

Poultry does not fly

...and unfortunately, many applications don't take off either. What does this have to do with each other? More than you might think: it's about good language and pictures!

Peter Näf

The image of the flightless poultry comes from the book "Deutsch für Kenner" (German for Connoisseurs) by Wolf Schneider, the journalist and book author who was often called the German language pope. A few months before his death in 2022 at the age of 96, he even became famous on Tik-Tok for his contributions to language and style. For me as a career coach, his books are some of the bests on written and oral communication - and thus on job applications and job interviews. And Wolf Schneider has managed to present a supposedly dry subject in such an entertaining way that you can read the book for pleasure while lying on the sofa.

Concrete beats abstract

The linguistic bad habit that Schneider illustrates with poultry is the tendency to categorise and thus abstract facts. Instead of narrating concrete things, we abbreviate with the umbrella term of category. So we say: "On the farm, all kinds of poultry flutter" instead of "On the farm, there are ducks, geese, swans and pigeons - and they can all fly.

I come across similar abstractions in CVs and job interviews: "I am responsible for providing financial advice to an international, wealthy private clientele." With a few more words, a sentence could be formed that actually says something: "I advise private clients with assets between 1 and 5 million from the USA, France, Italy and Sweden on financial investments and tax optimisation."

Abstraction is in itself an ingenious human ability and runs largely unconsciously. It helps us

to simplify the complex and diverse impressions of the environment by forming categories and thus to master them mentally. This is necessary because we have to keep our limited working memory free for processing new things. Categorisation is an interpretation based on personal experience and thus varies from person to person. We therefore disagree about the content of the terms.

It's about pictures

For people living in the countryside, the term «poultry» may include the farm animals listed above. For city residents, it might mean plucked chickens and geese in the display at the local butcher's shop. Similar examples can be found in the career field: When Person A speaks of customer advisory services, she thinks of recommending and selling securities because of her personal experience as an investment advisor. Person B, as an IT specialist, thinks of advice related to servers and PCs.

If you want to make sure that your counterpart really gets to know you in the application process and understands what you are talking or writing about, then be specific. Tell stories in the job interview. Well-told stories are individual cases and therefore vivid, because they create images in the mind of the interviewer. And that's exactly the goal - it's not by chance that recruiters say they see candidate A in this job, but not candidate B. Because it's all about seeing - with the mind's eye.

Therefore, give your career wings through good storytelling!

[#Motivation letter](#), [#Application](#), [#CV](#)

Please find further articles on career topics on my homepage

<https://karrierecoaching.ch/en/articles/>

