

CHAPTER 40

COVER LETTERS THAT WILL IMPRESS EMPLOYERS

People submit a cover letter with their resume as a means to introduce themselves to prospective employers. Your cover letter must capture the reviewer's interest; make them want to find out more about you, just like your 30-second commercial. The cover letter should make the reviewer want to read your resume to find out more about you. Your cover letter is like the cover of a great book; once you scan it, it makes you want to pick the book up and start reading it.

Your cover letter assists in selling you by highlighting the most key or desirable skills a company would want to buy. Your cover letter should be easy to read, direct and to the point, positive, and project a confidence by you in your talents and skills.

The reward of a great cover letter will be a resume that is read in detail instead of being passed over. Great cover letters, followed by great resumes, get you an invitation to interview.

Writing a cover letter to accompany your resume submittal is part of the job search process as shown in Figure 40-1. Generally one writes a cover letter after they have completed their resume, since the cover letter is really a summary or just the highlights of your resume that are meant to impress the reviewer.

GENERAL FORMAT AND LAYOUT OF A COVER LETTER

The general format of a cover letter is shown in Figure 40-2. In the upper right-hand corner is your contact information. Next should come the company contact or who the letter is addressed to. Following this is the greeting and introduction section. The objective statement is next followed by the best three reasons why they should hire you. And at the bottom of the cover letter is a strong closing and a request for an interview.

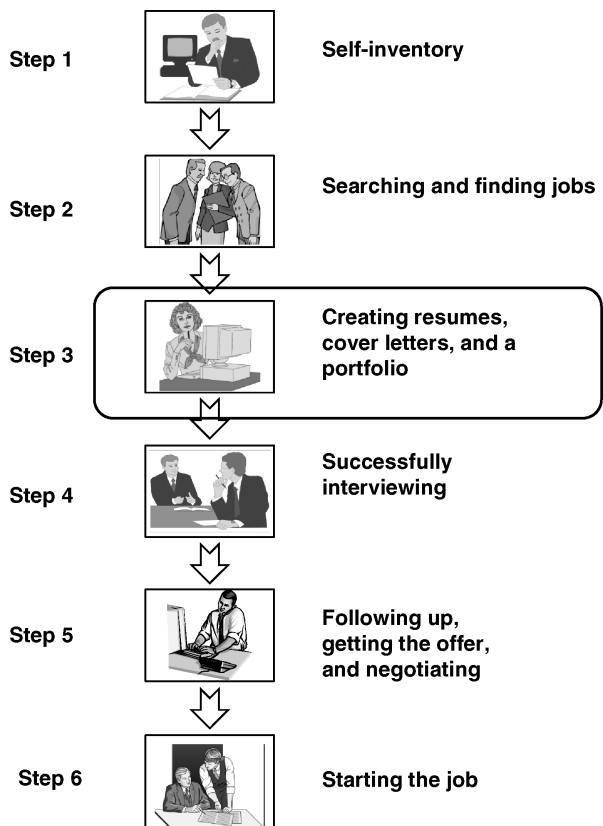


FIGURE 40-1 Job search process step 3—creating cover letters.

Greeting and Introduction Section. For the opening greetings it is best to be traditional and use “Dear” followed by the person’s full name. Directly below the greeting is a very short paragraph that tells them why you are writing to them; this should immediately grab their attention. There may be multiple job openings, so a good rule of thumb is to mention the job ad or opening that you are responding to. Make it short and directly to the point.

Objective Statement. This should be a short paragraph describing your objectives or highlights. This should be similar to, but not identical to, your objective statement on your resume.

Reasons to Hire You. Next should follow the three best reasons why they should hire you. These reasons should be clear, concise, and easy to read. They should jump out from the page and not be buried in the middle of a paragraph that makes it hard to read. One can use bullet points to highlight your superior skills.

Strong Closing. You should end your letter with a strong closing that directs the reader to your attached resume and requests an interview. And naturally, at the bottom of the closing, is your hand-written signature. All

General Format of a Cover Letter

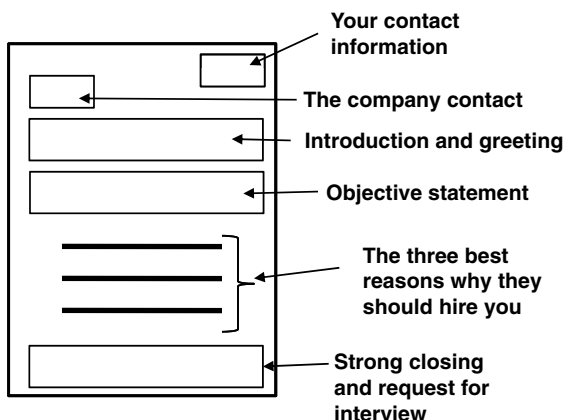


FIGURE 40-2 General format of a cover letter.

cover letters submitted should be originals. The standard closings include: Regards, Sincerely.

