

COVER LETTERS

When applying for jobs, a well-written cover letter is just as important as a well-written résumé. While the résumé is designed to provide an overview of your relevant skills and qualifications, the cover letter is your opportunity to discuss relevant experiences and to display your personality to your reader. In other words, the cover letter is your chance to humanize yourself to your reader and to give the reader a sense of who you are.

DOs	DON'Ts
<p>BEGIN WITH AN INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH THAT CONTEXTUALIZES YOUR LETTER by describing the job you are applying for, indicating where you saw the advertisement, indicating your interest in being considered for the position, and previewing the credentials you will discuss.</p>	<p>BEGIN WITH YOUR QUALIFICATIONS. It's important to establish what you job you're applying for and that you know something about the company before describing yourself.</p>
<p>INCLUDE ONE OR TWO BODY PARAGRAPHS THAT HIGHLIGHTS YOUR MOST RELEVANT SKILLS AND EXPERIENCES. One paragraph may be enough, but use more if necessary, particularly if you want to highlight various skills and experiences. Discuss one topic per paragraph.</p>	<p>CREATE A NARRATIVE RÉSUMÉ. Your attached résumé will tell them what you've done. The cover letter is an opportunity to make connections between your experiences and qualifications for the position.</p>
<p>SHOW, DON'T TELL. Use both qualitative and quantitative examples of your experiences and qualifications. Provide concrete examples by referring to specific courses, research projects, internships, or prior work experience.</p>	<p>JUST TELL. Anyone can write, "I am an excellent leader." However, describing an experience that allows you to <i>show</i> the reader that you are an excellent leader is much more effective.</p>
<p>CONCLUDE BY EXPRESSING INTEREST in being contacted for an interview. Be sure to also include your contact information in your conclusion, and remember to thank the employer for his or her time and consideration.</p>	<p>FORGET TO SHOW APPRECIATION to the reader for his or her time and effort in considering your application materials.</p>
<p>ESTABLISH ETHOS THROUGH A PROFESSIONAL TONE. Although you are writing in 1st person, avoid being too informal. Avoid contractions and jargon, and strive to create a mature, self-aware, and confident tone.</p>	<p>ADOPT EITHER AN ARROGANT OR SELF-DEPRICATING TONE. When presenting your qualifications, it is important to show confidence. However, it is also important not to sound cocky or aggressive. On the other hand, it is also important not to sound insecure.</p>
<p>FOLLOW CONVENTIONS OF THE FORMAL BUSINESS LETTER. Use a standard font and font-size, keep the letter to one page, and use appropriate formatting conventions for business letters. More information about formatting business letters can be found here:</p>	<p>FORMAT YOUR COVER LETTER LIKE AN EMAIL OR A PERSONAL LETTER. Don't use a unique font or include color in your cover letter. Don't write a cover letter that is longer than one page.</p>
<p>PROOFREAD YOUR LETTER SO THAT IT IS GRAMMATICALLY PERFECT. Hiring managers receive many résumés. Often, regardless of the content of your, a typo or grammatical error can quickly eliminate you from the pool of applicants.</p>	<p>THINK THAT A COVER LETTER IS NOT NECESSARY. Even if a job ad does not specifically request a cover letter, most professional positions expect them.</p>

RECOMMENDATION	EXAMPLE
Identify the position and context (your interest in this particular position and how your job search led you to this opportunity)	<i>I am writing to apply for the public relations internship advertised in the University of South Florida Career Center newsletter.</i>
Highlight your qualifications by explaining work history, activities that prove leadership skills, and educational accomplishments	<i>I am confident that my previous experience as a sales associate at Lenny's Surf Shop, my position as president of the Alpha Kappa Psi professional fraternity, and my Bachelor of Arts degree in Mass Communications prove that I am an extremely competitive candidate for this position.</i>
Connect your work history, leadership activities, and educational accomplishments with the position description	<i>For instance, while hired as a sales associate at Lenny's Surf Shop, I was responsible for communicating with clients regarding unique order requests. This role taught me to speak and act in a professional manner, and to communicate confidently and clearly.</i>
Request an interview and provide contact information and availability	<i>Thank you for your time and consideration of my application. I look forward to speaking with you about this position as soon as possible. I can be reached anytime via e-mail at _____ or by cell, at _____.</i>
Refer to the enclosed résumé	Use the word "Enclosed" after your printed signature (see example for format).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

WritingCommons.org has some excellent information on writing quality cover letters:

<http://writingcommons.org/open-text/genres/business-professional-writing/business-writing-in-action/resume/1087-writing-cover-letters>

