

The Workplace

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A Fact Sheet

Job Search 101: The Purpose and Organization of a Cover Letter

Highlights

Your cover letter should achieve three goals:

1. *State clearly your reason for writing.*
2. *Sell your skills and expertise.*
3. *Present the reader with a plan.*

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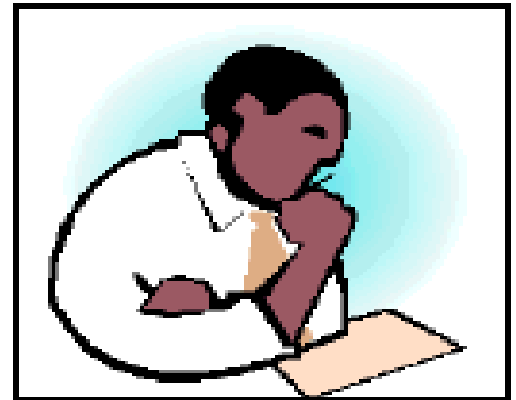
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The cover letter accompanying your resume may be the most important and the most difficult letter you ever write. Even more important than writing a strong resume, a good, strong cover letter that gets attention and communicates clearly plays an important role in the ultimate success of the resume. A terrific resume may become trash if the cover letter doesn't do its job.

Whether you are sending a traditional hard copy resume or an electronic one, a well-written letter should always accompany a resume. Although the purpose of the resume, i.e., to get an interview, is very different from the purpose of the cover letter which is to **"sell" the applicant's qualifications**, both are essential to the success of the overall job search.

The cover letter should be viewed and treated as a marketing tool which is one reason that many people find writing cover letters very hard to write. Knowing that most hiring managers or screeners spent approximately 10 to 30 seconds per letter puts pressure on the writer to make sure that the cover letter grabs the attention of the reader immediately. Unless you are an accomplished writer, hire a professional to help you compose and edit your letters. Having someone who is not emotionally involved in the process helps you maintain focus and objectivity.



When you begin to write your cover letter, ask yourself, "What makes me the best qualified applicant for this job?"

When you begin to write your cover letter, ask yourself the following question: "What makes me the best qualified applicant for this job?" The answer to this question has to be more than a simple listing of the skills and expertise listed on your resume; the answer has to explain how you would use those skills for the benefit of the company. The answer also has to be an honest accounting of your skills and talents. Hiring managers can

usually spot exaggerations quickly. The letter should state very succinctly, in no more than three to five short paragraphs, what the applicant could do for the prospective employer—what company needs the applicant can help meet.

“... the purpose of the cover letter which is to “sell” the applicant’s qualifications ...”

Your cover letter should achieve three goals:

1. State clearly your reason for writing. Although it should seem obvious, many applicants fail to specifically state they are applying for a job. Show that you are interested in filling a specific need for the company and briefly explain exactly how you can do this. This is also the place to tell the reader if you were referred to the company by a mutual contact.
2. Sell your skills and expertise. Give the skills you have that can meet the company’s needs. Explain how you can use your talents and expertise to benefit the company if hired. The closer you can match your set of skills and talents to those identified by the company through an ad or their web site, the better your chances. Remember to be

brief; the details should be in your resume that is attached.

3. Present the reader with a plan. Before closing the letter give a plan that includes when and how you plan to follow up to the letter and resume. For example, you might say that you will call in two weeks to make sure your resume was received. Some job coaches recommend using a self-addressed, stamped response card (Figure 1) as a tool for opening the lines of communication. Also be sure to give the details of where and how you may be reached, including your e-mail address. Diplomatically maintaining control of your job search is essential to the job search process.

J	Johnson J. Jones 111 Elite Square Anywhere, AL xxxxx (Phone: 334-555-5555; Fax: 334-555-5554) jjones@abc.com
From: Ms Jane J. Johnson First Bank and Trust Anywhere, AL	
Dear Mr. Jones:	
_____	Call me for an appointment at _____.
_____	I would like to talk with you by phone at _____.
_____	Call me in _____ weeks.
_____	Try the person below:
	Name: _____
	Title: _____
	Company: _____
	Address: _____
	Phone: _____
	e-mail: _____

Figure 1

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Sources:

Microsoft Corporation (2000). Cover Letter Content. <http://www.msn.com>

Frank, W. S. (1993). 200 Letters for Job Hunters. Berkley, CA: Ten Speed Press. <http://www.careerlab.com>.