

Ten Tips for Writing Effective Cover Letters

A creative, well-written cover letter is often the best way to make your resume stand out from the endless sea of applicants.

Here are 10 simple tips to have a striking cover letter:

1. Make yourself stand out. Get the competitive edge by writing a cover letter that focuses on your unique and exceptional qualities. What makes you an ideal candidate? Be strategic, persuasive, and concise.
2. Target the right person. Sending your letter to the proper person can make all the difference. Avoid generic addresses such as "To Whom It May Concern" or "Dear Sir or Madam." Instead, call the company and find out the name and title of the person who does the hiring for the job that you are interested in. Remember to ask for the correct spelling of his or her name.
3. Stay simple. Keep your cover letter brief. Never send a letter that is more than a page in length; half a page is ideal. Be sure to use clear, professional language while steering away from buzzwords, acronyms, jargon, or anything overly personal.
4. Make it shine. The overall visual impression of your cover letter can be just as important as what's written on it. Make sure to use crisp, quality stationery. Match the style of copy on your cover letter with the style of your resume. Stick with one font and avoid solid walls of text that make the reader's eyes bounce right off the page. Break your text into digestible morsels with lots of white space.
5. Be an attention getter. Don't waste your first paragraph by writing a dull introduction. Grab the employer's attention from the start by pointing out how you can make a difference in a way no other candidate can. Keep in mind that you have only about one to two seconds to get your initial point across before the reader moves on to the next letter.

6. Sell yourself. Don't expect to impress a prospective employer with a lengthy check-list of past accomplishments and titles. 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.
7. Proofread. Never underestimate the negative effect of bad writing, which can greatly hurt your chances of landing a new position. Edit to check your cover letter for spelling, grammar, and overall readability.
8. Avoid exaggeration. There's nowhere to hide when you finally land an interview and the prospective employer wants to know what you meant by "best in the world." Avoid saying anything that sounds like a hyperbole, which can project the wrong image and damage your credibility. Remember never to speak poorly of former employers or co-workers.
9. Close encounters. Don't depend on the employer to take action. Request an interview and tell the employer when you will follow up to arrange it.
10. Don't forget the follow-up. After sending in your cover letter and resume, follow up to check on the recruiting process, rather than waiting and wondering.