



## Network to Work Meeting

March 2019

### RESOURCE DOCUMENT – *COVER LETTERS*

## *The Ins and Outs of Writing a Cover Letter*

### **A. Introduction**

A cover letter is an important part of your job application. Sometimes, employers require a cover letter be submitted with your resume. Other times, a cover letter is optional. In either case, a well-crafted cover letter can boost your application for a job. A sloppy or poorly written letter, however, can also cost you an interview.

Many job seekers are challenged by writing a cover letter. Cover letters make demands that are difficult to meet. Many job seekers don't feel comfortable writing about themselves. Others aren't confident writing in general. Meanwhile, an increasing number of job applications don't request a cover letter and more and more reports suggest that recruiters don't read them anyway, leaving job seekers wondering, what's the point?

### **3 Things You Need to Know About Cover Letters**

**Here are three things to know about cover letters going forward.**

*1. A majority of corporate recruiters don't care about cover letters.*

Many recruiters make their first round of cuts by quickly skimming a resume for the minimum qualifications. If they're only dedicating a few seconds to the resume, it's likely they aren't spending time reading each cover letter. Therefore, job seekers shouldn't count on recruiters reading their letter.

This poses a problem for job seekers who rely on their cover letter to explain gaps or unusual entries on their resume, such as someone attempting to shift their career towards a new role or industry. To

bridge the gap for recruiters, job seekers can utilize a summary section to add context to their resume.

## *2. Yet Cover Letters Aren't Dead*

The idea that “cover letters are dead” has been growing support in recent years, but the notion is being promoted by those recruiters who freely admit that they don't even open up cover letters. That recruiters ignore cover letters is understandable, as they must sort through hundreds of applicants for any given position in order to deliver the three or four best candidates to the hiring manager.

Yet recruiters aren't the only people involved in the hiring process. A corporate recruiter may be the first hurdle, but they're not the final decision maker. That distinction belongs to the hiring manager, who is much more likely to read the cover letter.

If an application specifically requests a cover letter, it's worth the effort to write a good one because what a hiring manager sees in a great cover letter is an applicant who is willing to go the extra mile to make a good impression. A well-written cover letter gives you the opportunity to frame your background so that employers draw the right conclusions about you and your qualifications.

## *3) Social Media Might be the New Cover Letter*

Many recruiters and hiring managers prefer a “show, don't tell” approach; instead of trusting a job seeker to explain their skills and character in a cover letter, hiring professionals look for it online. Some recruiters look on Google, LinkedIn and other social media platforms for any public social media profile or website associated with a job seeker.

LinkedIn is often the first place they look, as it allows them to corroborate and delve deeper into the work history. Therefore, a valuable set in the job hunt is writing a standout LinkedIn profile. Other popular social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram also come into play. Status updates on these sites will tell a hiring manager more about a candidate's character than any cover letter.

A job applicant's online presence is now a standard part of their application. And while corporate recruiters may have moved on from the cover letter, it won't die off completely as long as there are still hiring managers that want to hear directly from the applicant. If a cover letter is required, job seekers must be sure to put their full effort into writing a letter that adds value to and expands upon their resume.

## B. Cover Letter Basics

### What Should Go Into a Cover Letter?

The purpose of a cover letter is to convey how you are the right fit and a strong candidate for a job. You demonstrate this by sharing how your character, knowledge, skills and experiences equip you to excel in the position. Ideally, this is presented in a natural tone of voice that lets your natural charm and enthusiasm shine through. Think about what would make you sit up and take notice if you were reading this cover letter. What would inspire you to call you in for an interview?

The body of the cover letter is the place where you try to capture the hiring manager's attention and emphasize your unique qualifications for the job, while not repeating the same exact information you've included on your resume. While it's fine to begin with a cover letter template, be sure to customize each letter to each position and proofread carefully.

#### Here is the basic content for a cover letter:

##### Written Letter:

1. **The Header:** Your name and address followed by a double space; the date followed by a double space, and then the employer's contact information (hiring manager name; employer name; employer address).
2. **Use a professional greeting and address a specific individual:** Try to find out the name of a hiring manager or recruiter dealing with the position you're interested in and address them directly. If you have the recruiter's name, how you greet them depends on the company's level of formality. If you're applying to a corporate business, you may want to consider using "Dear Mr. Snaper" for example. If you're applying to a start-up or a business with a more casual culture, you can use "Dear Jon Snaper". If you really can't find a name, it's okay to use "To Whom It May Concern", although that isn't ideal.
3. **Write a strong first paragraph:** Mention the position you are applying for, and if you have the name of a contact within the organization, include their name here. **Try to use a "hook"**, which is a clever introduction that "hooks" your reader into wanting to learn more. Think about yourself as a job candidate -- what makes you unique? What about your career might a recruiter be intrigued by that you can package into an interesting first sentence? You can see some examples of a good hook below in the section titled. **"Attention Grabbing Ways to Start a Cover Letter"**.

