

## Cover Letter Tips

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### Cover Letter Do's

- Match the paper and font style to your résumé.
  - Keep your cover letter to one page.
  - Address the letter to a specific individual. Call to request the name and title of the person responsible for hiring college graduates in your area. Make sure you spell the name correctly. As a last resort, you may direct the letter to someone with a specific job title, such as “Director of Human Resources”.
  - Write from the reader’s point of view. Letters that shout “Me! Me! Me!” are not effective. Minimize the use of the word “I.” Focus on the needs of the employer and how hiring you will lead to higher production and greater efficiency.
  - Be positive and confident. Your cover letter should motivate the reader to want to find out more about you.
  - Use an attention-getting introduction that invites, informs and entices.
  - State the position for which you are applying, and point out your relevant qualifications, telling why you are uniquely suited for the job.
  - Focus on key qualifications you wish to emphasize. Do not repeat the contents of your résumé! Select relevant experiences, and give examples that back up the information on your résumé.
- Add power by using facts, examples or evidence. The statement “can initiate and accomplish tasks with little direction,” has no credibility until backed-up with an example: “independently began operation of organization’s Web site.”
  - Tailor your letter to the needs of the company and the requirements of the position -- how will the employer benefit by hiring you? Use the position announcement and company literature for clues about what to stress.
  - Say good things about yourself, but paint an accurate picture. This is one of those rare occasions in which modesty will hurt you. On the other hand, if you exaggerate even once, your reader will suspect everything else you wrote is also an exaggeration or possibly even a lie.
  - Inform the employer of your intent to contact him or her within the next few weeks. Remember to make the follow-up call once the résumé and letter have been sent out!
  - Edit ruthlessly and avoid passive verbs. Using active verbs will produce shorter sentences.
  - A letter written in a friendly tone, as opposed to one that is stiff and formal, enables you to say things more clearly and briefly.
  - Make your letter perfect -- no typos, misspellings or factual errors. Have someone proofread the letter before you send it out.

- Make your letter look attractive. Look at the completed letter at a distance and determine if it looks balanced and centered on the page.

#### **Common Cover Letter Mistakes**

- Using a post office box for your return address. Post office boxes seem transient.
- Abbreviating St., Cir., Ave., and others -- It looks more professional to spell out the words.
- Forgetting the date or salutation.
- Addressing your letter "To whom it may concern."
- Addressing your letter to "Dear Sir." Many readers are women. If gender is unclear, or you've have been unable to determine who will receive your letter, you may use something like "Dear Human Resources Manager."
- Handwriting or typing over an old résumé or letterhead to make corrections.
- Using a sticky note as a cover letter. Attaching a Post-it Note to your résumé says, "This isn't important. I was too busy to write a real letter."
- Handwriting letters. Brief thank you notes can be handwritten, if legible, but all other correspondence should be typed.
- Being too "creative." Avoid unusual fonts and graphics. Business letters should be conservative.
- Lengthy letters. The biggest marketing mistake is trying to say too much. Limit sentences to seven or eight words, and limit the paragraphs in the body of your letter to four or five sentences.

- Not saying enough, or not sending a cover letter with a résumé. Your cover letter is an opportunity to sell yourself!
- Fonts that are too small. Think you might use a smaller font so you can get more information on one page? Think again. Your letter may be dismissed if the reader has to work too hard to read it.
- Spelling errors, grammar errors, typos, awkward sentences, and oddball phrases. Make sure you have someone else proofread and critique your correspondence!
- Forgetting to include your phone number.
- No signature. Your name should be typed below your handwritten signature.
- Forgetting to enclose your résumé. If you say you're enclosing your résumé, make sure you do so.
- Even worse, forgetting to put the letter and résumé in the envelope. Employers report sometimes receiving empty envelopes.