making the change to this new function. Highlight courses and side projects that show your commitment to this new skill set. Assure the hiring manager that the organization will be making a good decision by investing in you.

□ You Weren't at Your Last Position for Very Long

- **What the hiring manager is thinking:** Is this person a job hopper? Why would they commit to working at a job they didn't like? Was there something wrong with their performance? Should this be a red flag?
- **How to address this:** Firstly, don't say anything negative about your previous employer in your cover letter. Instead, appeal to the hiring manager's sense of understanding that sometimes, the fit between employer and employee just isn't there. If you had to take the job because of financial hardship or for another reason, tell them that you were in a tough place in your life financially and that now, you're committed to finding the right LONG-TERM fit.

□ You've Moved Jobs Frequently

- **What the hiring manager is thinking:** If this candidate is constantly moving jobs, how can I expect them to come to this organization and stay?
- **How to address this:** First, if any of those short stays were designed to be short from the beginning, like an internship, a temp job, or a position on contract, make sure that your resume shows that by noting "internship" etc. next to your job title. If you really have left positions frequently over the past few years, first assure the hiring manager that you are looking for somewhere that you can stay for the longer term. Let them know that you've



learned a lot about organizations and/or different job functions and that you now know much more about the kind of environment where you can succeed.

□ You Don't Have Much Work Experience

- **What the hiring manager is thinking:** If I can get someone with experience for the same price, why would I hire someone without experience? Then, we'll have to train them and teach them about the world of work.
- **How to address this:** If you're a recent graduate, remind the hiring manager that you're fresh out of school and that you have received fantastic training. For example, you might say "I've been so fortunate to receive an excellent education at..." Also, show that you're someone who wants to learn inside a great organization by saying something like, "most people would characterize me as someone who is a quick learner, and I'm especially interested in joining an organization where I can quickly onboard and make a positive impact with the team around me."

□ You Have Gaps in Your Employment History

- **What the hiring manager is thinking:** You've been out of the labor market for some time and you're not mentally and emotionally prepared to join their high performance organization.
- **How to address this:** First, address the obvious. You might do this by saying "you might have notice that between ... and ... my resume doesn't show any professional engagement." Then, provide some context about the employment gap. Don't give away anything inappropriate. For example, never say something like "my family was falling apart because my partner cheated on me." Instead, say something like "I took a personal leave to help my family make an important transition." Then, assure the reader that you have been working on your skills. Describe classes, volunteerism, and relevant projects that you've worked on. Let them know that you're ready to take the next step in your life.

□ You Don't Have Experience with a Required Software

- **What the hiring manager is thinking:** We're going to have to train this person on the software ourselves and it's going to slow things down.
- **How to address this:** Try to address these concerns in your cover letter by taking tutorials or classes on the software package and then talking about it in your letter. Also, assure



the hiring manager that you're committed to finding a great long-term fit and that, if the organization will invest in you, it will be worth their time.

□ You're Currently Unemployed

- **What the hiring manager is thinking:** Why hasn't anyone hired you yet?
- **How to address this:** First, personally appeal to the hiring manager by saying something like "as you know, finding the right match between employer and employee often takes time." Then, let them know that you are working hard to find the right fit because you want to be able to make a long-term commitment to an organization. Then, assure the reader that you have been working on your skills. Describe classes, volunteerism, and relevant projects that you've worked on. Let them know that you're ready to take the next step in your life.

□ You're Planning to Move or are a Long Distance Candidate

- **What the hiring manager is thinking:** It's easy to dream about taking a job in some far away place or that, if you're moving to the area for a personal reason (like a relationship or a friend), it's easy to call it quits and move back home.
- **How to address this:** Reassure the hiring team that you're serious about moving to their specific place. The message that you'll move "anywhere" usually isn't nearly as powerful as saying that you're doing everything to move somewhere in particular—where the target organization is located. You can prove this by talking about the time you've spent researching housing and other moving concerns.

□ You're Looking to Change Industries

- **What the hiring manager is thinking:** You might want to move industries, but what does that matter to me? I need to make sure that I can get someone qualified into this position.
- **How to address this:** Show the recruiting team that you're serious about changing industries by letting them know that you're learning the relevant softwares, reading about the industry, and that this move is an important part of your career plan.

□ You're Moving to a Smaller or Larger Organization

- **What the hiring manager is thinking:** This person has been working in a situation where the scope of their work will be very different than in this organization. If they're coming from a smaller organization to a bigger one, the scope of their responsibilities is likely to

be much smaller and they might get bored. If they're moving from a much larger organization to a smaller one, they might not be able to handle the lack of structure in the smaller organization.

- **How to address this:** If you're moving from a smaller organization to a bigger one, write in your letter that you're interested in joining an organization with more resources, structure, and reach. If you're moving from a larger organization to a smaller one, write in your letter than you're looking to work somewhere where it is easier to bring ideas to the team and to get exposure to a broader set of job functions.

□ This Job Would be a Promotion for You

- **What the hiring manager is thinking:** Why didn't this person get promoted into a higher role at their previous organization. Also, are they only in it for themselves? Will they move organizations again if they have a chance to move up the ladder?
- **How to address this:** Firstly, make sure that you speak positively about your previous organization, but then transition to a description of the situation. Highlight that you want a chance to take on more responsibility and let the hiring manager know that you were prepared to take on new challenges before there was space for you at the next rung of the organization. Also, make sure to speak in terms of "we" to assure the hiring manager that you're not a selfish person. Speak well of your team and include phrases like "shared success" and "when everyone succeeds..."

□ You're Overqualified for the Position

- **What the hiring manager is thinking:** This person is just looking for a short-term job fix. When a better opportunity comes along, this candidate is just going to get up and leave this organization.
- **How to address this:** First, address this in a way that doesn't come off as arrogant. You might say something like "from my resume, you might notice that I have quite a bit of experience in this area." Then, assure the hiring manager that you're not looking for a short-term job fix and that you realize that careers are made by finding a great organizational fit—not by being selfish about your level in the organization. Then, describe how you see this position fitting into your longer-term career goals.