Limit your first paragraph to 1 to 3 sentences however; the details about your qualifications come in the subsequent paragraphs.

4. The **middle paragraphs** explain why you are interested in and qualified for the job. In the **second paragraph**, describe what you have to offer, making a strong connection between your qualifications and the position requirements. Using one or two concrete examples, be specific in explaining how your skills and experience match the job and make you a great fit for the position. Include an accomplishment that will show your suitability for the job.

Consider these questions. What did you do at a previous company that gave you relevant experience? Which projects have you worked on that would benefit the new company? How will your prior experience help this company grow? Stay humble in your explanation of credentials while still showing that you would be an asset to the team. Use this paragraph to show you're genuinely excited and interested in the position.

Be mindful of readability. A few shorter paragraphs or a bulleted list of your qualifications rather than one large block of text will make it easy for the reader to quickly scan and absorb this important information.

5. In the **third paragraph**, talk about what impresses and excites you about the company – what makes it a great fit for you.

6. The **final paragraph** should be a strong closing. Be straightforward about your interest and enthusiasm about the new position, thank the employer for considering you for the position and tell them you're available to talk about the opportunity at any time. Be sure to include your phone number and email address. At this point, the ball is in the recruiter's court to decide how to follow up. End your cover letter on a high note, saying something like “I’d welcome the opportunity to speak with you about how I can contribute.”

7. End with a **formal sign off** like “Sincerely,” “Best” or “All the best”. Finish by typing out your full name.

8. Don’t forget to **also include**:

- Your contact information:
  - Put at the top of the letter in a written letter;
  - Include your phone number, email address, and LinkedIn address (if you have one)
  - Your home address isn’t required, but it can be a helpful reassurance to the employer if you live nearby and would have no trouble coming into the office.
  - Do NOT include any phone number or email address that belongs to your current employer.
- Your signature:
  - Sign your name on a printed cover letter.

9. **Finally, it is very important to be sure to include “keywords”**. These are the specific words and phrases in the job listing related to the skills and qualifications required. This is especially important if you’re submitting online. The right keywords will help get you past the applicant tracking system to a real human being.

**Here is an example of a good, basic cover letter.** The numbers correspond to the numbered paragraphs above.

Tim Halpern  
555 First Street  
Boston, Massachusetts 02215

November 20, 2014

Munder Difflin, Inc.  
15 Coal Blvd, Floor 2  
Scranton, PA 18504

Dear Jon Snaper,

I was thrilled to see the opportunity at Munder Difflin posted. I believe my current role would make me the perfect candidate because of my interest in marketing technology, experience managing a team, and enthusiasm for the work your team has done to make the paper industry more eco-friendly.

Last year, I was tasked with a few challenges: double the number of leads generated from our blog, take over management responsibilities for our content and campaigns teams, and implement inbound marketing within a company that has always depended on outbound marketing tactics. Here we are a year later, and we have tripled our blog’s lead generation and created a growth machine centered around marketing. I feel that my experience in this area will translate well to the work of the the Marketing Manager position to grow your inbound program from the ground up while also maintaining stronger results. I value your emphasis on metrics and also your company’s focus on inbound marketing tactics.

I know that Munder Difflin has doubled the size of the business while also making the business more green. Because of my experience working with clients on similar initiatives such as LEED certification, I know that Munder Difflin will help me grow in my career while also supporting my passion for going green. I have always been impressed by your company’s phenomenal results that have been achieved while supporting an important cause.

I would be delighted to further discuss my experience and qualifications for the Marketing Manager position at Munder Difflin. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or require any additional information at 555-867-5309 or tim.halpern@gmail.com. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Best,  
Tim Halpern

### Email Cover Letter

When an email is used as a cover letter it is even more important to be concise as much of the letter is likely to be skimmed. Here is the basic content:

1. A clear, concise subject line. Typically, you want to include the title of the position that you are applying for and your name. For example: Editorial Assistant - John Smith. Limit it to 30 characters as this is about all that can be seen on a mobile device.
2. An introductory paragraph.
3. A paragraph that explains your qualifications for the job.
4. A professional closing.
5. Don't forget to **also include**:
  - Your signature:
    - Type your name on an uploaded or emailed cover letter.
  - Your contact information:
    - Put below your signature in an email cover letter.

