

The best kept secret in job-hunting is that the people who hire do so on essentially two criteria:

- (1) will this person make us more money than it costs to recruit, hire, train, and outfit; and*
- (2) do we like the person. People buy anything for only two reasons: to solve a problem or to feel good.*

Make your cover letter prove that you will solve their problem of who to hire and they will feel good about themselves by hiring you. Don't just repeat your résumé. Your cover letter is not a summary of your resume; instead, it's an introduction of yourself and an argument for why you are the best candidate for their company and the specific position.

- ◆ Personalize your cover letter if possible. Your cover letter should be addressed to a specific person—avoid the “Dear Sir or Madam”. Form letters demonstrate a lack of effort to learn more about the company. Consider calling to politely ask the name of the hiring authority. Go to the company website and search the “About Us” pages for names of individuals. It takes a few seconds; however, it will make your letter stand out. In a blind box ad situation, it is best to address the cover letter to “Dear Boxholder” or “Dear Hiring Manager.”
- ◆ Include all information asked for in the job announcement such as salary, references (if required) and job duties. Be sure to include the name of the company and the job title for which you are applying.
- ◆ Keep it clear and concise, usually no more than 3-5 paragraphs on one page.
- ◆ Use the same paper stock for both your cover letter and résumé.
- ◆ Highlight one or two of your most significant accomplishments or abilities. This draws immediate attention to your most impressive skills.
- ◆ Write the cover letter in an active voice instead of using past tense verbs. This grabs the reader’s attention and conveys a sense of energy.
- ◆ Avoid jargon and clichés. It is tempting to use ready made phrases such as “self-starter” or “excellent people skills,” but it doesn’t help your cover letter to stand out. Use prove it stories such as “I helped save the company \$6,000 annually by changing the method of shipping used on a daily basis” to quantify results.
- ◆ Proofread the cover letter for spelling and grammar. Use a simple, easy to read font. Remember, there is intense competition for good jobs. Any and every detail could be a reason for the hiring manager to dismiss your application in favor of one that is error-free.
- ◆ Never, never — include any negative information in your cover letter. Negativism immediately puts your cover letter (and entire application) in the trash.
- ◆ Sign the cover letter in blue or black ink. This signifies the letter is original.
- ◆ Applying to jobs online? If the employer has to spend more time on your application than on others, guess what? He or she simply won’t or will move on to the next applicant. Always send your cover letter and résumé as unformatted text within the email message as well as formatted as attachments. If you don’t provide both options, you risk not being considered. Why? Because some employers only want text, while others request formatted attachments. Still others don’t open attachments for fear of viruses, security reasons or software incompatibilities.
- ◆ Demonstrate some knowledge of the company and stress what you can do for that company. You can normally find information on a company website or by asking people with knowledge of the company.
- ◆ Request action—Always ask for an interview or state when you will be following up. Then follow up 7–10 days later with a phone call.