

5 SIMPLE STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL COVER LETTER

by Caroline Potter, Yahoo! HotJobs

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Most folks put (or should put) a lot of effort into crafting a resume that conveys their talents and breadth of experience. But these same people often drop the ball when it comes to crafting a cover letter to complement that important document. This can be a costly error. If your resume is what gets you in the door, your cover letter is what prompts employers to answer that door in the first place.

If you're intimidated by writing a cover letter, don't be. Job-search expert Deborah Brown-Volkman has an easy-to-follow, five-step formula for cover letter success.

1. Cut to the chase...

Brown-Volkman, who coaches professionals at all stages of their careers, reminds applicants to begin their correspondence by clearly identifying why they're reaching out to a company. "Start by completing the statement, 'I am writing to you today because...'" Cover all pertinent facts, such as the position's title and location. Also, she asks, "Where did you see the ad for the position, or who recommended you? Include that information up front."

2. What I like about you...

New York-based Brown-Volkman agrees that flattery will get you everywhere. "Next, complete the statement 'I like your company because...'" Compliment the organization on what they have done right and what you admire about them. This will show that you've taken the time to get to know the company in detail," she shares.

3. What you'll like about me...

The founder of surpassyourdreams.com, Brown-Volkman urges job seekers to list their most vital qualifications up front. "Now, tell the employer, 'Here are relevant examples of work that I've done that match what you're looking for.'" Briefly discuss the items you want to showcase so a hiring manager can spot them easily. She recommends, "Bullet points work well in making your accomplishments easy to read."

4. What else you'll like about me...

Now, succinctly, personalize your letter. "Describe who you are and what makes you stand out from other applicants. Discuss your soft skills and strengths and what you're passionate about professionally," says the author of "Don't Blow It! The Right Words For The Right Job." Research the company's mission statement to see if your values match up and use similar language. "This is your last chance to say, 'Here's why I am a good candidate,'" she adds.

5. And in conclusion...

In your closing paragraph, Brown-Volkman coaches clients to express their enthusiasm for a position and an interview and to include a plan of action. "Make note of your contact information and state what the next steps will be. If you will wait for their reply, tell them that. If you will be following up, tell them when they can expect to hear from you," she shares. Don't drop the ball on your first promise to a potential employer, though. Brown-Volkman warns, "Whatever you put down, make sure you do what you say you will do."

Recruiter Roundtable: Cover Letters

<http://hotjobs.yahoo.com/jobseeker/tools/ept/careerArticlesPost.html?post=78>

The Recruiter Roundtable is a monthly feature that collects career and job-seeking advice from a group of recruiting experts throughout the United States. The question we put before our panel this month is:

In this age of uploading or emailing resumes, how important are cover letters in your decision to interview a candidate?

Use It Strategically

My belief is that as long as a candidate meets the obvious basic criteria for a specific position, a well-articulated cover letter will only enhance their chances. A cover letter can also be useful to tackle an obvious weakness relative to an advertised role, usually a credential that is "required" (e.g., CPA or MBA) by pointing to equivalent training or experience. Overall I am a supporter.

-- Anu Datta, executive recruiter, Korn/Ferry, San Francisco

Channel the Effort Elsewhere

Unless the job seeker is making a significant career change (i.e. different field) or is a fresh college graduate, I rarely look at a cover letter. It may be necessary to explain your position and bridge your experience to the position of which you are applying. Resumes are typically scanned and cover letters skipped over completely in evaluating potential candidates for first-round interviews, so it is advisable to either say what you must in the body of the email with a resume attached, or customize your resume toward each and every position you seek.

-- Lindsay Olson, partner, Paradigm Staffing

Say Something New

If I like someone's resume for a specific position, then I read the cover letter. Mistakes or typos in a cover letter have an impact on my impression of the candidate; I recommend getting a second set of eyes to review any cover letter. Cover letters tend to be fairly similar, so take up the challenge of making yours stand out. Tell me something about your professional history that I would never know from your resume -- HOW you lead a team to success on a project, for example.

-- Ross Pasquale, owner, Monday Ventures

It's All About the Resume

About 75 percent of the job seekers that have applied online for positions I manage do not attach a cover letter. What does that mean for me? I make most of my decisions to schedule an interview based strictly on resumes. When a job seeker includes a cover letter, I reward their effort by contacting them to thank them for their interest whether or not it leads to an interview. Who knows where that interaction might lead?

-- Cheryl Blackman, recruiter for Wells Fargo -- Texas Human Resources

Yes, They Make a Difference

A good cover letter -- one that captures my attention because it is targeted to the position and highlights specific areas of expertise that the hiring manager is looking for -- can make the difference between whether or not I call someone for an interview or leave them in the "maybe" file. A great cover letter will persuade me to call you for an interview even if you may be lacking in some of the qualifications needed for the position. A poorly written cover letter tells me everything I need to know about you; you won't be called for an interview.

-- Cheryl Ferguson, recruiter, The Recruiter's Studio

SAMPLE COVER LETTER

Date

Company name

Company Address

City, State and Zip Code

Dear Mr. or Ms. (last name, and title)

I am interested in a career with (name of the company) as an Aviation Maintenance Technician.

My resume demonstrates a successful and dedicated work history before and during my attendance at Teterboro School of Aeronautics. Currently I am employed as a (name of the job such as "an Airframe and Powerplant Technician" working on aircraft completion, or whatever it is you are doing).

Please review my resume. I look forward to the opportunity to meet with you to discuss career employment with your company.

Respectfully

John Doe