

## CREATING COVER LETTERS THAT SELL

### GETTING STARTED

A cover letter briefly describes the position you are seeking, why you are uniquely qualified for the job, and why you are interested in this company. It can provide a sense of who you are that may not necessarily come across in a résumé. You will use a cover letter when you know the exact position you are applying for, and when you know the name of the person you are sending your résumé to. Keep in mind the following as you prepare the cover letter:

What tone do I want to convey in my letter?  
Have I done my research about this company and this position?  
What is unique about me that would interest this employer?

### FAQS

*Why is a cover letter important?*

The cover letter is the very first thing a hiring manager reads. It must capture his or her attention and make him or her want to read your résumé.

*Is the appearance of the cover letter important?*

Yes, it is extremely important. Just as you put on your best professional clothes to go to an interview, you must use the best paper, the most professional looking fonts, and otherwise do what is necessary to convey the unspoken message that you are a quality person.

*Do I use a cover letter in every job application situation?*

No. In some cases you may send a letter to an organization inquiring about whether or not they have any job openings. You would also ask who to send your résumé to. You would not use a cover letter if you visit an organization in person and are asked to fill out a job application. Internet job searches are a new field—covering letters are not always necessary.

### MAKING IT HAPPEN

The guidelines for writing a cover letter that really sells are fairly straightforward. But they do require you to do your homework.

Each cover letter that you write should be uniquely tailored to the specific position that you are applying for. When you intersperse well-written letters with effective face-to-face and telephone networking, you will conduct a more successful job campaign.

*Reasons for Writing a Cover Letter*

You may write a cover letter and send a résumé to someone for a variety of reasons. Typically these include: responding to an ad; following up on a lead from your networking; advising a potential employer of your availability.

### *Identify a Specific Person to Receive Your Cover Letter and résumé*

Cover letters addressed to “Dear Sir,” or “To Whom It May Concern,” get quickly thrown into the wastebasket. If you do not know a specific person within the company, you can either call the company and ask, or you may be able to find out on the Internet or at a reference library.

### *Keep Your Letter Short and to the Point*

An effective cover letter is typically two or three paragraphs long.

### *State the Position that You Are Seeking*

In the very first line of your cover letter you will explain its purpose. It may read something like, “I am very interested in the position of Production Manager as described in your September 19th advertisement in the Big City Newspaper.” Or, “I was given your name by Ms. Mary Bettencourt in connection with the position in Human Resource Information Systems.”

### *Show Your Understanding of the Company’s Business Issues*

In order to stand out from the stack of letters and résumés that the hiring manager has on his or her desk, you must show that you have done your homework about the company and their current business issues and challenges. The Internet is a marvelous tool for learning more about a particular company. The first step is to go to the company’s Web site. Most companies have a section for recent news articles about them, particularly their press releases. You should also be reading the best business newspaper and magazines available. They will give you a sense of the major industry issues, and they may also have particular information about companies that you are targeting.

It is a good idea to save these articles in a file for each company. They are valuable to review if you actually get an interview. You can also use your friendly reference librarian to help you research some basic information about the company in business reference books.

### *Describe Your Qualifications*

Very early in the cover letter you must interest the hiring manager in your qualifications. Explain how your qualifications will help this organization achieve its goals. For example, “I understand that your company is planning on creating a Web presence to support your sales. In my current position as Director of Internet Sales for Speedy Sales Company, I have helped to increase our market share by 13% in the past year.” Show how you specifically can help this organization with the issues or challenges it is facing.

### *Ask for an Interview*

There are several ways to do this. You might say that you are going to be in their area during a specific time period and that you would be available for an interview. Or you can simply say, “I look forward to discussing how my qualifications can help your organization to be more successful. I will call you within a week to set up an appointment.”

## *Be Yourself*

Résumés are cut and dried, and only convey your experiences and your accomplishments. Your cover letter is your one opportunity to convey something about your personality and your uniqueness before you actually go to the interview. Keep it professional, but don't be afraid to show your enthusiasm, your willingness to work hard, and your interest in the position. Potential employers are really attracted to job applicants who show an interest in them and who seem very eager to be a part of the company.

## *Present a Professional Appearance in Your Cover Letter*

First of all, make absolutely certain that there are no grammatical or spelling errors. Fortunately, most word processing programs catch and correct these problems, but make sure that you proof-read the letter before you send it out. Use the highest quality paper that you can find. Unless you are applying for a specialized job in the arts or advertising field, you will probably want to use a quiet, neutral toned paper such as ivory, light gray, or light beige. Use a standard and easily readable font such as Times New Roman or Helvetica.

If you are mailing the cover letter and résumé, send them in a large flat envelope. And send two copies. Many hiring managers will need to circulate your letter and résumé. Photocopies are better if the originals have not been folded.

## **DO NOT**

### *You Use a Cover Letter Template from a Book*

It's okay to read through cover letter samples in a cover letter book, such as the one recommended in "Resources" below. You will get a feel for the kinds of information people include, the layout of the letter, and the tone of the letter. You can then customize letters to fit your particular need. Experienced managers have seen hundreds of cover letters, and they are tired of hearing the same old textbook phrases. Make sure you personalize each of your cover letters so that they are targeted to a particular person, and so that they represent you and your uniqueness.

### *You Use the Same Cover Letter for all Your Job Applications*

A manager wants to know that you are interested enough to understand this particular company and that you have taken the time to write a personal letter.

## **MORE HELP**

### **BOOKS**

Krannich, Ronald L., and Caryl R. Krannich. "201 Dynamite Job Search Letters." Manassas Park, VA: Impact Publications, 2001.

Wynett, Stanley. "Cover Letters That Will Get You the Job You Want." Cincinnati, Ohio: Betterway Books, 1993.

## WEBSITES

[Hotjobs](#)

[Washington Post's Guide To Writing Letters](#)