

## *Cover Letter Suggestions*

How you write your cover letter is as important as the message it delivers. Your letter is an example of how well you communicate, and no employer wants to hire people who can't do so effectively. With that in mind, here are some tips on making your cover letter look and sound professional.

- **Personalize the letter.** Whenever possible, address your cover to the individual responsible for filling the position. A generic salutation sends the message that you aren't familiar with the company; such an impression won't convince the reader that you're enthusiastic about the job. Likewise, "To whom it may concern" will probably concern no one. And "Dear Sir" or "Dear Madam" are **not advised**—don't risk alienating or offending your reader.

If necessary, make a phone call, visit the library or use the Internet to find out the **name and title** of the person who does the hiring. Also, make sure to get the spelling correct. Remember, the hiring manager will be looking for people who set themselves apart. Take the time to find out who's in charge and you may be that person.

- **Be natural.** Use simple, uncomplicated language and sentence structure. Don't try to sound like someone else, particularly if that means using unnaturally formal language, convoluted sentences and words you've never used before (perhaps misusing them in the process). You may mean to impress, but you'll often sound awkward. Write as you would speak. Be formal, but don't be stiff. Say things in a simple, straight-forward way, and don't rely on a thesaurus. As with your resume, use **action words** to create dynamic sentences.
- **Be specific and get to the point.** Your cover letter must be intriguing enough to get the reader to look at the resume, but should be only an introduction to the resume, not a repeat of it. Make sure you answer the questions, "**Why should I hire this person?**"

Avoid using clichés, like "I've taken the liberty of enclosing my resume," or "I'm a people person." It's difficult to sell yourself as unique if your letter reads like every other one in the pile.

- **Be positive.** Don't complain about your boss or describe your present or previous work experience as "boring". Nobody wants to hire somebody with an attitude. Above all, don't sound like you're begging for a job. A hiring manager may wonder why you're so desperate.
- **Be polite and professional.** You may be a comedian with your friends, but a potential employer should be treated with respect.

## Interview STOP

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- **Be confident, but not arrogant.** Don't be negative or too humble. Tell them you're qualified for the job, but don't demand it. Don't profess to know more about the company than you really do. Explain why you find the company attractive and simply leave it at that.
- **Be efficient.** Don't waste space (and the reader's time) on unnecessary details. Make sure every sentence has something to do with explaining your interest in the company, illustrating how you'll fill the company's needs, and how you'll contact the company in the near future.
- **Type your letter,** but beware of the dangers of word processing. If you send a similar letter to several companies, make sure that you change all customized statements; no company wants to read how much you'd like to work for their competitor. Carefully read each letter before you sign it.
- **Be available.** Remember to tell the employer how to reach you. Give a phone number that will be reliably answered by either a person or an answering machine. If possible, include an e-mail address.
- **Do not leave the ball in the employer's court.** Indicate what reaction you expect from your letter and how you will follow up. For example, don't end with "I look forward to hearing from you soon."
- **Proofread.** Check carefully for grammar and spelling mistakes, and then check again. Typos and grammatical errors say a lot about the kind of work you do. Don't depend entirely on the spell-check function of your word processor; if you use "there" for "their", for example, spell-check won't notice. Keep a dictionary hand for proper word usage and consult a style manual for grammar questions.
- **Sign it.** Don't forget this or your letter may appear to be a form letter.
- **Package it nicely.** Print your resume and cover letter on the same paper stock; the uniformity will look professional. Use only printers that produce neat, readable text with no stray marks or smudges. Avoid using a dot-matrix printer or a manual typewriter.
- **Keep a copy for yourself.** Make a copy of each letter sent, and keep it for future reference.