A well-crafted cover letter is one of the most vital tools in the job search process. Many job-seekers discount the importance of the cover letter, believing the majority of their energy should be expended on writing and revising their resume. On the contrary, the cover letter is a professional expectation that merits significant time and attention. Without an appealing letter, a candidate’s credentials may never be considered.

What Purpose Does It Serve?
A cover letter introduces you and your resume to a potential employer and is your first opportunity to convey a positive impression. It’s an important marketing tool that illustrates what you can contribute to the organization. The cover letter is used to personalize your resume, highlight your most outstanding qualifications, and demonstrate written communication skills. It should convince the employer to read your resume and invite you for an interview.

Getting Your Letter Noticed
To develop an enticing letter, you will want to employ your best writing skills, incorporate proper format and structure, and clearly address why you’re the best match for the job.

Here are some specific tips to consider as you construct your cover letter:

- Tailor your letter specifically for the position/employer for which you are applying. Focus on facts that are unique to the employer. Cookie-cutter letters will not make you stand out.
- Address your letter to a specific person. If necessary, call the organization directly to inquire about the name and correct spelling of the appropriate contact. Never use “To Whom it May Concern.”
- Personalize your letter. Maintain a business-like tone but be genuine. Allow your personality to come through in your writing. Exude confidence, motivation, and enthusiasm.
- Know your audience. Demonstrate that you have researched the employer. Review the organization’s Web site to learn as much as possible about their products, goals, and mission.
- Be proactive! Describe to the employer what you can do for them. Why are you their solution? Concentrate on how your skills align with position requirements and organizational goals.
- Showcase your talents. Highlight notable accomplishments and experiences. Be specific but do not reiterate everything on your resume.
- Use key words that are meaningful to the employer. Refer to your research and the job description to identify terms that reflect what the employer considers important.
- Follow a business letter format. Choose a simple 10–12 point font that is clear and easy to read. Set consistent margins. Use a good printer and high-quality paper that matches your resume. Your letter should be no longer than one page.
- Deliver a well-written document that has a professional and aesthetically pleasing appearance. This is your writing sample. Keep it neat. Correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation are essential.
- Proofread! There can be absolutely no errors in your cover letter. Don’t rely on spellcheck. Put the letter aside and then go back and reread it with fresh eyes. Ask someone you trust to review and critique it. Proofread again.
- Maintain a copy of every letter. Create a paper or electronic file to house copies and related notes you may have about the employers and organizations.

The Structure
There are a few main parts to a cover letter: the heading, introduction, body, and closing. View the sample letter provided for suggestions on structure and content.
An Important Job Search Tool!

An effective cover letter will show the prospective employer that you are thorough, organized and motivated. Take the time to develop an exceptional letter and set yourself apart from the crowd!

Cover Letter Conundrums:

What If …

You are asked to include salary requirements? If you must provide salary requirements, give a general range of your expected compensation (after you have researched salaries in your field). Then state that you are open to discussion.

You are required to send your documents electronically? There are a few different rules for emailing your job search correspondence. See Related Resources for more information.

You incorporated all tips but still are not getting any bites? Avoid having your credentials arrive with a massive influx of mail. Many candidates send their responses the first day following the job posting. Try mailing your materials a few days after the initial advertisement and increase your chances of obtaining a more thorough review.

Related Resources

Sending resumes and letters via email, University of Minnesota, Duluth
www.d.umn.edu/careers/cs_handbook/cshandbook_sending.html

Sample job search correspondence, JobWeb.com

Cover letter rubric, JobWeb.com/Amy Raphael
www.jobweb.com/resumesample.aspx?id=780

Access this article and many additional career-related links at the Excelsior College Career Center at www.excelsior.edu/career.

Questions or comments about this article?
Contact Maribeth Gunner Pulliam, Career Services Coordinator, Office of Online Education and Learning Services.

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