

## Writing a resume cover letter

Writing a resume cover letter can leave a favorable impression in the receiver's eyes. Here are some tips on constructing a good cover letter.

If you are involved in a serious job hunt, you may have the best resume, the sharpest suit, the most polished interview style and the best references in the world, but without one simple but critical element you may not even get an appointment for an interview. This overlooked element that may make or break your job search....The cover letter.

There are several different reasons to include a cover letter in your application package, but one of the most important is implied in its very title. A good cover letter does indeed 'cover' everything else you have enclosed. The cover letter in a business setting is very close to a personal letter of introduction, but it should also account for everything else you submit. Resumes, samples, references- all of these should be acknowledged in a one or two page professional cover letter. This not only gives the recipient a chance to get his or her bearings on your application, it also protects you in case something turns up missing along the way. If you include an original drawing or sample, for example, the recipient would immediately notice it missing if you take the time to mention it in the cover letter.

So how do you go about constructing a professional letter while working on a job search?

Consider precisely what you hope to accomplish with your application, and what additional materials you will enclose to make this goal happen. Add a touch of salesmanship and a fair amount of goodwill towards the recipient and you should have a very good cover letter.

Specifically, make sure ALL of your contact information is recent and correct. The person who is listed in a job reference book or contacted you at the college job fair last year may or may not be the person you need to contact this year. Before constructing a final cover letter, double-check your inside address information with a representative of the company.

Once you've determined the validity of your contact information, your next step is to introduce yourself as a viable candidate for the position. You'll want to do this in the very first paragraph, so that little time is wasted trying to file your application appropriately. Use specific language in your opening lines that demonstrate your knowledge of the job opening. If you have already made other contact with the company, mention that information as well. "Dear Mr. Smith, My name is John Q. Public and I have recently graduated with honors from the business program at Hometown University. I spoke with

your associate Jane Public at a recent job fair and she mentioned a possible opening in your accounting division. I would like to discuss my qualifications for this position at your earliest possible convenience..."



Of course your own information and circumstances will vary, but the important point is to keep your letter professional and specific, especially in the opening paragraph. Your recipient should be able to glean most of the pertinent information from the opening paragraph alone.

Once you've established the specific reason for your application package, then you may need to sell yourself. This should be done very tactfully, if at all. You are competing with others for a position, which means that you should demonstrate a real interest in that position. You can often sell yourself indirectly by referring to the materials you are submitting.

"As my enclosed resume and work samples will show, I have spent a great deal of time exploring some new ideas in the accounting field. I believe the skills I have developed over the course of study at Hometown would make a very good fit at a progressive firm such as Harris and Boyle..." Although it may sound as if this applicant is merely pointing out the existence of a resume and work samples, he or she is also playing up their own strengths and interests at the same time. This is a much more subtle sales approach, but should still keep the recipient interested in reading more.

The next paragraph should spell out accomplishments and goals more explicitly, along with any other pertinent background information. Again, subtle salesmanship may give you an edge. "I can honestly say that my years spent at Hometown University were satisfying both personally and professionally. I was honored to receive the Jonas Hebbberhoffer prize for outstanding accounting student during my senior year, and I am also proud of the President's Award I was given for my final grade point average. While these honors are a source of personal pride, I feel that the real credit for my successful college experience lies with the incredible staff of accounting professionals that guided me..." Maybe this sounds a little over-the-top, but it could have been much more blatant. Your resume and other application information will probably receive more weight than any cover letter you write, but it doesn't hurt to play up your skills within reason in the cover letter.

Any additional information should either clarify an important point, such as your contact information or availability, or serve as your way of leaving a good feeling with the recipient. If you can make a comment on a recent milestone reached by the company or a personal achievement made by the recipient, that should be done in your closing paragraph. "I thank you for your time and consideration of my application. Feel free to contact me at any time should you need any more information. I understand that congratulations in order for your recent promotion to vice-president of operations. I read the account in our local newspaper and I was quite impressed to hear of your many accomplishments in the accounting field. I wish you all the best in your new position, most sincerely. Close simply and professionally.

The ultimate cover letter, however, may be the one you never write. If you are fortunate enough, you may actually have a cover letter written by a current employer or a professor. These letters serve not only as personal letters of recommendation; they also bolster your standing in the professional community considerably. If you are ever offered the chance to have a cover letter written by a strong personal reference, take it without hesitation. If you believe you can



approach your employer or instructor honestly, then you might solicit a cover letter from them directly. But always be prepared with one of your own, just in case.

Another variety of cover letter concerns the literary world. After the final pages of the manuscript have been proofed, the contact information checked and rechecked, the curriculum vitae polished and signed, the cover letter is one final step in the submission stage that could spell the difference between acceptance and rejection. Here's how to construct a literary cover letter that will leave the best impressions in the receiver's mind.

First, allow me to offer an overview of the cover letter's function in your writing life. A cover letter is designed to do precisely what its name implies- cover all of the pertinent details concerning your submission. It can be as simple as 'Here's the manuscript you requested' to a detailed combination of resume and curriculum vitae. The average cover letter is usually no longer than a page in length, so brevity and information are the two key elements to keep in mind when writing one. You are not trying to give a blow-by-blow synopsis of every chapter in your manuscript, nor are you trying to impress the judges with your lifetime supply of literary awards and honors. The best cover letters function as a combination of sales pitch, resume and letter of introduction.

In general, cover letters are usually welcomed unless specified otherwise. If you know for a fact that cover letters are discouraged, don't send one anyway on the assumption that you will have a tactical advantage over your competition. Rules are rules.