

# Important Cover Letter Guidelines You Can't Afford To Ignore

October 23, 2013 by Erica Tew



Cover letters, like resumes, must be tailored specifically for each position. At times, they can feel more time-consuming than the resume and application, but there are some general guidelines you can use to ensure this document is going to stand out among the competition.

The overall theme is to make your documents employer-oriented. If it doesn't relate to the open position or the company's needs, do not include it in your documents. Also avoid using the personal

pronoun "I" too often. It can be a struggle, but it will improve your writing and make your statements stronger. Here are more important cover letter guidelines to review before you write your next one:

## Get A Name

Use the company's website or directory to get the name of the Hiring Manager. Try to not address it to "Dear Sir or Madam" or other generic parties. Getting a specific name will ensure your documents get to the right person.

## Start Strong

Begin the first paragraph with a value-packed statement saying what you offer and how it ties into the company vacancy.

As a Sales Manager with a proven record of exceeding goals and streamlining processes, I am interested in your position for **Sales Director**.

Always emphasize the job title so it can catch the eye of a Hiring Manager, especially if they are skimming the documents quickly. Reference your enclosed resume in the first paragraph, so the reader can move on to that document if they choose. (Not all cover letters are read, but it's much better to send one than not send one!)

Don't state the obvious such as your name (you should have a contact information header that mimics your resume) or phrases such as, "I am writing to apply for..." It is a letter, so it is understood you are writing. Save space for more valuable text.

## Meet Their Needs

There are two common approaches for the body of a cover letter. One is for quick and easy readability by bulleting your skills or qualifications so the employer can quickly see how you meet the position's needs. Three to five bullets will suffice; more than that can look excessive.

Another approach is to continue writing in paragraphs, but explain in concise sentences how your skills match the needs of the position. Similar to the bullets, three to five sentences should be enough to make your point in each paragraph.

Use hard examples and quantify when possible to back up your claims. If you're stating your achievements in saving money, say how much money you saved. When you provide evidence to support your skills, you paint a clear picture of your capabilities.

Have a copy of the job posting near you when promoting your knowledge and skill base. Mirror the terminology of the job posting so you and the employer begin to speak the same language.

If the job posting has a list of 20 different requirements, those requirements closer to the top of the list are going to be the most important of the group. Emphasize your skills and qualifications that match with the beginning of the list, and not the lesser tasks near the end.

### **Close With A Call To Action**

For the closing paragraph, don't simply state you hope to hear from them soon. Instead, state that you'd appreciate the opportunity to explain how your skills match their needs during an interview. Explain how and when you will follow up with them to schedule a mutually convenient meeting.

If no phone number is available or there is a request to not call the company, repeat your contact information so the employer may reach out to you.

If you have a professionally developed LinkedIn Profile or any other appropriate pages, you may reference one in the closing or include them in your contact information header, so the reader may go on to discover more detailed information about you.

If you're not electronically sending the document, always write your signature by hand to close the letter.

Overall, customizing these documents will take time, but the cover letter is going to be the document that will introduce your resume. It is worth the effort to make the match and capture the reader's interest with any opportunity you have to do so, to better your chances to advance on to the interview.