

## Tips for Writing Winning Cover Letters



### **The Mindset: It's all about THEM**

A cover letter is a **persuasive** letter. The whole point of writing a cover letter is to persuade your reader to look at your resumé! You have a short time, actually about three or four paragraphs, to give them a glimpse of yourself and why they would benefit from hiring you. So this is a sales job of you and your talent, but it's *not* a letter about why *you* want to work for them!

HINT: Try to think from the perspective of the company/organization that is doing the hiring. You need to show them what's in it for them. WIIFM (What's In It For Me?)

### **Read the job posting carefully**

Then read it again. Underline the key words in red pen and think hard about what the employer is looking for. The *qualifications* tell you what they want. The job description tells you about the job itself.

Connect the dots for your reader. Show them how your talent, education and experience are a good fit for the *qualifications* they are seeking.

### **Always Write a Cover Letter**

The cover letter is in some ways more important than your resumé. It is the first thing an employer reads. Many resúmes go straight to the shredder if there is no cover letter, or a poorly written cover letter.

Write one even if you are submitting a resume for a job that is not posted.

The cover letter is the place you can say things that you can't say in your resume. You can talk a little about your traits and show some personality that a resume won't show. Think of the things about you that the reader *can't* see from your resume. For example, a resume cannot tell the reader if you have a high level of work ethics, or how honest and reliable you are.

### **Be a Sleuth and a Tailor**

These days it's pretty easy to find out some information about the company/organization to which you are applying. Most places have a website where you can find lots of relevant stuff.

Write a different cover letter for each job. Tailor it so it fits the company/organization and the position for which you are applying.

### **Be a Mirror**

Even at this stage of the game you will want (and need) to know something about the employer. Some of the words they use to describe themselves can be thrown right back at them in your cover letter. This is called

*mirroring their language* and it is literally reflecting them back to themselves. Some good clues are the *mission and vision statements* of the company or organization. Use the *exact* same words as they do.

### **Think before You Write!**

*Plan your letter* using the diamond structure (Think: What do I want to say? What are my main points? Why am I saying it? Who am I speaking to/who is my reader? What will my reader need to know? How is my reader going to get in touch with me?)

Opening – State the focus/deliver the message

- Tell them what you are going to say – tell them early and tell them clearly
- 3 – 5 lines
- Set the tone
- Avoid detail
- Openings answer the *why*

Middle – present well organized details for the reader (Say it!)

- Deals with the *who*
- You can use headings and point form to guide your reader
- 6-7 lines maximum per paragraph

Closing - summarize and offer follow-up (Tell them what you said)

- Deals with the *what*
- 3 – 4 lines maximum
- Give your contact information
- Say what you are going to do to follow up OR ask for them to follow up

### **Be Impeccable and Totally Excellent**

- One page is the ideal length for a cover letter.
- Be clear, concise and specific in your language
- Use plain language
- Powerful sentences have action verbs, speak in the active voice and use specific words and parallel structure
- Spelling, grammar – use the computer for this... and proofreading – use a person for this!
- Draw attention to the highlights of your resume
- Create a headline – the name of the position and where it was advertised works well for cover letters. Reader's eyes go here first
- Salutations – find out the person's name, correct spelling and gender
- Always use "dear" first name, last name followed by a colon: