



MAKE YOUR COVER LETTER COUNT

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Is a well-prepared resume enough to convince potential employers that you should be called in for an interview? Don't be too sure. Not including a cover letter with your resume—even when you submitted it online—is passing up a key opportunity to sell your skills. A recent nationwide survey by Accountemps found that 60 percent of executives believe the cover letter is either as important as or more critical than the resume.

A cover letter allows you to direct the reader's attention to aspects of your resume that are most relevant, demonstrate your knowledge of the company you're writing to and explain any part of your work history that needs clarification. The following guidelines can assist you in preparing a solid cover letter:

Follow a standard business letter format. Try to address the letter to a specific individual, even if it means making several calls to determine his or her name and title. And be sure to ask for the correct spelling. A prospective employer who sees his or her name spelled incorrectly may assume you are not detail-oriented.

Once you've determined the hiring manager's name, a good general rule for salutations is to use his or her first name only when you've been personally introduced and have already referred to that person by first name in conversation. Otherwise, use the person's surname preceded by Mr. or Ms. If you are responding to a classified ad with a box number, or if you're unable to obtain the spelling of the hiring manager's name, use a greeting such as, "To Whom It May Concern."

Writing the opening. The opening sentence of a cover letter should announce its purpose (even though the purpose may seem obvious) and give the reader a compelling reason to read on. If someone mentioned the job opening to you, be sure to use his or her name in the introduction: "I am writing to you at the suggestion of John Doe, who told me you may be looking for an office manager." If you're responding to an advertisement for a job, say so in your letter: "I am applying for the marketing manager position advertised in the Daily News and would like to tell you about my qualifications."

Demonstrate your knowledge of the company. Work a fact or observation about the company that isn't common knowledge into your opening paragraph. Such a statement tells the reader you've done some homework: "I have been following with great interest the success of your company in developing and marketing a line of satin skirts. That interest has prompted me to send you this letter, along with my resume." You could also say, "I am writing because I was taken with your recent ad in the San Francisco Chronicle. In light of the work your company is now beginning to do in gene splicing, I thought my previous research fellowship in this area would make me a valuable candidate for a position."

Explain your current situation. Are you finishing school or in a full-time job? Can you begin work immediately or are you available upon completion of an internship? Clarify these points in your cover letter.

Explain why this job interests you. Let potential employers know what you have to offer. Do you have any special abilities or knowledge that you could build upon if hired? A part-time job in college may have been in the same industry as the firm you're applying with now. Or you may have experience with a specific software application that will be used extensively in the position.

On a similar note, be sure to research prospective employers and demonstrate that knowledge in your cover letter. Not only does this show that you have a genuine interest in the job, but it also indicates that you have initiative—a quality that is highly sought after in entry-level candidates.

Briefly elaborate on one or two key points to draw attention to your resume. Give details about the most relevant parts of your work history for this particular position. For example: "I served two terms as president of ABC University's student golf club, where my responsibilities ranged from overhauling the organization's fee structure to representing our members in key meetings with faculty and other university leadership."

Don't rehash your resume. The cover letter should generate interest in the resume, but not reiterate the same points.

Have someone else review your cover letter. While you may have used spelling and grammar checkers on your computer, thoroughly proofread for any typos,

poor grammar or spelling mistakes. Ask a friend or family member to review it as well. Remember, potential employers take cover letters very seriously, so be sure that you do, too.

Closing the letter. End the letter with Sincerely, Sincerely Yours, Yours truly or Cordially.

How About Electronic Cover Letters? You still need a cover letter if you apply for a job via the Internet. Online letters do not need to be as lengthy as traditional ones, but the elements should remain the same. Use professional salutations such as "Mr." and "Ms.," and always include your full name, telephone number and mailing address.

Appearances aside, what really matters in a cover letter is what it says and that it generates enough interest to draw people to your resume. Use the guidelines above to make sure what you state in your letter delivers exactly the message you wish to convey.

An effective way to present yourself is to create a letterhead for your resume that can be used on your cover letter and reference pages. Use the same font(s) throughout, and print everything on matching paper. This creates an impressive package.

Resource: www.careerbuilder.com

ATTACHING COVER LETTER/RESUME TO AN EMAIL

Email is an increasingly popular form of business communication, and many employers request that you submit your resume and cover letter via email. To utilize email to its full potential, do the following:

Type the name of the position for which you are applying in the subject line. In the body of the email, there is no need to include your email address, date or employer's address as that information is transmitted electronically.

There is no need to leave spaces between the closing and the typed name as there will be no signature.

Always check to make sure that your attachments are indeed attached before you hit "send." You may want to follow-up your initial email with a brief email asking if your resume and cover letter were transmitted and readable when opened in their system. Gracefully, let the employer know that you are willing to resend the attachments if there was a glitch in the transmission.

Resource: Greene, B. Get the Interview Every Time. 2004.

DO I REALLY NEED TO SEND A LETTER?

