

A – COVER LETTER TIPS

Nine Tips for Creating a Winning Cover Letter

1. Keep it short and follow a standard business letter format

The ideal cover letter is about half a page long, and never exceeds one page. A concise letter demonstrates that you are focused and have strong communication skills. Aim for two to four brief paragraphs.

Try to address the letter to a specific individual, and be sure to use the correct spelling (all the contact details of the On Campus Recruiters are listed on our web site). A prospective employer who sees his or her name spelled incorrectly may assume you are not detail oriented.

Once you've determined the hiring manager's name, a good general rule for salutations is to use his or her first name only when you've been personally introduced and have already referred to that person by first name in conversation. Otherwise, use the person's surname preceded by Mr. or Ms.

2. State the position

The opening sentence of a cover letter should announce its purpose (even though the purpose may seem obvious) and give the reader a compelling reason to read on. If someone mentioned the job opening to you, be sure to use his or her name in the introduction. If you're responding to an advertisement for a job, say so in your letter: "I am applying for the XYZ position advertised in Careerlink and would like to tell you about my qualifications."

3. Demonstrate your knowledge of the company

Work a fact or observation about the company that isn't common knowledge into your opening paragraph. Such a statement tells the reader you've done some homework: "I have been following with great interest the success of your company in developing your private equity practise in Asia. That interest has prompted me to send you this letter, along with my resume."

4. Explain why you want the job and why this job interests you

Candidates should always answer the question 'Why do I want to do this work?'. Ask yourself how the position fits into your overall career plans and what you find exciting about the particular sector. A genuine show of enthusiasm and knowledge will set you apart from those sending generic form letters.

Let potential employers know what you have to offer. Do you have any special abilities or knowledge that you could build upon if hired?

On a similar note, be sure to research prospective employers and demonstrate that knowledge in your cover letter. Not only does this show that you have a genuine interest in the job, but it also indicates that you have initiative—a quality that is highly sought after in entrylevel candidates.

5. Clearly describe ways you will contribute

This is the most important element of a cover letter. After carefully reading the job description, write a paragraph outlining one or two specific examples of how your skills and experiences will fit the company's needs. Sell yourself. Don't expect to wow a prospective employer with a lengthy checklist of what you've done in the past. Instead, position your accomplishments in terms of how you could bring the same benefits to their company. Your cover letter needs to answer the question "What's in it for my company?" Clarify how your expertise will benefit them directly.

6. Match, but don't reiterate, your resume

This is one point many job seekers find tricky. You should never claim experience in your cover letter that isn't reflected on your resume. Doing so makes you look like a liar. At the same time, your cover letter shouldn't simply restate your resume. When you explain the ways you will contribute, refer to an experience or skill on your resume to show how you will add value to the company. Briefly elaborate on one or two key points to draw attention to your resume. Give details about the most relevant parts of your work history for this particular position.

7. Don't say you're not qualified

Even if you think the position is out of your reach, your job is to convince the recruiter that you are qualified. If the recruiter thinks you're unqualified, a confessional letter is not going to get you an interview. Keep the letter positive by focusing on your transferable skills and unusual accomplishments.

8. Keep the tone and content professional

Don't be a comedian, don't get really personal, and don't beg for the job. Recruiters are more likely than not to think your attempts at humor or stories about your personal life are just plain weird.

9. Proofread Again

Using a spell checker is not enough. Many recruiters will dismiss even the most qualified candidate if there's one typo in the cover letter or resume. Reread your letter two or three times, then give it to someone else who knows a thing or two about good writing and is a native English speaker. Even if your letter is free of typos, poor grammar also makes a bad impression.

End the letter with Sincerely, Sincerely Yours, Yours truly.

