

Your cover letters should follow the basic format of a typical business letter and should address three general questions why you are writing, what you have to offer, and why you want to work for that company. A targeted cover letter shows that you have the skills and qualifications for a specific position and why you should be selected for an interview. It seems like an almost impossible task for the employer to weed through the hundreds of resumes and cover letters to find the best candidates to interview. But writing an effective cover letter will get you noticed for the right reason.

When emailing your cover letter and resume to an employer, follow the employer's "how to apply" instructions. Your cover letter comes before your resume and is in the same font as your resume.

What does it take for your resume and cover letter to make an impact among these other resumes?

- Perfect means perfect - there should not be any typos or grammatical errors.
- That first glance at your cover letter is your one opportunity to make a good impression and make it to the next round.
- Invest time in writing your cover letter. A targeted cover letter takes more than 20 minutes to write.

The cover letter "must dos"

Target your cover letter. If you are applying to a specific job ad, take the job ad and highlight the key words. Next review your resume to ensure that you provide "proof" that you have transferable skills and experience. Take the qualifications in the job ad and reflect on how your experience meets those qualifications. Your cover letter should share how you meet/exceed those qualifications. Never write a generic cover letter. If you don't take time to target your cover letter, why should an employer take time to read your cover letter?

Do's and Don'ts

1. Always address your cover letter to a specific company or person.

If possible, find out the name of the person in the company who will be doing the hiring. Be sure to spell their name correctly. Also avoid creating a form letter; personalize the letter for each position.

2. Include all your personal information: name, phone numbers, address, email address.

You want to be sure they can contact you easily for an interview.

3. Be formal and professional.

Do not address the person by their first name. Paragraphs are single spaced with a full line in between each paragraph.

4. Don't sell yourself short.

You only have a couple of paragraphs to convince the employer they should consider you for the position. Show that you know what you're talking about.

5. Limit your cover letter to approximately three to four paragraphs.

In the first paragraph make it clear what position you are applying for, how you came across this position, and why you want to be considered for this job. In the second paragraph, write about your experiences, accomplishments and skills that relate to the position. In paragraph three, outline why you want to work for the company. In the last paragraph, request an interview and thank them for their consideration.

6. Remember that you have more room in the resume.

Your cover letter does not repeat all the information in your resume. Only mention the most important achievements and skills related to the position.

7. Language.

Don't use "I" to start every sentence. Do not use "very" or "good". Avoid using slang. Do not use contractions (won't, wouldn't, that's). Also, do not use the wording, "not only..." as this can be read in the negative.

8. Mention your knowledge of the company or industry.

Make the employer think that it was not random choice of yours to apply for the position. Be careful not to go overboard. Be sure to research in order to be sure that your information is accurate.

9. Remember to sign the letter.

This is an important personal touch. Ensure that your name is typed below the signature.

10. Proofread.

Use your computer's spell-checker and read your letter over thoroughly. Consider having someone else proofread it for you as well. Remember that one error can give an employer a bad impression.

“I learned!”

This handout will assist with writing your cover letter. How many ways can you say “I learned”? And what did you learn? Skills, abilities, attitude, knowledge.

I learned...
I acquired...
I gained this insight...
I developed the skill of...
...was instrumental in my learning

Skills

I became aware of ...
I was required to learn...
I was trained to ...
I became acquainted with...
I became skilled at...

I achieved...
I came across...
I came into this experience with ...
I brought ...to this experience
I developed an understanding ...

Abilities

I expanded my ...
I increased...
I became knowledgeable in ...
I became educated in...
I required a skill in ...

I recognized the importance of ...
I distinguished the difference between ...
I became aware of ...
I am now familiar with...
As a result, I documented...

Attitudes

I accepted ...
I acknowledge...
I identified my ...
I am familiar with ...
I improved...

I advanced ...
I gathered ...
I understand...

I demonstrated . . .
I confirmed . . .
I established . . .
I proved . . .
I verified . . .
I validated . . .

Knowledge