

How to Write a

Compelling Cover Letter



Writing a good cover letter may not be the key to landing the job but it is essential to getting the interview. A poorly written or constructed cover letter will severely hinder your job search.

Most people have difficulty writing an effective cover letter because they are uncomfortable selling their strengths and the benefits that they bring to the company. Another reason cover letters fail is that they sell too much or come on too strong. A cover letter is meant to sell you to the company but should be done by informing your future employer and not over-selling them.

Remember that your cover letter is first impression you make on your potential employer. This means that quickly scribbling a cover letter and attaching it to your flawless resume will most likely blow your chance for an interview.

The ideal cover letter explains how your unique set of skills and experience make you the right person for the posted position. This is the correct place, rather than your resume, to demonstrate your personality and passion for the position.

The first thing to remember about writing a compelling cover letter is research. If you don't know anything about the company to which you are applying then you can't write a good cover letter. Visit the company's website and find out what they do. Are they a large company or a small company?



What impression does the website, news articles, or job description give you about how you could positively impact the organization? Lastly, find out the hiring manager's name by looking through the company website, using LinkedIn.com, or calling the front desk.

The letter itself should not need a clever or witty introduction but the opening statement should grab the attention of the reader. If you have been referred by a third party then make that connection clear immediately. Name dropping may not be appropriate in other situations but mentioning an individual who the manager knows and respects will get their attention and prompt them to keep reading.

The first paragraph should state the purpose of your letter and tell the manager what position you are applying for and why it interests you. If you're responding to a job posting, mention where you saw it.

The second paragraph is where you should summarize your credentials without reiterating word-for-word your resume. You can discuss your most relevant accomplishments and emphasize your qualifications. This is where it is important to keep the most salient points above the fold. In other words be sure that the information you want read is in the first couple paragraphs before the manager is distracted or sets your résumé aside in a pile of others.

Be as specific as possible in your letter. Be brief but very thorough and use as much specificity as possible. In other words, discuss your accomplishments in measurable terms such as, "I increased revenue by 40% through. . ."

Also, be sure to include industry-specific key words. If you are applying in a specialized profession, then the terminology used should match the job. Hiring managers will notice if the letters and e-mails they receive appear to come from people who work in the industry. It is a good idea to include some industry buzzwords in your cover letter as a way of increasing the chances that your resume will be read.

At the close of your cover letter leave a call for action. This means that instead of saying "thank you for your consideration," you directly tell them what your next step will be. For example, "I will follow up with you in a few days to inquire about setting up a meeting to discuss my qualifications for the position further."

Finally, before sending your cover letter and resume go over it for grammatical and spelling errors. Nothing says that you lack attention to detail more than grammatical or spelling errors in the documents you are sending potential employers. Many applicants are declined for employment simply because they failed to proof-read their resume or cover letter. Remember that the first impression your potential employer will have of you is from your cover letter and resume!



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