

# 10 Key Steps to a Successful Cover Letter

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A well written cover letter can make the difference between receiving an invitation for a job interview or being passed on for another applicant. First impression counts and a cover letter is a way of introducing yourself to an employer. You have around 1 minute to impress, that is not a lot of time so you need to stand out from the beginning. In fact, statistics say that many of the employers decide after just 3 lines if the letter is worth their time or not.

- 1. The format.** Cover letters usually have the same format as a business letter. The left, right, top and bottom margins are 2.5 cm. If the letter is shorter than one page, the text will be centered vertically. The font should be easy to read. The recommended fonts are Times New Roman - 12-point, or Georgia - 11 point. Start with your letterhead, followed by the date, then the name and contact details of the person you're applying to, then the address, then the content, followed by your name, signature and enclosure.
- 2. Address your letter to a particular person,** if possible. Never use "to whom it may concern", "sir" or "madam". Do a little research about the company and try to find out who will read your cover letter so you can address it to that person and show that you know more about the company other than the fact that they are hiring. The research will also be useful if you will get an interview, so do your homework. Write the name, title and address of the recipient. Use "Mr." if the person reading will be a male, and "Ms." for female recipient.
- 3. Specify what job you are applying for.** A company might be hiring on more than one position. Make sure you specify from the start which one you are applying for and how did you find out about it, if someone they know recommended you or told you about the position, write it down. If you don't, the reader will feel like he's doing crosswords while reading the letter. Don't expect the employer to just guess.
- 4. Keep it short.** Your cover letter should not be longer than one page, no recruiter or future employer reads a 3 page letter. It should be brief but informative, containing just the important information, not the story of your life.
- 5. What to write.** You are marketing yourself and what will sell is your key skills and how your background meets the qualifications. Always point out what you can bring to the company and why you are the right person for this job. Just remember - the company always comes first, so instead of talking about you, focus on what your contribution to the company would be, identify the needs they have and what the ideal candidate means to them.
- 6. Briefly explain why you want the position you are applying for.** Even if the cover letter is mostly about what you can offer to the employer, always make it clear that if he will offer you the job you will most likely accept it. Avoid using "I" too much, it will give the employer the impression that you are a self centered person and you haven't thought about them.
- 7. Emphasize your main selling points.** Always write about your strengths and not your weak points. Unless it requires explaining, such as unemployment or gaps in your work history. But never lie, never overstate your qualifications and never falsify your background! And do not write sentences such as "Although I do not have a lot of experience I always dreamed of working in this field." Maybe it would be a good idea to start by writing a list of your strengths on another paper and try to elaborate from there. Also find a skill that you have and that is unique and write about that as well, that will separate you from the crowd.
- 8. Closing paragraph.** Let the employer know that you are looking forward to hearing from him and finish with an appropriate closing such as "Sincerely," "Respectfully" or "Regards", then add your signature line and add "Enclosure" if you are enclosing your resume.

9. **No mistakes and no handwriting.** Your cover letter must be perfect. You want to sound professional. Meaning no typos, no grammar mistakes, no punctuation mistakes and no misspelling. Avoid all forms of slang, abbreviations and language lingo. Always use a word processor, such as Microsoft Word and have the grammar check feature active. Handwritten cover letter days are far gone. A good printing job on good quality A4 paper will give the final note of professionalism that you need for a successful cover letter.

10. **Final Step.** As a last step, check your contact details again to make sure they are correct, and that your email name is decent. Avoid fantasy email names such as “Sweet\_Lucy@..” unless your surname is Sweet. Read your cover letter out loud to hear how it reads and ask a friend or two to proofread it as well. If no one is available, wait a couple of hours and then read it yourself again.

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