

Prepare

Interviews and Salary Negotiations



25 Tips for Cover Letters

Cover letters are your first sales pitch to a potential employer. Remember that employers receive hundreds of resumes and cover letters from people who are

applying for the job you want. Your goal is to stand out from the other candidates. A good cover letter introduces you to the employer and explains why you are the best candidate applying for the job. The following are guidelines to help you create a cover letter that stands out from the crowd.

1. Proofread your letter for errors and readability.

A professional cover letter contains no spelling, typing, or grammatical errors. Job applicants are frequently disqualified because of such mistakes.

2. Address your letter to the person who can hire you.

Call the company and find out the name and title of the person to whom to address your letter, usually a hiring manager or department head. It shows initiative, resourcefulness, and will impress the reader that you figured out a way to address him or her personally.

3. Send your letter to an individual, not a company.

Use his or her name and title, when available. Do not use a title such as Mr. or Ms. unless

you are certain of gender. Your goal is to get your letter to the person who is actually making the hiring decision. Use “Human Resource Manager” or “Personnel Director” only when you cannot find a name.

4. Write in your own words.

Make sure that your letter sounds personalized. Choose a writing style that matches your personality. Employers are looking for knowledge, enthusiasm, focus, drive, dedication, and honesty. Incorporate as many of these characteristics in your cover letter and writing style as possible.

5. Use proper grammar and spelling.

Because it is so critical to be as accurate and professional as possible with your cover letter, don't hesitate to utilize the variety of reference tools that are available to help you with grammar, spelling, and letter writing, including your dictionary and thesaurus.

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6. Show you know something about the company and the industry.

This is where your research comes in. Don't go overboard, just make it clear that you didn't pick this company out of the phone book. You know who they are, what they do, and why you would like to work for them.

Introduce yourself and why you want the job in the first paragraph...

7. Use terms and phrases that are meaningful to the employer.

Customize your letter as much as possible to the needs of the employer. Think about the company, their customers, and the work you see yourself doing for them. Use industry jargon and career-specific keywords where appropriate.

8. Be sure to include a return address and phone number.

Your return address includes your street address, city, state, zip code, telephone number with area code, and e-mail. Put this information at the top of your cover letter. Always include the best time to contact you.

9. Adapt a formal tone to your letter to promote yourself as a professional.

Your letter should be close to a business proposal instead of a plea for an interview. What do you offer that is of value? What objectives can you help them achieve?

10. Emphasize the benefits to hiring you.

What can you do for the organization that will create interest and arouse a desire for an interview? Don't just explain why you are qualified, illustrate why hiring you will have a positive impact on the company's bottom line.

11. Sound confident.

If you meet all the stated requirements for the job, spell this out in your letter. Accentuate the good match between your skills and their needs. Doing so will emphasize your viability as a candidate.

12. Provide readers with an insight into your past success.

Make your accomplishments, skills, and background the subjects of your sentences, and

emphasize how these abilities can contribute to the organization. Use concrete, specific language so that the reader gets a good sense of who you are and what you have done.

13. Draft your letter in a way that demonstrates your fit within the organization.

Use your cover letter to describe your skills, abilities, personality, and experience and how these qualities will benefit the organization. Demonstrate how your experience matches the requirements of the position.

14. Structure your letter in an organized, deliberate manner.

Introduce yourself and why you want the job in the first paragraph, demonstrate your qualifications in the second paragraph, and ask for the interview in the third.

*“Don't
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15. Visually call attention to your qualifications!

Use underlining, bolding, indents, or bullets to highlight key information contained in your cover letter, but use these formatting techniques sparingly and consistently. If you emphasize too many qualifications, your cover letter will become hard to read.

16. Keep it short.

Keep your letter simple, clean, short, direct, and to the point. Use no more than five to seven lines per paragraph. Vary the length of each sentence. Sentences shouldn't be very long, but you also don't want a staccato stream of very short sentences. One page is the maximum for letters.

17. Demonstrate your skills.

For any position, there are two types of skills: core skills that any serious applicant will be

expected to have, and a much broader range of skills that would be useful to the employer but go beyond the scope of the minimum requirements. Your core skills get you in the door; your other skills make you stand out from the competition.

18. Send original letters to each employer.

Sending a personalized letter to each hiring manager will always achieve better results than mass-produced or mail-merged letters. Whenever possible, tailor your letter to the specific needs of each employer.

19. Direct the reader to specific information in your resume.

Your cover letter should be vibrant and bursting with energy. It should mention the highlights of your resume and tease the reader into wanting to see more. Consider including a question or statement about you that would entice the reader to read your resume, such as “The time-saving techniques I developed have saved my current company 1.3 million dollars over the last 3 years. Let me demonstrate how I can save money for your company.”

20. Include a copy of your resume.

Remember that the main purpose of a cover letter is to get your resume into the hands of the employer and request an interview. Don't forget to enclose a copy of your resume.

21. Open with an attention grabber that generates interest immediately.

There are many ways to start your letter. Your opening statement should get to the point quickly, but engage your reader's attention. If your first sentences demonstrate how you can

contribute to the organization, you have a strong opening.

22. Do not enclose a photo.

Unless you are seeking employment in modeling, acting, or other performance industries, it is inappropriate to send a photograph with your cover letter. An employer will have a chance to see you in person, should you reach the interview stage. Until then, a photo will not help you get in the door.

23. Do not use all capitalized letters.

Some employers may consider using ALL CAPS unprofessional. Use bold, italics, or underlining instead to highlight information in your cover letter. Additionally, do not justify the right margins. The contents and organization of your letter are the most important elements, but presentation has an effect too. Be sure your letter has a professional appearance.

24. Finish your letter with a request.

The primary goal of your cover letter is to introduce yourself, demonstrate your qualifications, and request an interview. Be sure and ask for the interview at the end of your cover letter and then let the employer know when and how you will follow up.

25. Send your resume and cover letter unfolded.

Sending your resume and cover letter unfolded in a full-sized, flat envelope may give you an edge on the competition. Your resume will have a neater, more professional appearance, and your resume will be easier to scan into a database.

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