Any time someone spends more than ten minutes assisting you in any business situation, send a thank you letter. This includes someone who gives you a job lead. For any formal correspondence, follow appropriate business format. Use good quality paper, preferably

matching that of your resume and cover letter.

Thank You Letters: Use these letters as an opportunity to highlight your key strengths and remind them who you are and why you should be hired. Personalize both the company information and your specific fit to that company. Make sure your letter is unique.

Thank You for Interview: Indicate your appreciation for their time and the opportunity to speak with them on (date) and at (location). Stress the importance of learning the information provided and your interest in the possibility of using your background, education and experience (give specific examples based on the interview conversation) for the position discussed. Indicate that you will furnish any additional information or are including requested information. Restate personal qualities which make you uniquely qualified for the position and which may or may not have been discussed in your interview. Encourage them to let you know if further information is needed. Let them know you look forward to hearing their decision.

Thank You for Plant/Office Visit Invitation: Thank them for the letter/phone call of (date) offering a plant/office visit at (time) on (dates). Tell them the most convenient date for you and when you will arrive. Indicate what materials you have enclosed or the company has requested, such as resume, transcripts and/or application form. Indicate your appreciation for the opportunity to visit them. Reinforce your interest in a position with the company.

Thank You for Plant/Office Visit: Thank them for the time and opportunity to visit their plant/office on (date). If applicable, thank specific individuals for special efforts during your visit. Thank them for accommodations, meals, air fare or other expenses paid. Include any requested receipts needed for reimbursement. Express your interest in the company. Re-emphasize what you can offer to fit their needs.

Letter of Acceptance: Indicate your pleasure in having received the company's offer of (date). Include all details of offer: position, location, starting salary, bonus, starting date and relocation expenses. Mention the materials you have enclosed, such as transcripts, application forms and/or resume. Tell of plans and anticipated arrival date. Indicate enthusiasm for the job and the opportunity with the company.

Letter of Acknowledgment: Requesting More Time for Decision: Acknowledge receipt of the offer of (date). Express appreciation and continued interest in the company. Indicate reasons for time extension needed (if possible). If you require further information, specify what you lack. Specify exactly when you expect to make your decision. This situation usually requires a

prior phone conversation, but always follow up with a letter to verify.

Letter Rejecting Offer: Indicate that you have given considerable thought to the offer, but you have decided not to accept it as outlined in their letter of (date). Indicate that it has been a difficult decision for you. Thank them for their time, effort and consideration. Let them know that their confidence in you was appreciated. Mention aspects of the position or company that were appealing to you.

Response to Letter of Rejection: Thank them for informing you of their decision and for considering you. If you are still interested in them, tell them you look forward to being considered for future positions.

DON'T MAKE THESE 10 COVER LETTER MISTAKES

Your cover letter shows employers how well you express yourself. It can also demonstrate that you are savvy in the ways of marketing yourself and selling your best qualifications. A good cover letter can entice the recipient to review your resume. A bad cover letter can turn them away. Here are 10 mistakes that contribute to bad cover letters and you want to avoid:

1. **Sending your resume without a cover letter.** Sure, some employers don't read them or place little importance on them. But since you do not know the reader's values, include a letter.
2. **Failing to address the letter to the specific name of the recipient.** Addressing the letter to "Dear Personnel Director/HR Director," "To Whom It May Concern," "Dear Sir or Madam" (or worse, "Dear Sirs") instead of a named individual are all lazy approaches that show the employer that you were not concerned enough to find out the name of the person with the hiring power. It's not always easy to find the name of the specific hiring manager, but try to do so if at all possible. Usually, you can just call the company and ask who the hiring manager is for a given position. Tap into your personal network to learn the names of hiring managers. If you know someone who works for the company that has posted a position online, ask your contact to find out the name of the person hiring for that position. Also use the library, phone book and internet to find names of hiring managers.

The worst-case scenario is that your letter will begin "Dear Hiring Manager for [name of position]." It's not the best approach, but if you absolutely cannot find a name, this salutation does at least provide some specificity.

3. **Telling the employer what the company can do for you instead of what you can do for the company.**

This mistake is particularly common among new college graduates and other inexperienced job-seekers. In most cases, employers are in business to make a profit. They want to know what you can do for their bottom line, not what they can do to fulfill your career dreams. Tell the employer how you can meet his or her needs and contribute to the company.

4. **Leaving the ball in the employer's court.** Too many cover letters end with a line like this: "I look forward to hearing from you." Proactive cover letters, in which the job-seeker requests an interview and promises to follow up with a phone call, are far more effective. Don't be vague about your desire to be interviewed. Come right out and ask for an interview. Then, take your specific action a step farther and tell the recipient that you will contact him or her in a specified period of time to arrange an interview appointment. Obviously, if you say you will follow up, you have to do so. If you take this proactive approach and follow up, you will be much more likely to get interviews than if you did not follow up. This follow-up aspect is another good reason to obtain the specific name of the hiring manager. Here's a sample closing paragraph requesting specific action and describing the writer's planned follow-up.