### **Attention-Grabbing Ways to Begin a Cover Letter**

Traditional cover letter wisdom tells you to start a cover letter with something to the effect of: "Dear Sir or Madam, I am writing to apply for the position of Customer Service Representative with the Thomas Company". While an acceptable opening paragraph, there are ways to truly capture the attention of the reader. Here are some examples:

#### *Start With a Passion*

- "If truly loving data is wrong, I don't want to be right. It seems like the rest of the team at Chartbeat feels the same way—and that's just one of the reasons why I think I'd be the perfect next hire for your sales team."
- "I've been giving my friends and family free style advice since I was 10, and recently decided it's time I get paid for it. That's why I couldn't believe it when I found a personal stylist position at J. Hilburn."
- "When I was growing up, all I wanted to be was one of those people who pretend to be statues on the street. Thankfully, my career goals have become a little more aspirational over the years, but I love to draw a crowd and entertain the masses—passions that make me the perfect community manager."

*Start with Your (genuine and specific) Love of the Company – and bonus points if you can tell a story*

- “I pretty much spent my childhood in the cheap seats at Red Sox games, snacking on popcorn and cheering on the team with my grandfather. It’s that passion that’s shaped my career and what led me to apply for this position at the Red Sox.”
- “It was Rudy, my Golden Retriever, who first found the operations assistant opening (he’s really excited about the prospect of coming to work with me every day). But as I learned more about Burton and what it is doing to transform the world of snowboarding, I couldn’t help but get excited to be part of the team, too.”
- “When I was seven, I wanted to be the GEICO gecko when I grew up. I eventually realized that wasn’t an option, but you can imagine my excitement when I came across the events manager position, which would have me working side by side with my favorite company mascot.”
- “Seeing the job description for Warby Parker’s customer service representative stopped me in my tracks. I’ve been a Warby glasses wearer for many years, and have always been impressed by the way the company treats its customers, employees, and the community at large.”

*Start With an Attribute or an Accomplishment to Make yourself Stand Out*

- “My last boss once told me that my phone manner could probably defuse an international hostage situation. I’ve always had a knack for communicating with people—the easygoing and the difficult alike—and I’d love to bring that skill to the office manager position at Shutterstock.”
- “Among my colleagues, I’m known as the one who can pick up the pieces, no matter what amount of you-know-what hits the fan. Which is why I think there’s no one better to fill Birchbox’s customer service leader position.”
- “I’ve built my career on one simple principle: Work smarter. I’m the person who looks for inefficient practices, finds ways to streamline them, and consistently strives to boost the effectiveness of everyone around me. It’s what’s earned me promotions in my past, and it’s what I know I can do as the new operations analyst for SevOne.”

*Start With Humor or Creativity*

- “Thank you so much for offering me the marketing manager position at Airbnb! I wholeheartedly accept. OK, I know we’re not quite there yet. But if we were, here are just a few ideas of what I would do once in the role.”
- “I never thought that accidentally dropping my iPhone out of a second story window would change my life (it’s a funny story—ask me about it). But thanks to my misfortune, I discovered iCracked—and found my dream job as an expansion associate.”

## What Should be Left Out of a Cover Letter?

It is possible to share too much information; a cover letter should be short, concise and focused only on relevant information. It shouldn't be longer than one page. Leave off personal information or anything else that doesn't connect you with the position for which you're applying.

