Crafting Effective Cover Letters

Your cover letter may be the first thing prospective employers see, even before they read your carefully prepared resume. It may be your first chance, and possibly your last, to market yourself. You can make the employer's job easier by clearly describing your strengths, ambitions, clear-headed thinking, and enthusiasm in the cover letter. Since you want to assure that your resume is read, it is important to spend a good deal of thought and time writing an effective cover letter that will motivate an employer to seek more information about you.

A well-written cover letter will allow you to:

- Link your skills and experience to the employer's needs
- Complement your resume's content by highlighting your unique qualifications that pertain to the job
- Express your individuality

Remember, it is critical for a cover letter to express who you are. Avoid copying sample cover letters – they will not represent you adequately and will probably sound artificial.

Research

To write an effective cover letter, you must conduct research to clearly understand what the job entails, what the industry/organization is like, and (most importantly) how you will be an asset to the employer. Indicate the unique contributions you can make to the organization. Call attention to your skills and motivation.

Make each letter unique

Each letter needs to be unique to the position. Yes, it is a lot of writing, but targeting your cover letter is as important to getting an interview as targeting your resume. It is your first chance, and possibly your last chance, to market yourself as a potential employee. You can make the employer’s job easier by clearly describing your strengths and your enthusiasm in your cover letter.

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Be specific

Avoid over-used phrases and cliché’s in describing your qualifications and interest in a position. Too many people have written that they are seeking a "challenging and rewarding position" where they can "work with people." Boring! If you are seeking these attributes in a job, try to rephrase them in new ways. Be specific about the challenges, knowledge, and opportunities you hope to find in the position.

Back up your claims

Try to draw logical connections between the statements you make. For instance, if you say that you understand the goals of the XYZ Corporation and would be good at sales with the company, give specific examples and reasons for thinking so. Reasons could be because you have had prior experience in the industry, because you have done the job before in a different setting, or because you understand the importance of sales to the company’s goal of increased growth.

In short, back up claims of past or intended success with evidence that you have demonstrated these skills in previous positions.

Engage the reader

Utilizing an active voice and enthusiastic tone attracts an employer’s attention. There are no specific rules for creating an active tone to your letter. Reread the letter. If you sound too passive, apologetic, or indifferent, rewrite the letter to capture the reader’s attention. Try to engage the reader with your enthusiasm and commitment to the work.

Here are some quick cover letter writing tips:

- Use spell check and a human proof reader.
- Cut extra words. Keep sentences and paragraphs short.
- Check for coherence and readability. Read your letter aloud.
- Be the employer: would you be interested?
- Let a day pass and then reread.
- Ask someone else you trust to read it.