

TIP SHEET

COVER LETTER TIPS

A cover letter is your first impression to an employer. Put your best foot forward and follow some recommended conventions. The purpose of a cover letter is to introduce yourself, explain your interest and qualifications for a position, and propose a follow-up plan.

1. Minimize Use of "I"

While your cover letter is certainly about you, you don't want to give the impression of arrogance or self-centeredness. The letter is really about your qualifications, your skills, your experience, and your ability to meet the employer's needs - not about you in general. Don't start too many sentences with the word I.

2. Start Strong

Open your letter with something strong and catchy. You only have their attention for a few seconds - don't waste time. Draw their interest with the first sentence and shape their attention with the rest.

- **Usual:** I am interested in your accounts manager position.
- **Stronger:** Your Accounts Manager should have excellent accounting and analytic skills. My experience at Acme, Inc., is an excellent match for this position.

3. Focus On Your Best Selling Points

Remember you are selling yourself as a prospect. Your cover letter and your resume should present a compelling argument that they should invite you to an interview to learn more about you. Match your chief skills and accomplishments to the main points of their job posting.

Your Position Requires: Experience with diverse manufacturing accounts

My Qualifications: Six years of experience managing accounts in the automotive industry with progressive levels of responsibility.

Your Ad Specifies: Computer experience with SAP and MS Excel.

My Qualifications: Proficiency in SAP and all MS Office applications with advanced expertise in Excel.

4. Keep It Short

If you write more than a few paragraphs, you risk losing their attention. Keep it clear and to the point. You might include an example of something you accentuate in your resume, but save your longer stories for the interview.

5. Be Specific About The Job You Want

When you respond to a posting, assume they probably have posted many job openings, and don't assume they will know which one you are applying for. Mention the job title and any internal Job Posting number in your cover letter. Make sure your message points explain how your qualifications meet the employer's specific needs.

6. Be Careful With Boilerplate

When you use one cover letter as a template and modify it each time you use it, make sure you change the right elements. Update the company name, job title, and recipient information. People tend to be sensitive about how their name is spelled. And incorrect information tells them you didn't do your homework, or worse yet, you are sloppy with details.

7. The Cover Letter Should Stand On Its Own

The cover letter is your chance to make the case for them to read your resume. I shouldn't BE another version of your resume. Consider using the letter to give a brief story, such as "How I Solved A Thorny Accounting Problem and Saved the Company Money."

8. End With Action

Take responsibility for the follow-up. Don't put it on their already full plate. Offer to follow up in a week or so. It is acceptable to say, "I will call early next week to answer any preliminary questions you may have. In the meantime, you may reach me at (651) 555-5555.

9. Be Respectful and Considerate

Thank the person for their time and consideration.

Sample Cover Letter

Your Name
Address
City, State, Zip
Phone Number
Email address

June 3, 2006

Ms. Audrey Smith, Executive Director
Acme Inc.
2233 Grand Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55555

Dear Ms. Smith:

Please accept my resume for consideration for the Accounts Manager position listed in the Pioneer Press on March 17th. The skills and qualifications you mention closely match my experiences.

Your Needs:

- Experience working with diverse manufacturing accounts
- Corporate experience with major clients a must
- Experience with SAP and Excel

My Qualifications:

- Six years experience as Accounts Manager in automotive industry
- Regularly served purchasing agents at Fortune 500 companies
- Proficient in SAP, Excel, Word and Access

My six years of industry experience, as well as my strong organizational and analytical skills will serve Acme, Inc. well. I look forward to speaking with you regarding the position. Enclosed is my resume for your review. I will follow up with a phone call next week. Feel free to contact me with questions in the meantime, via email or phone.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Signature

Typed Name

Enclosure: Resume