

Cover Letter

Cover Letters: Your First Chance to Impress

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Hiring managers routinely receive responses from hundreds, perhaps thousands, of applicants for any given job. To avoid having your resume sink in this sea of paper, it's imperative to write a cover letter that stands out from the crowd and makes a good first impression.

A compelling cover letter that follows five essential rules will convince a hiring manager to read an applicant's resume.

Rule #1 -- Appearance

The resume and cover letter must be aesthetically pleasing and consistent in appearance. This would include using the same heading and fonts in each, both produced on a high-quality printer and paper (if documents are being "snail-mailed"). Save the designer stationery and stylish fonts for writing letters to friends. A professional employment package never sets a casual tone.

Rule #2 – Target Your Audience

Always use the hiring manager's name in the salutation. If the contact's name isn't provided in the job posting, a bit of Internet research or a well-structured phone call can produce results. In using the contact's name, the cover letter is personalized, while also showing the applicant's interest in the company. Remember, a letter addressed "Dear Sir or Madam" or worse, "To Whom It May Concern," has the same impact as one addressed "Dear Occupant."

Rule #3 – A Strong Opening

A dynamic opening paragraph is essential to capture and retain a hiring manager's interest. Pared down to basics, for a quick and effective read, it should include a reference to the position sought and a brief statement as to why the applicant feels qualified to fill the job. Emphasis should always be placed on what the applicant can do for the targeted company, while also providing quantifiable proof as to why this is true.

Rule #4 – Showcasing Accomplishments

Include a bulleted area to emphasize accomplishments pertinent to the targeted job. Not only does this break up large blocks of text that a hiring manager might find daunting, but it also draws the eye towards the most important part of the cover letter -- what the applicant has to offer.

Rule #5 – A Proactive Closing

Always initiate further action at the end of a cover letter. A proactive closing indicates that the applicant will call within a few days to see if a time might be scheduled to meet. To wait for a hiring manager to take that first step is to risk losing the opportunity to another candidate.

Sample Cover Letter

July 10, 2004

Your Address

John Smith
Director of Personnel
ABC Company
1234 Main Street
Anywhere, GA 01234

Dear Mr. John:

The accompanying resume is in response to your sales opportunity presented to me by (recruiter name).

I am especially interested in this position because my experience as a senior sales professional in the industry has prepared me for a disciplined, secure work environment and the challenges associated with unexpected events. I'm looking forward to using this experience for enhancing the sales of a growing and community-conscious company.

I would appreciate an opportunity to meet with you to discuss how my experience will best meet your needs. My ideas on how to improve your companies sales posture may be of particular interest to you. Therefore, I will call your office on the morning of July 14 to inquire if a meeting can be scheduled at a convenient time.

I look forward to meeting you.

Sincerely yours,

Your Signature

Your printed Name

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Thank You Letter

After an interview it is always appropriate to write a thank you letter. This is your opportunity to demonstrate to the employer, one more time, how your skills and qualifications are a good fit for the position. You can use the thank you letter to reiterate topics which were discussed during the interview and re-enforce in the interviewer's mind how hiring you could meet his/her needs. Your final paragraph can also serve to remind the interviewer about when and how you will be hearing from them.

Like all letters written in the job search process, a thank you letter is a typed business letter. You should try and send your thank you note within 3 to 4 days of your interview. If you interviewed with

more than one person, write a thank you letter to each person with whom you interviewed.

Sample #1

Mr. (First & Last Name)
(Title)
(Company Name)
(Street Address)
(City, State Abbrev. Zip Code)

Re: Interview for the Position of (title) on (Date) (i.e. October 21st, 2003.)

Dear (First Name),

It was a pleasure meeting with you (and list other's names here if appropriate) yesterday to discuss the position as an (same as above) with (same as above). I sincerely appreciate you taking time out of your busy day to discuss with me your business, people, and personal philosophies as well as your expectations for the position of (same as above). It was very encouraging to see that our philosophies are so much alike, and I feel very confident in my abilities to add significantly to the team you are building.

From our discussion, it appears the (same as above) position would allow me to begin (describe your immediate duties) in the (capacity of those duties). I look forward to (achieving the goals and/or expectations defined in the interview). Together we will (the benefit and value that you will bring as it relates to the company. i.e. "build new long-term relationships with clients that will in a short time lead to repeat business as well as a new business prospects).

I was particularly impressed with your (state what impressed you such as "leadership style and the long tenure of many members of your firm"). It is readily apparent that you (add a statement or two here about what you took away from the interview such as "treat your employees as successful until they prove otherwise"). Your many years of business experience and the successful reputation of the firm adds a strong sense of encouragement and excitement to this opportunity. I eagerly look forward to learning all I can from you, Jim, and others on our team. I in turn will share the benefit of my (whatever you bring to the table).in order to contribute all I can to our team.

The atmosphere at (the company) seems to strongly favor an environment toward (i.e. running a "business within a business" which demands a great deal of responsibility while also allowing for a great deal of individual freedom). This approach is (i.e. vastly different than the "cookie cutter" environment of most firms where employees are required to ...) Your approach is exactly the kind of environment I am seeking. I am confident that I will be a valuable strength to you and the firm's team in addition to significantly contributing to (restate the benefit you bring).

This is an exciting opportunity and I look forward to your decision on the next step. As we discussed, I will call you on (time and date agreed upon).

Sincerely,

Signature

(Your Name)

Sample #2

July 10, 2004

Your Address

John Smith
Director of Personnel
Coastal Products Incorporated
1234 Main Street
Anywhere, GA 01234

Dear Mr. Smith:

Thank you again for the opportunity to interview for the marketing position. I appreciated your hospitality and enjoyed meeting you and members of your staff.