HOW TO WRITE IMPRESSIVE COVER LETTERS

The process for writing a cover letter is very similar to writing a resume. You should have the job ad, your resume, cover letter templates, and reference material close at hand to look at as you draft your cover letter. You start by asking yourself, “what do I have to offer that would make them choose me?” You determine this by finding the matches between their job ad and your resume. These are the items you want to highlight in your cover letter. Once you identify these matches, then you are ready to start writing. The following are great tips to consider when drafting your cover letter.

Use the Job Ad Terminology. Again, like when you wrote your resume, you tailor the cover letter directly to the job ad and use the same terminology and keywords the company put in the job ad. Your cover letter should highlight your superior qualifications for the job in the exact words used in the job ad.

Quantify, Relate, and Sell Yourself. Power-charge your cover letter by quantifying, relating, and selling yourself. The cover letter is all about highlighting the great benefits you can offer to the company. Your cover letter should answer the question, “Why should they hire you?”

Use Action Words. Use powerful action words throughout the cover letter like you did when describing your superior skills in your resume. Please refer to the previous section for a list of action words.

Use Simple Language and Sentence Structure. Don’t overcomplicate your letter by using industry jargon and acronyms. Stick to the terminology of the job ad and not your terminology. Keep the sentences short and easy to read.

There should be more white space than text on the page; your cover letter is not a PhD thesis or long narrative on why they should hire you. QuintCareers.com suggests your cover letter should be in the range of 200 to 250 words.

Proofread Many Times. Proofread your cover letter many times before you submit it and even have others review and get their comments.

John Smith
123 First St
Maple City, CA 76532
Date

Ms. Mary Jones
National Engineering Company
465 Park Avenue
Trenton, New Jersey 12345-6789

Dear Ms Smith

I am interested in the position of senior engineering manager #34567 that your company has posted on your website. My skills and experience match your needs and, in some instances, offer more than the requirements of the position.

I am presently an engineering manager with over 25 years experience in the design and development of products utilizing Field Programmable Gate Arrays (FPGA) devices. I have a Master's Degree in Digital Design and a Master's Degree in Business from Stanford. Here is what I have to offer your company:

- Highly successful engineering manager responsible for 150-person group generating \$110M business base with eight different products. Revenues and profits from my group have exceeded expectations the last three years.
- Demonstrated outstanding customer skills as evident by customer selecting our group as Supplier of the Year.
- Responsible for leading state-of-the-art digital designs for extremely large three-million gate FPGA utilizing advanced tools to complete design ahead of schedule and under cost.

I would appreciate the opportunity to talk to you about your exciting opportunity so that I can share more of my background and skills with you. I will be contacting you to confirm that you received my attached resume and if you have any questions. The best way to contact me for an interview is on my cell phone at 234-567-7890.

Sincerely,

John Smith
Senior Manager
Enclosed: resume

Now after reading this cover letter let's summarize the key points. John Smith has an advanced education, 25 years experience, manages a large group that produces very profitable products. He exceeds expectations, his customers select him, and he utilizes the latest technology to keep costs down and delivers products on time. Yes, I would say this applicant is definitely a good candidate. The cover letter is written to present the image that John Smith is an ideal manager to have working for your company. Make your cover letter read like you are the ideal candidate whom any company would hire.

Email Cover Letters and Electronic Copies. Some companies no longer accept paper cover letters and resumes. They inform applicants to email their resume to the company email address. In this case your email is actually the cover letter. If you find yourself submitting resumes in this fashion, make sure the structure, font, and formatting of your email cover letter will remain intact once it is opened up at the company. The best way to do this is by selecting a common font, a simple paragraph structure, and staying away from special alignment tabs. A good test is to send it to a friend and have them open it up and see if the format goes unchanged. If the company wants an electronic copy of your cover letter, another good thing to do is convert it to PDF format before sending.

SUMMARY

Your cover letter should make the reviewer want to turn immediately to your resume to find out more about you. A great cover letter is like the cover of a book that once you scan it, it makes you want to pick the book up and start reading it.

Cover letters are there to sell you. Sell you by highlighting the most key or desirable skills you have that the company would want to buy. Your cover letter should be easy to read, direct and to the point, positive, and project a confidence by you in your talents and skills.

The process for writing a cover letter is very similar to writing a resume. You should have the job ad, your resume, cover letter templates, and reference material close at hand to look at as you draft up your cover letter. You start by asking yourself what do I have to offer that would make them choose me. You determine this by finding the matches between their job ad and your resume. These are the items you want to highlight in your cover letter.

The format of cover letters varies slightly and templates are available for you to start from [1–3]. In addition, there are excellent reference books available to guide you when writing cover letters [4–8]. If you are interested in more information, search online using “cover letters for engineers.”

Have you identified any career actions you want to take as a result of reading this chapter? If so, please make sure to capture these ideas before you forget by recording them in the notes section at the back of the book.

ASSIGNMENTS AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

- 1 How does a cover letter differ from a resume?
- 2 Describe the general format of a cover letter.
- 3 How do you power-charge your cover letter?
- 4 What precautions should you take when submitting a cover letter online?
- 5 How do you quantify, relate, and sell your skills? Give examples.

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