**To avoid making the wrong impression, here are a number of things to keep out of your cover letter.**

- 1. Spelling or Grammar Errors.** Your cover letter is viewed as a sample of your ability as a writer and evidence of your attention to detail. Even a minor typo or error can knock you out of contention for the job. *(Later in this document are helpful proofreading tips.)* It may help to get a second set of eyes to review it for you.
- 2. The Wrong Company Name or the Wrong Name of the Contact Person.** Double-check to be sure you've addressed your letter to the correct person at the right organization, otherwise you are signaling that you are mass producing your documents and lack attention to detail.
- 3. Anything That Isn't True.** Facts can be checked and lies are grounds for rescinding offers and dismissing employees. Make sure your cover letter accurately reflects your qualifications for the job. Don't embellish your work history or qualifications. Employers can and do check with references and previous employers.
- 4. Paragraphs That Are Too Long.** Employers will skip over your cover letter if it is too difficult to read. Each paragraph of your letter should include 5 - 6 lines of text with no more than three sentences in each. Include plenty of white space at the top and bottom of your letter and in between paragraphs.
- 5. Negative Comments about a Current or Past Employer.** Avoid negative comments about your current or previous employer as part of why you are looking for work. Such comments can be viewed as an indication of attitude or performance problems. Be positive and focused on why you're the right person for the job.
- 6. Information Not Related to the Job. Stay focused on what you can offer the employer and why the position appeals to you.** Empty language distracts from your most important message.
- 7. Personal Information.** Don't talk about the personal reasons a job is of interest to you (such as employee discounts). Keep your focus on the professional reasons you'd love to be hired.

- 8. Any Portrayal of the Position as a Stepping Stone.** Mentioning future advancement can lead an employer to believe you won't be satisfied doing the job for long. Most employers are looking primarily for someone who is motivated to do the advertised job for a reasonable length of time.
  - 9. Qualifications You Don't Have. Don't say things like "Despite my lack of sales experience"** or otherwise draw attention to your limitations. Stay focused on your credentials and how they will enable you to get the job done.
  - 10. Explanations for Leaving Past Jobs that Sound like Excuses.** Excuses direct attention to less-positive chapters in your work history. Pointing out that you were recruited for a better job is fine, but there's no need to mention that you were fired or had difficulties in previous positions.
  - 11. Excessive Modesty or Overly Flattering Language.** Convey positives in your letter but do so in a matter-of-fact way. Speak about accomplishments and results but don't use adjectives that may suggest you are arrogant or conceited.
  - 12. An Overwhelming Amount of Interest in the Job.** Excessive interest can hint at desperation or undercut your leverage for salary negotiation, and is a guaranteed turnoff. Keep the focus on pitching yourself as a candidate, not on begging for an interview.
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## **C. Cover Letters for Older Workers**

### **Cover Letter Tips for Older Workers**

1. Don't summarize your entire resume but instead focus on your experience relevant to the job at hand. Illustrate how your qualifications fit the position. Also, don't ever lead with "decades of experience" or say you have 25 or 30 years of experience. It might signal to employers that you're overqualified even if you're exactly who they are looking to hire!
2. Emphasize your results and accomplishments. Quantify them using data and numbers wherever possible. Make sure you list achievements that set you apart from other candidates. The more you can demonstrate how you've added value and how specifically you've made an impact, the better. This is one of the key cover letter tips for older workers.
3. Express some understanding of company's current challenges and demonstrate that you have solutions.

4. Include language about your flexibility and willingness to learn. Emphasize that you're a proven commodity, and highlight any knowledge of current technology that you have.

5. Relate yourself to the company and show that you'll fit if you get hired. Spend some time getting to know the company's culture; explore their blog and social media platforms to learn more about them. Ideally, you'll also want to demonstrate your connection to the company's goals. Have you been following news on them for a while? Do you use their products? Anything to show a genuine interest in the company will increase your chances of being interviewed.

## Examples of Cover Letter Phrasing for Older Workers: Four Scenarios

These are some of the situations older worker might need to explain when applying for work:

#1: You took time off to nurse a family member. Here is one way to address it:

*"In the last two years, I stopped working to care for my mother who was diagnosed with a terminal illness. It was a difficult period, but I've made sure I've kept my skills up to date by participating in various networking events and online forums, as well as studying\_\_\_\_\_.*

*Right now, I am available to return to work, and I believe my extensive experience in \_\_\_\_\_ would be an asset to your team."*

#2: You took time off to raise a family. Here is one way to address it:

*"After stepping away from my professional life to start a family, I am eager to return to workforce now that my children are older and more independent. I have kept my skills and connections current through attending industry events and through participation in a couple of charitable organizations."*

#3: You are looking to change careers. Here is one way to address it:

*"Even though my last role was a \_\_\_\_\_, at this point in my career I want to apply my skills in a new field. My skills will transfer nicely, as I am focused, dedicated and have a track record of completing projects on time."*

*Then name the specific skills that are relevant to the job, how you have applied them, the outcomes, and how they will benefit the prospective employer.*

#4: You are applying for a position for which you may be overqualified. Here is one way to explain your willingness to take a step down professionally:

*"At this stage of my life, I'm more interested in flexibility and work-life balance."*

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