

Cover Letters & Resumes

A cover letter, sometimes called a job application letter, is a persuasive piece of business writing that accompanies a resume (and sometimes other documents). When you're applying for a job, always send your resume — the document that outlines your skills, education, and experience — with a cover letter tailored to the job you're interested in.

At just a page or less, a cover letter is a tool that allows you to introduce yourself, identify the job you'd like to interview for, and make a case for why you are a great candidate. Unless you've exchanged some preliminary e-mails, your cover letter is usually your first written communication with a potential employer. This means you need to make a good impression.

When organizations advertise available positions, they may receive applications from many more people than they could possibly interview. That's why the persuasive aspect of the cover letter is so important. Imagine a hiring manager faced with a stack of thirty resumes to read. She's probably very busy and wants a clean, simple way to turn that stack of thirty resumes into a more manageable pile of five or six. Skimming cover letters is a good way to do that. So keep in mind that when you write a cover letter, your main goal is to persuade readers to invite you in for an interview.

WRITE

When did you last write a cover letter to apply for a job? What was the job? What did you emphasize in the letter? How persuasive was it? Ultimately, was it successful? Why or why not? Write for five minutes about these questions. Include details in your answers.

A resume is a document that lists and highlights a person's credentials for a job. When you write a resume, you're writing to convince a potential employer that you have the right education, experience, and skills to succeed in the job you're applying for. A resume typically begins with the writer's name and contact information and a statement about the kind of position he or she is looking for, followed by specific academic and employment information relevant to the particular job being sought. It's crucial for applicants to portray their qualifications accurately and to keep all resume information up-to-date.

Like cover letters, resumes are usually very brief. A good practice is to limit your resume to one page until you have at least ten years of experience in the field in which you're applying for a job. Like cover letters, resumes are read quickly by busy people, so they need to be extremely clear and match your experiences precisely with the qualifications listed in the job posting. Be sure to carefully tailor your resume to each job you apply for, paying particular attention to the section that states the kind of job you're looking for. It would be embarrassing, for example, to send out a resume that focuses on how you are a "people person" and thrive in team environments when you're applying for a job that requires you to work alone. Additionally, resumes focus on the positive only — projects managed successfully, sales goals met, increased responsibility, and the like.

ATTENTION, JOB APPLICANTS

Another important letter that job applicants write is the postinterview thank-you letter. Always send a thank-you note, card, or e-mail after any interview, and as soon as possible. In this correspondence, point out a few specific details from the interview to reinforce your professionalism, your interest in the job, and your potential as the candidate for the job. This letter is not only another tool for being persuasive — it's a great opportunity to ask any questions you wish you'd asked when you were face-to-face with your interviewer.