

The Workplace

Volume 2, 6

March 31, 2001

A Fact Sheet

Highlights

Hints to help you get your message across and get an interview include:

1. *Make the letter interesting.*
2. *Personalize the letter.*
3. *Be genuine and enthusiastic.*
4. *Keep the letter short.*
5. *Make provisions for follow-up.*

AUTHOR INFORMATION:

Dr. Jacquelyn P. Robinson
Community Workforce
Development Specialist
State Headquarters
216 Extension Hall
Auburn University, AL 36849
Telephone (334) 844-5353
FAX (334) 844-9022
jrobinso@aces.auburn.edu



Job Search 101: Writing the Cover Letter

Knowing what to put in a cover letter and knowing how to format it so that it looks professional are important keys to grabbing the attention of the hiring manager or screener. Equally important is how your message is conveyed. Finding the right tone between sounding overly confident or too familiar and being too vague is hard to do, but finding just the right balance for communicating your skills and expertise is vital to finding your next job.

The cover letter should focus on how you can help the company and should never repeat the details given in the resume. Instead, the cover letter should refer to the detailed information provided in the resume and whet the appetite of the reader to know more details of the applicant's experience. Keeping these in mind, here are some hints to help get your message across and get an interview:

1. Make the letter interesting. Fill your letter with benefits for the reader. Tell them exactly what they will be getting and how you can help them. Tailor your letter to fit the company. Form letters are easily spotted and are not successful in attracting much attention. Most companies look for individuals who can set themselves apart, are creative, and can communicate fluently.
2. Personalize the letter. Address the letter to a person. This may take a little research to find the preferred name of the hiring manager or director of the human resource department. Be sure to get the correct spelling. A generic greeting is a sure sign that you do not know anything about the company and have not done your homework. Use an appropriate closing. *Sincerely* may be the best choice, but consider using other closings, such as *Warmest Regards*. Use blue ink when you



Knowing what to put in a cover letter and how to format it are important keys to grabbing the attention of the hiring manager or screener.

sign the letter. Signing in blue ink indicates that the letter is original. (The only other appropriate ink color is black.)

3. **Be genuine and enthusiastic.** Use simple, straightforward language and sentence structure. Unnaturally formal, complicated language often comes across stiff and awkward. Try to write in a way that shows respect, yet is natural. Give your accomplish-

Finding the right tone between sounding overly confident or too familiar and being too vague is . . . vital to finding your next job.

ments, especially those that specifically relate to the job for which you are applying. Show that your positive attitude and work ethic can make a difference. The message that you want to convey is that you are confident and capable, but not arrogant. It is also important to let your prospective employer know that you really would like to work for his/her company without appearing to sound desperate.

4. **Keep the letter short.** State very succinctly what you can do for the prospective employer. Explain your qualifications in one page or less. An efficient letter, i.e., every sentence relates to how you can help the company, shows that you would make an efficient and valuable employee.
5. **Make provisions for follow-up.** Tell the employer how you may be reached and your plans for following-up on the letter.

Before putting the letter and resume into the mail, let it sit for at least a day. Ask others to proofread it. Chances are you will think of ideas to include or a better way to express yourself. Let others read your letter and get their reaction. After editing for a final time, it is time to make a copy for yourself, drop the original in the mail (being sure to include your resume), and wait for the phone to begin to ring.

Dr. Jacquelyn P. Robinson

Community Workforce Development Specialist

Alabama Cooperative Extension System

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>.