I would like to be considered for a sales position in which someone of my background could make a contribution. I will contact you soon to arrange for an interview. Should you require any additional information, I can be contacted at the phone numbers listed above.

5. **Being boring and formulaic.** Don't waste your first paragraph by writing a boring introduction. Use the first paragraph to grab the employer's attention. Tell the employer why you are writing and summarize the reasons you are qualified for the position, expanding on your qualifications in later paragraphs. Read more. Don't use such clichés as "Enclosed please find my resume" or "As you can see on my resume enclosed herewith." Employers can see that your resume is enclosed; they don't need you to tell them. Such trite phrases just waste precious space. Write a letter that will make the employer want to get to know you better. Allowing typos, misspellings, or incorrect grammar/punctuation into your letter. Your letter reflects your ability to write and communicate. Be sure your document is letter-perfect before sending it out.

Proofread your letter. Put it down and proof it again a few hours later with a fresh eye. Then enlist a friend to review it for errors.

6. **Rehashing your resume.** Use your cover letter to highlight the aspects of your resume that are relevant to the position, but you're wasting precious space—and the potential employer's time—if you simply repeat your resume.
7. **Failing to specifically tailor your letter to the job you're applying for.** If you're answering an ad or online job posting, the specifics of your cover letter should be tied as closely as possible to the actual wording of the ad you're responding to. In his book, *Don't Send a Resume*, Jeffrey Fox calls the best letters written in response to want ads "Boomerang letters" because they "fly the want ad words—the copy—back to the writer of the ad." In employing what Fox calls "a compelling sales technique," he advises letter writers to: "Flatter the person who wrote the ad with your response letter. Echo the author's words and intent. Your letter should be a mirror of the ad." Fox notes that when the recipient reads such a letter, the thought process will be: "This person seems to fit the description. This person gets it."

A particularly effective way to deploy the specifics of a want ad to your advantage is to use a two-column format in which you quote in the left-hand column specific qualifications that come right from the employer's want ad and in the right-hand column, your attributes that meet those qualifications. The two-column format is extremely

effective when you possess all the qualifications for a job, but it can even sell you when you are lacking one or more qualification. The format so clearly demonstrates that you are qualified in so many areas that the employer may overlook the areas in which you lack the exact qualifications. See a sample letter in a two-column format.

9. **Rambling on too long and telling the story of your life/career.** Keep your letter as brief as possible. Never, never more than one page. Keeping to four or five paragraphs of no more than three sentences each is a good guideline. Using bullet points in the letter is a good way to break up blocks of text and interest the reader. Some job-seekers tend to use their cover letters to provide a narrative of their life or career. That's not what the letter is all about; it's a marketing tool that should focus on the qualifications that will sell you to the employer. Your letter should answer the question that the employer will be asking while reading the words you've written: "Why should I hire this person?" Answer with your Unique Selling Proposition. Use simple language and uncomplicated sentence structure. Ruthlessly eliminate all unnecessary words.
10. **Using wimpy language.** Avoid such phrases as "I feel" and "I believe." Your statements will be much stronger without them. It's best to either leave off the qualifier or use a stronger qualifier, such as "I am confident," "I am convinced," or "I am positive."

Resource: Katharine Hansen
http://www.quintcareers.com/cover_letter_mistakes.html

EMAIL COVER LETTER FORMAT

To: janedoe@business.com	Recipient's Email
Subject: Marketing Position	Position you Want
Dear Ms. Doe:	Salutation
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	Body
Sincerely, Awesome Student	Closing

COVER LETTER CONTENT

Name

Current Address: xxx Street • City, ST ZIP • Phone Number • Email Address

Permanent Address: xxx Street • City, ST ZIP • Phone Number

May 20, 2006

Mr. U. R. Employer
Director, Personnel Department
We Have Lots of Money, Incorporated
Auburn, AL 36830

Dear Mr. Employer: (address to particular person, always)

Introductory Paragraph: State why you are writing; name the position or type of work for which you are applying; and mention where you learned of the position or organization. Give specific dates if you have had specific conversations with a person, and include this personal reference as it may attract more attention.

Body: The next one or two paragraphs should be your sales pitch. Explain why you are interested and how you best fit this position. "Tease" the reader enough to read your resume. Emphasize particular skills or duties that are part of the job description. As a recent graduate, you may want to use a paragraph to address academic qualifications and another paragraph to highlight experience and skills. Illustrate in this section that you have knowledge of the company's needs and of the position to demonstrate you have done your "homework." Be confident!

Closing Paragraph: Be short and to the point. Indicate what steps you would like to happen next—if you want an interview, ask for it! **Passive Approach:** Results from you saying, "I look forward to hearing from you," and places responsibility on the employer to make the next move. **Active Approach:** Puts you in the position to initiate contact with the employer. State a specific date in the near future when you will verify receipt of the letter and/or seek to arrange an appointment. If you say you will contact them, do! Finally, thank the employer for his or her time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Always Sign Your Name in Black Ink

Ima Tiger

Enclosure