



Creating a Professional Cover Letter

Cover Letter Dos and Don'ts

Do NOT apply for a job without considering the attachment of a cover letter. Studies have shown that more than 60% of hiring managers prefer a good cover letter attached to a resume. (CareerBuilder.com) Your cover letter introduces your resume and tells the hiring manager that you are a qualified, serious candidate for the job.

In an extremely competitive job market, neglecting your cover letter is a big mistake. Why? A cover letter is your first opportunity to tell a prospective employer about yourself, and to do so in your own words. Like a written interview, a cover letter gives you the opportunity to point out applicable experience and qualities that make you right for the job. And just like any other important job searching tool, there are definite do's and don'ts to follow to make sure your cover letter is an asset, not a hindrance.

Do personalize your letter. If your boss greeted you each morning by saying, "Hello, employee," you would be irked that he/she did not know your name. Cover letters beginning with "Dear Sir or Madam" and "To Whom It May Concern" leave similar impressions. If the job posting does not specify who will receive the applications, find out. Look online or call the company's main line to ask for the name of the corporate recruiter or hiring manager. Once you find out, use a formal title such as Mr., Ms. or Mrs. It adds a personal but professional touch that will be appreciated.

*Put a little personality into your writing. Recruiters aren't looking for jokes, but they do want to know a real person is applying for the job. Just changing the "To" and "From" fields in a form letter will come across as lazy and generic. Use your own words and ideas.

Do NOT send a generic cover letter to many different companies. Hiring managers can spot a mass mailing a mile away. What gets their attention are letters that address the company – and its needs – specifically. Research the company prior to writing the letter. Check out recent news and read through the company's website, and then incorporate what you learned into your cover letter. Doing so will demonstrate to employers that you are informed, motivated and willing to go the extra mile.

*Be sure to adhere to business etiquette. As you would on any professional correspondence, include your full contact information as well as the hiring manager's name and company address. And of course, avoid any typos and grammatical errors, which include text jargon (k? thx).

Do address the specific position advertised if you are answering an ad Companies that post openings are making your life easier by telling you the qualities they are seeking. Show the company that you paid attention. If a company advertises that it is looking for sales experience, make sure you address your sales experience. One way to do this is by making a table for yourself before writing your letter. List the company's stated needs in one column, and your corresponding experience and qualifications in another column. You can then use that information to write a letter that tells them exactly what they want to know.

Sure, a paycheck would be nice, but hopefully you want this job for another reason. The company's history, accomplishments and culture probably played a role in your decision to apply. Let the hiring manager know. It tells him or her that you've done your homework and are serious about being a member of the team.

Do NOT make the reader work too hard to see that you are right for the position. Include specific examples about your past successes and experience. If you are looking for a marketing position, give the reader detailed information about a marketing campaign you successfully executed. Don't just tell the reader that you are motivated. Give an example that shows your motivation. You need to lay all of your pertinent information out in a way that lets the person making the hiring decision easily see how your experience and qualities fit the company's needs.

Hiring managers read the cover letter before they (hopefully) flip the page to look at the résumé. They might decide they don't want to read the résumé if your cover letter sounds like it's restating the exact same information without offering anything new. Discuss a specific achievement or experience that shows your qualifications for the job. The cover letter and résumé combined give you their attention for only two pages, so don't waste it repeating yourself.

Do get to the point. Hiring managers receive letters and resumes from dozens and even hundreds of applicants, and often just don't have the time to read lengthy, wordy letters. Be direct. In the first paragraph, include the title of the position you are interested in and then move on to your specific qualifications immediately. Keep the cover letter to a few organized paragraphs that fit on one page. You want to give the reader a glimpse into your personality and your ability as an employee, but no one needs to know every little detail about your life.

Do NOT end your letter passively. Nobody gets a job by sitting at home waiting for the phone to ring. Similarly, not many people get a call once a resume or cover letter is sent. Since you are the one looking for work, you need to take the initiative and follow up. Instead of ending the letter with "I look forward to hearing from you," close with "I will call you next week to discuss a time for us to meet." Once you've included this call to action, however, make sure you follow your own promise.

