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Cover Letter Tips

The cover letter is probably the most underrated component of the job search. If written well, it can pique the curiosity of the employer and motivate him/her to carefully read your resume. If written poorly, the resume may never get read.

Basic Tips

- 1) Write to a specific individual - never Dear Sir or Madam.
- 2) Tailor your letters - don't mass produce them.
- 3) Keep it brief - 3 or 4 SHORT paragraphs will suffice.
- 4) Make sure to use terminology that is not too technical - this might come off as arrogant and demonstrates insensitivity to the audience.
- 5) Use paper and print which match your resume. Use the same header.

Keep the bigger picture in mind - remember, the point of a cover letter is to get them to read your resume and the point of the resume is to get yourself the interview. If you have the interview, the resume is almost useless, except as a good starting point for discussion during the actual interview. If you bomb the interview, you're screwed no matter what.

What exactly is a cover letter trying to convey?

The cover letter should try to steer the reader to "What conclusion do you want your audience to get from your cover letter, that is not so readily apparent from your resume?" or in other words, "What do you want the reader to think after reading your resume? - that's what you want to convey on the cover letter."

Introduction

The introduction introduces who you are and why you are writing to this person. Start with your name, even though it's on the header and resume. Pretend that it is a regular conversation. Throughout your cover letter, do NOT use big, fancy, SAT words. Write as if you were talking in person to this person.

After your name and VERY brief introduction, say what you are applying for and how you heard about it. It is not always necessary to say how you heard about it, because since there's an opening, people will hear about it; if the employer is really curious, they will ask - it all depends on the specific writing style. Mention your major and school and your accomplishments. Be assertive and confident of yourself, but do not appear arrogant.

The Body of the Letter - Your Sales Pitch

Keep in mind that your cover letter is NOT to regurgitate your resume – that is what your resume is for. Your cover letter should cover other aspects not covered in your resume. This is where you need to emphasize your strengths and relate them to the requirements of the position. Tell the employer what you can do for them as opposed to what they can do for you. Stress that you possess certain skills which can help your potential employer solve certain concrete problems.



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This is the opportunity to let the person know that you've done your research. Talk about the department you are applying for, or if it's a general cover letter, talk about a department that would interest you and why. Answer the following "W" questions:

- Who (Department Name)
- What (what it does – functionality)
- Why (why are you interested in it)

It is essential to sell yourself – if you don't, who will? Brag about your achievements, don't hold back, but of course strike a balance between confidence and arrogance. You want to show that you are proactive, have self-initiative, self-motivated, a team player, and easy to manage. Cite specific examples of previous experiences (whether it's job-related or non-job related). Describe your major accomplishments, not only on the job, but also extra-curricular activities and community service.

The body of the cover letter should be two paragraphs – three MAX and that's stretching it already.

SHOW DON'T TELL!!
Give me EXAMPLES!!

It is important to show to the reader that you have the qualities they are looking for in an employee. This involves citing specific examples of experience when you exhibited traits that every employer wants (such as analytical abilities and communication skills) This is much more powerful than simply stating that you have the necessary abilities, rather than just stating them without any justification. The reader will always remember a powerful example communicated to stress certain qualities, rather than the hundred other cover letters that merely state that you have strong analytical abilities without any supporting evidence.

Don't tell me you're smart, show me you're smart - did you train anyone? did you teach a course?

If you want to demonstrate that you are smart and self-motivated and can hit the ground running, don't just tell me so - give me an example, such as you learned something your first week on the job and then turned around and wrote a tutorial and trained the department and become the de facto expert.

Do you believe you are a leader and a team player? Don't just say so - tell me that you've managed a team of people or interns, tell me that you were an officer of some club on campus (not just a member) or how you were instrumental in a project or something.

If you are an IT person and want to show your knowledge of a management consulting project, don't just say that you "are familiar with the life cycle of a project", explain to me how you added value in the proposal stage and how you architected or helped architect the systems analysis and design phase.

If you are a Finance person and want to convey your knowledge of finance and analytical ability, don't just tell me, but show me by saying that you built a model.

Show me that you can get involved by describing your extra-curricular activities - if you graduated recently, were you active on campus? - if you are a professional, are you involved with non-profit organizations and industry associations?



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Everyone wants to show that they do excellent work, so don't just tell me that you exceed expectations, but prove to me that you exceed expectations by citing specific examples.

Think you have excellent communication and inter-personal skills? Great, tell me that you were part of a team and describe how you contributed to the common goal. (Saying that you stayed up all night to finish something is not a good example of being a team player.)

Here's a common job requirement: "Ability to prioritize workload and shift attention among changing tasks and priorities". If you want to show that you are highly organized and can multi-task, then be sure to explain how you handled 5 different projects successfully under strict deadlines.

The Final Paragraph

Close by thanking the person and saying something like "Enclosed is my resume... I look forward to hearing from you..."