

The Reality of Cover Letters

First, most people assume that the cover letter is actually read before the resume. Wrong. Just ask those who spend any portion of the work day reviewing resumes--the cover letter and resume are pulled from the envelope, the cover letter is immediately placed behind the resume, and the resume is scanned first, then read. And you know there is interest if they finally make their way back to the cover letter.

Second, most people assume that the cover letter should be about you. Wrong again. DO YOUR HOMEWORK FIRST! Your cover letter should be about the company, your prospect, your target. Your resume will tell them everything they need to know about you (if it is well written). If you are interested enough in the company to make an initial contact, you should take the time to fully reflect your understanding of the company and how you may be able meet their needs in your cover letter.

Third, and most important, many college students end up using the cover letter/resume mass mailing as a crutch to convince themselves that they are actually doing something in their job search. "But I sent out over 200 resumes!" In reality, all they are doing is generating rejection letters. Mass mailing of your cover letter and resume has extremely low odds for success in today's job market.

Please understand that at the entry level a resume and cover letter on their own do little good. The best you can hope for in a blind emailing campaign is that you will be filed away and perhaps miraculously resurrected at some future date; very unlikely. Do your research so that if at all possible you are addressing your letter to a specific person in the place you are applying to.

Use this checklist to ensure that your cover letter and your follow thru are complete:

- One page only and limited to four targeted paragraphs
- Written to someone specific, with the name and title spelled correctly
- Company name and address are correct and complete
- Four focused paragraphs: focused on the reader's needs, not yours
- Use the company's: mission, vision, values statement, along with language from the job listing to tie their phrases to your own values
- Close with "Sincerely,"--anything else can be too chummy
- Use full spell check, grammar check and your own printed proofing, and then give it someone else to proof BEFORE you send it to a potential employer!!!
- Keep a desktop folder of cover letters by company name and date sent so that when you get called back for an interview you know exactly what you sent them and when
- Keep a copy of the job description in the same folder so you can review their expectations prior to an interview
- When preparing to bring it on an interview; sign it with a blue or black pen,
- Print both your cover letter and resume on the same quality 8.5x11, bond paper
- Place the resume behind your cover letter and put them in a clean folder
- Final step: do not forget to follow up, or all the other steps will be in vain!

Your Street Address
City, State Zip Code
Telephone Number
Email Address

Month, Day, Year

Mr./Ms./Dr. FirstName LastName
Title
Name of Organization
Street or P. O. Box Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. LastName:

Opening paragraph: State why you are writing; how you learned of the organization or position, and basic information about yourself.

2nd paragraph: Tell why you are interested in the employer or type of work the employer does (Simply stating that you are interested does not tell why, and can sound like a form letter). Demonstrate that you know enough about the employer or position to relate your background to the employer or position.

3rd paragraph: Mention specific qualifications which make you a good fit for the employer's needs. This is an opportunity to explain in more detail relevant items in your resume. Refer to the fact that your resume is enclosed. Mention other enclosures if such are required to apply for a position.

4th paragraph: Indicate that you would like the opportunity to interview for a position or to talk with the employer to learn more about their opportunities or hiring plans. State what you will do to follow up, such as telephone the employer within two weeks. If you will be in the employer's location and could offer to schedule a visit, indicate when. State that you would be glad to provide the employer with any additional information needed. Thank the employer for her/his consideration.

Sincerely,

(Your handwritten signature)

Your name typed

Note: Throughout your letter be concise, enthusiastic and use proper grammar!