Do take your time. You already know how important a cover letter is, so don't rush through it. Treat it with the same care you used for your résumé. Check your facts. Write several drafts, revise it and look it over again. Let your first impression be a good one. Write and edit your letter with great care. Nothing says "I don't really want this job" like a cover letter with typos, incorrect information, or spelling errors. Make sure the company's name is spelled correctly. Check to see if the contact is a male or female. And, while it sounds almost too obvious to mention, be sure to sign your letter. Careless – and easily correctable – mistakes tell the company that you did not take this simple task seriously. **Good luck!**

(Visit *Careerbuilder.com* for more useful tips)

Career Services

Bailey Center, 10th floor - P.O. Box 2000, Hanceville, AL 35077-2000
Ph. (256) 352-8133 Fax (256) 352-8188

Guidelines for Writing a Cover Letter

The best cover letters are addressed to a particular person by name and are short and to the point.

Paragraph 1: Who You Are and What You Want

In your initial paragraph, state the reason for the letter, name the specific position or type of work for which you are applying, and indicate from which resource (college career center, new medium, friend, and employment service) you learned of the opening.

Paragraph 2: How You Can Benefit The Employer

Indicate why you are interested in the position, the company, and its products or services—above all, what you can do for the employer. If you're a recent graduate, explain how your academic background makes you a qualified candidate for the position. If you have some practical work experience, point out your specific achievements or unique appropriate educational background and work experience. That's a plus. Try not to repeat the same information the reader will find in the resume. However, do refer the reader to the enclosed resume or application form, which summarizes your qualification, training, and experience, or whatever medium you may be using to present yourself. Try and use several shorter paragraphs rather than one large block of text.

Paragraph 3: The Call For Action

In the closing paragraph, indicate your desire for a personal interview and your flexibility as to time and place. Repeat your phone number in the letter and offer any assistance to help in a speedy response. Finally don't forget to thank the reader for reviewing your letter and resume.

For your cover letters, use paper that matches your resume. It should be typed with no mistake, erasures, or whiteout.

DO include your telephone number, e-mail and message number in your return address. It makes it easy and convenient for employers to respond immediately.

DO NOT tell the employer something they already know—like this: "In today's highly competitive world, product quality and customer service is extremely important." Of course, that is true, but they certainly do not want to hear it from an applicant.

Cover Letter Template

Contact Information

First and Last Name

Address

City, State, Zip Code

Phone Number

Email Address

Date

Employer Contact Information

Name

Title

Company

Address

City, State, Zip Code

Dear Mr. /Mrs. /Ms. Last Name:

First Paragraph: The first paragraph of your letter should include why you are writing. Mention the position you are applying for. Include the name of a mutual contact, if you have one. Be clear and concise regarding your request. Convince the reader that they should grant the interview or appointment which you request.

Middle Paragraph(s): The next section of your cover letter should describe what you have to offer the employer. Make strong connections between your abilities and their needs. Mention specifically how your skills and experience match the need of the job you are applying for. You are interpreting your resume with your cover letter, not repeating it.

Final Paragraph: Conclude your cover letter by thanking the employer for considering you for the position. Include information on how you will follow-up. State that you will do so and indicate when (one week is typical). You may want to reduce the time between sending out your resume and follow-up if you fax or email it.

Respectfully yours,

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Example of Cover Letter

Jeanine Culpepper
2456 County Road
Cullman, AL 35055
(256) 352-0001
JeanineCulpepper@aol.com

July 11, 2011

Alyce Malcolm
Human Resources Director
Wallace State Community College
P.O. Box 1200
Cullman, AL 35055

Dear Mrs. Malcolm:

I am responding to the announcement posted through Wallace State Community College that the college is opening a new Theatre Department and is planning to expand their teaching staff. I have a very high interest in a teaching career. With experience working at both the elementary and high school levels, as well as several years experience of professional dance, I have a diverse background with much to offer your production.

As a graduate of Wallace State Community College with a degree in Liberal Arts with over two years of working experience, I have gained an understanding in all phases of Theatre. In addition, I worked for several summers at Sunny Beaches Art Camp where I staged several plays each season.

With my knowledge in these areas, I am sure that I would make a contribution to your expanding organization.

My Resume is enclosed; I will contact you next week to discuss employment opportunities. I look forward to meeting with you.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Jeanine Culpepper

Jeanine Culpepper

