

Cover Letter

What is cover letter?

In the past, when the job market was less competitive, a cover letter was often a simple formality that introduced your resume.

Today, it is a vital instrument that "sells yourself" to the recruiter. **In a job search, first impressions really do count** and a cover letter is a powerful tool that can get you noticed.

There are many kinds of job search letter. When discussing "cover letters", we are generally referring to letters which accompany resume in response to job advertisements. These guidelines will help you to write effective cover letters. The ideas can also be applied when writing networking, self-marketing and thank you letters.

An effective letter should:

- Gain the attention of the recruiter and **persuade them to invite you for an interview**
- Outline the main ways in which you meet the requirements of the job and can contribute to the company's business
- Draw attention to "something extra", making you stand out from the other applicants
- Demonstrate that you understand the job and the company's business
- Express your interest and energy.

Cover Letter

The "do's" of cover letter writing

Do send a tailored cover letter with every job application that you make

It can be useful to design a standard letter template, which you can then tailor to the requirements of each job application.

Click [here](#) to view tips on tailoring a cover letter to a job advert.

Do use the highest quality paper you can afford

Use the same paper for your resumé, cover letter and envelope. Headed paper creates the strongest impression. Avoid folding your letter: today, it is likely to be scanned into an applicant database.

Do use a word processor with a readable (and scannable) font and a laser printer

The finished document should create a professional and competent image.

Do follow a logical and professional structure for your letter

Even if you are writing a [high impact cover letter](#), your letter should still include your address and contact details, the recipient's address, the date, a greeting, an introductory paragraph, three to

five paragraphs of text, a closing paragraph and a closing statement. Limit the letter to one page, if possible.

Click [here](#) to see an example of a standard cover letter format.

Do research the name of the person to whom the letter should be addressed

Names are often listed in business directories, which are available in libraries and the Trade and Development Council. You can also get them from the relevant secretary or receptionist. If you cannot find the person's name but know their gender, use "Sir" or "Madam". Never use "Sir/Madam".

As a final option, you can use "The Recruitment Manager", assuming that you are writing to a manager who is currently recruiting. Always follow the instructions on the job advertisement.

Do specify the position you are seeking ;V use a "with reference" heading

By adding a "RE: Finance Manager Job Vacancy" heading, you can avoid wasting space in the bulk of the letter.

Do use a compelling opening statement to attract attention

The opening statement is your first chance to create a positive impression. It would be a pity to waste it with a bland statement. For example, the phrase "I have enclosed my resume in application for the above position;" does not inspire the recruiter to read further.

Click [here](#) to view compelling opening phrases.

Do consider using high impact tools and techniques to add interest

Some specific techniques can help draw attention to your key selling points and assist you to stand out from the crowd.

Click [here](#) to read "A guide to writing high impact cover letters"

Do focus on the company and the things they would gain if they employed you

A recruiting company is only interested in employing someone who will create profit-related results for them. You must show them exactly what you can do to help the company get results. Focus on examples of when you have: saved money, generated sales, improved efficiency, negotiated lower prices, helped someone else learn how to do things better, reduced waste or saved time, etc.

Even the most junior person can add value. For example, a clerk might use her initiative and set up a schedule for her outdoor tasks. The schedule would increase efficiency and she might then spend more time on keeping the client database up-to-date, which would, in turn, translate into increased efficiency for the sales team.

Do outline your relevant skills

Highlight skills that are directly relevant to the requirements and include short descriptions of your

achievements. Focus on the results you achieved rather than the methods you used.

"Skills" are different from "duties". A duty is something that you are required to do (for example, recruitment). Skills are the actions that you have learned and which enable you to perform a duty (for example, interviewing skills, job advertisement writing skills and resume-screening skills).

Do use powerful, active, energetic language

Keep sentences short and to the point. Avoid over-polite or old-fashioned language, such as hitherto, forthwith, furthermore and moreover.

Do demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of the company

Use language or words that are common within the industry you are applying to. You can also refer to company products or industry developments. Do your research before applying.

Do close with a powerful final statement

Express your expectation of interview and enthusiasm for the work. Leave no doubt that you know that you are right for the job.

Do proof read obsessively

One typing error is all that is needed to land your resume in the bin.

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The "don'ts" of cover letter writing

Avoid giving the impression that you are either too lazy to find a PC or too outdated to use word-processing packages.

Don't sign your name in coloured ink

Don't discuss your emotions, feelings or sensitive issues (such as chronic illness)

The employer is only interested in what you can do and how you would do it. If there are unusual circumstances to discuss, wait until the end of the interview.

Don't mention your salary history unless this is specifically requested

Determine how closely you meet the needs of the position before discussing your salary. Revealing salary details too early may bias the employer against you or undermine your negotiating power.

Don't include any negative information of any kind

Discussions of why you left your last job, how you were made redundant, why you did not like your last manager and difficulties you have experienced in your job search are inappropriate in cover letters. Focus only on positive, relevant experiences.

Don't repeat words or phrases from your resume

Your cover letter is a chance to add extra value and really draw the recruiter's attention to the ways in which you match the job. No-one will bother to read the same information twice.

Don't use correction fluid

No matter how subtly it is used, correction fluid always creates a bad impression.