



Point of View

Preparing Your Cover Letter: *A Written First Impression*

A cover letter is a necessity, so sending a strong cover letter gives you an edge. Learn how to write your cover letter so that you stand apart from the rest.

You just heard about the perfect job, and were so excited that you rushed home and tailored your resume. But now for the next step: the cover letter. You are tempted to just send your resume without one, why not? What are the chances someone is actually going to read it?

Don't do it! You want recruiters to read your resume, and a cover letter will ensure this will happen. Employers usually give resumes 30 seconds, so sending a strong cover letter gives you an edge.

But writing a cover letter doesn't have to be painful. Reading through the job description should give you clues on what sort of information to include, like relevant experiences, managerial or leadership skills as examples. But how do you manage your letter to make you stand apart from the rest? Here's how:

- **Customize it.**
You don't send a form resume, and you shouldn't send a form cover letter. Avoid, "To whom it may concern," or "Dear Sir or Madam." If you can't find the recruiter's name, call the company and ask who you should direct your resume to.
- **Toot your own horn.**
We all know that you should talk about why you are applying for the position and why it interests you. But don't be shy; talk up why the company wants to hire you. Use examples of how your qualifications will benefit the company in their short-term and long-term goals, but don't embellish. Your cover letter and resume should be truthful.
- **Keep it positive.**
Avoid negative words. These are subtle keys that turn off recruiters. Avoid phrases like, "I realize I do not have the right amount of experience, but." As soon as you tell someone you aren't qualified, they won't get to the, "but." If they want to clarify this information they will ask you during the interview.

- **Keep it simple.**

This is not an essay. Recruiters and hiring managers are flooded with candidates all applying for the same position. Keep your paragraphs short, avoid jargon, don't use SAT words and keep the length to a page or less. It's better to come off as relatable and concise, these are more desirable traits recruiters are looking for.

- **End it well.**

Thank the person for their time, and be assertive. Instead of a passive hope to hear from the recruiter, indicate that you will follow up with them regarding the interview process.

Remember to write your cover letter in a business letter style. Most word processing programs have formats you can use. Once you have revised your letter, have a friend look it over as well. This is your first impression and you want it to carry you to the next step, the interview.