

Writing a Cover Letter – Do's and Don'ts

- Don't write "To Whom It May Concern" or "Dear Sir or Madam." Cover letters that begin with phrases like "To Whom it May Concern" sound like random junk or bulk mail, rather than important correspondence. Call the company, look on its website or talk to others to find the correct contact.
- Do personalize your letter. If you don't know the person's name, use something generic and gender neutral, like *Candidate Selection Team* or *Dear Hiring Manager*.
- Don't send a generic cover letter to many different companies. Hiring managers can spot a mass mailing a mile away.
- Do address the specific position advertised. Companies that post openings are making your life easier by telling you the qualities they are seeking. Show the company that you paid attention. Research the company prior to writing the letter and incorporate what you learned into your letter.
- Don't confess weakness or apologize for a lacking qualification.
- Do help the reader know that you are right for the position. Include specific examples about your past successes and experience. Lay all of your pertinent information out in a way that lets the person making the hiring decision easily see how your experience and qualities fit the company's needs.
- Don't write a letter longer than one page.
- Do get to the point. Hiring managers receive letters and resumes from dozens and even hundreds of applicants and often just don't have the time to read lengthy, wordy letters. Be direct.
- Don't end your letter passively. Nobody gets a job by sitting at home waiting for the phone to ring. Similarly, not many people get a call once a resume or cover letter is sent.
- Do take the initiative and follow up. Instead of ending the letter with "I look forward to hearing from you," close with "I will call you next week to discuss a time for us to meet." Once you've included this call to action, however, make sure you follow your own promise.
- Don't use an improper tone. It may seem obvious, but avoid a demanding, desperate, confessional, overly enthusiastic tone.
- Do write and edit your letter with great care. Nothing says "I don't really want this job" like a cover letter with typos or spelling errors.
- Make sure the company's name is spelled correctly. Check to see if the contact is a male or female.

Additional feedback about cover letters from a recruiter:

- Include what you plan to bring to the job in value added, not just what you hope to get from it.
- If the company name or my name is misspelled, I don't even read the letter; I just throw it away.
- Be brief and to the point, explain what I should look for on your resume and why you are a good fit for the position you are seeking.