The interview convinced me of how compatible my background, interest, and skills are with the goals of Coastal Products Incorporated. As I mentioned during our conversation, my experience as an Army recruiter has prepared me well for direct sales opportunities both in the U.S. and Germany. I am confident my work for you will result in increased profits within the first two years.

For more information on my success as a recruiter, please call Lieutenant Colonel Dave Weeks at 123-123-1132. I talked to Dave this morning and mentioned your interest in this program.

I look forward to seeing you again.

Sincerely yours,

Your Signature

Your Printed Name

Sample #3

**33 Columbus Square
Poughkeepsie, NY XXXXX
(000) 000-0000
April 9, 20__**

Mr. Robert Jeffers
Virginia Dept. of Game and Inland Fisheries
P.O. Box XXX

Richmond, VA XXXXX

Dear Mr. Jeffers:

I enjoyed our discussion last week. Thank you for your time. I have read the recent article you gave me from the "Virginia Nature" magazine about Virginia Game and Inland Fisheries and the local Mood River Preserve. It was informative and exciting.

I would enjoy the opportunity to do research in the Preserve as we discussed. The independent field study I designed for the spring semester has given me some valuable tools and skills. I agree with you that informal natural research is important to developing a scientific understanding.

Best wishes with the Spring season. I look forward to hearing from you next week. Thanks again.

Sincerely,

Logan Hanna

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The Resignation Letter

It's usually isn't easy to resign. Even if you hate your job, hate your boss and can't wait to start that new job, it still can be difficult to resign diplomatically and tactfully.

Used most effectively, a resignation letter can help you maintain positive relationship with your old employer, while paving the way for you to move on. You never know when you might need that old employer to give you a reference, so it makes sense to take the time to write a polished and professional resignation letter.

Pros and Cons

Before you make the decision to quit, be absolutely sure that this is the right decision. An employee once called me the day after she started her new job. She hated it, regretted resigning and wanted to come back. By the time we heard from her, we had already filled the position and she was out of luck. If you're not sure about the position you are considering taking, ask if you can spend a day in the office "shadowing" the staff. It may reinforce your decision to take the position or help you decide you don't want it.

Do you have another job offer? If so, weigh the pros and cons of the new position versus your current position. Consider the work environment, flexibility, salary and benefits in addition to the job responsibilities. How about opportunities to advance? If the new job comes up ahead on all counts and you feel sure that this is the right change to make, don't hesitate.

No new job on the horizon? Before you quit, consider the basics. It will take about three to six months, sometimes longer, to find a new job. Unless you quit for good cause, you may not be eligible for unemployment benefits. Do you have enough savings or other income to manage on? This is a

tough job market, with over 2.5 million unemployed workers, and there is a lot of competition out there. Even if your employment situation isn't the best, you might want to consider hanging on to the job you have, as well your paycheck, and starting your job search before you resign. That old saying that "it's easier to find a job, when you have a job" does hold true.

Give Notice

If you have an employment contract that states how much notice you should give, abide by it. Otherwise, it's appropriate to offer two weeks notice.

What to Say

Don't say much more than you are leaving. Emphasize the positive and talk about how the company has benefited you, but, mention that it's time to move on. Offer to help during the transition and afterwards. Don't be negative. There's no point - you're leaving and you want to leave on good terms.

Write a Resignation Letter

Even if you resign verbally, write a resignation letter. A resignation letter can help you maintain positive relationship with your old employer, while paving the way for you to move on. You never know when you might need that old employer to give you a reference, so it makes sense to take the time to write a polished and professional resignation letter. Use our sample resignation letters for suggestions on what to write.

Ask for a Reference

Before you leave, ask for a letter of recommendation from your manager. As time passes and people move on, it's easy to lose track of previous employers. With a letter in hand, you'll have written documentation of your credentials to give to prospective employers.

Don't Forget the Details

Find out about the benefits and salary you are entitled to receive upon leaving. Inquire about continuing health insurance coverage through COBRA (Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act), collecting unused vacation and sick pay, and keeping, cashing in, or rolling over your 401K or other pension plan.

Sample #1

July 10, 2004

Your Address

John Smith
Director of Personnel
ABC Wholesale Distributors, Inc.
1234 Main Street

Anywhere, GA 01234

Dear Mr. Smith:

The purpose of this letter is to inform you of my resignation from my current position as Junior Auditor with ABC Wholesale Distributors, Inc. My last day of work will be Friday, March 12, 2004. I have accepted another position in Aurora, Illinois.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation for your guidance and counsel during the three years that I have worked under your supervision at ABC. I have learned a great deal about computerized auditing procedures and I am certain that the skills I have acquired will be of value throughout my career.

I know that I have been fortunate to have been associated with ABC Wholesale Distributors because I have learned so much about how important providing outstanding customer service is in today's business environment.

Please use the address on this letter to send my final paycheck and any other official communications that may be necessary.

Sincerely,

Your Signature

Your Name
Title

Sample #2

July 10, 2004

Your Address

John Smith
Director of Personnel
ABC Wholesale Distributors, Inc.
1234 Main Street
Anywhere, GA 01234

Dear Mr. Smith:

I want to thank you for all you have done for me here at (Company). It's been a pleasure working with you, and representing the company as your (job title).

I have accepted an offer with another firm and have decided to tender my resignation. My last date of employment will be (approximately 2 week notice). This decision has nothing to do with the exceptional opportunity you have provided me here. You and the company have been more than fair

with me, and I genuinely appreciate all your support.

I wish (Company) continued success, and I want to thank you for allowing me to be a part of your team. Please feel free to contact me at any time if I can be of further assistance in helping with a smooth transition.

Sincerely,

Your Signature

Your Name
Title