



## 25 Golden Rules to Effective Cover Letter Writing

*By WorkBloom.com*  
*"All You Need for Your Job Search"*

Following is a list of what we believe are the 25 keys to writing an effective cover letter to complement your resume.

- 1) **Determine what the employer is looking for. "Determine the need and meet that need."** Depending on how you learned about the job opening, you should enquire further into what the employer really wants. If you learned about the position through networking, ask questions in terms of what the position entails, the industry, the employer's work philosophy, etc. If you found out about the opening through a job posting, read the job description carefully and make sure that you address all the requirements of the job in your application. Don't forget to read "between the lines". Some things, although not specifically stated, are implied and should be taken into consideration.
- 2) **Decide whether or not you are truly interested in the position.** More often than not, the way you draft your cover letter will reflect your level of interest in the position. If you are truly interested in the position, you will take the time to make your application perfect. If you have reservations about the position, you will probably not produce something up to that level. If that is the case, find out why you have reservations about the opening and decide whether or not you still want to give it a try. That way, you won't waste your time sending out applications that, in any event, will have a low rate of success.
- 3) **Find out to whom you should address the cover letter to.** It is always a good idea, if possible, to address your cover letter to a specific person, as opposed to using generic language such as "To whom it may concern". Addressing your cover letter to a specific person will help you relate to that person. Also, if the name of the recruiter was not mentioned in the job posting, the fact that you were able to find out his or her name will show that you took the initiative and will demarcate you from other applicants.
- 4) **Address how you found out about the position.** Recruiters are often curious as to how job applicants found out about the job opening. If you address this in your cover letter, you will probably have answered a question they had in mind and will add some context to your application. This is a bonus to the recruiter.
- 5) **Introduce yourself in the first paragraph.** The person that will be reading your cover letter probably knows nothing about you. You have to give some background about yourself in order to ease into the substantive part of your cover letter. That does not mean that you should spend half a page discussing who you are, but you should at least answer some basic questions that people would normally like to know

when meeting someone new. For instance, “where are you currently working?” or, if you are a new graduate, “where did you study?”.

- 6) **Customize your cover letter to each position that you are applying to.** Each opening is an opportunity. You don’t need 10 jobs. You only need one. If you approach each job application as being “the one” and spend the time necessary to put the odds on your side, your success rate will increase. Tailor your cover letter to each position that you are applying to. Sending a standard cover letter to someone is like talking to him or her while looking away. You would never do that in a social setting, so why would you do it in writing? If you are interested in the opening, then apply for the position. If you are not interested in it, then abstain yourself. Don’t go half way.
- 7) **Limit your cover letter to what is essential.** A cover letter can be a very powerful tool. When a recruiter picks up a cover letter, he or she tells the applicant: “This is your chance to make your case for an interview. Show me what you’ve got.” If you meet someone in person and he or she tells you that, what would you do?
- 8) **Keep your cover letter short and to the point.** Recruiters have a limited attention span, especially when they have to review a lot of applications. At this stage, they “owe” nothing to the candidates that are sending in their applications. Actually, for them to retain an application is to do that applicant a favour. Writing a long cover letter is like trying to drive from A to B with a tank half full, the tank being the recruiter’s attention span and “B” being the end of your cover letter. Keep your letter concise enough so that the reader remains interested throughout.
- 9) **Don’t repeat the information that is provided in your resume. Instead, complement that information.** A cover letter is meant to complement a resume. The recruiter does not need to read the same information twice. Your resume already discusses your qualifications from an objective standpoint. You need to add some subjectivity to your application. That is what the cover letter is for.
- 10) **Be future-oriented.** Referring to your qualifications or past accomplishments does not necessarily show the recruiter that you can do the job. You have to relate whatever you did in the past to what you can bring with you to the new position.
- 11) **Show confidence.** Your personality will emanate from your cover letter. If you lack confidence in yourself, it will show. Believe in yourself. How you present yourself applies not only at the interview stage, but throughout the job search process. Be careful, however, between showing confidence and exaggerating. Keep in mind that your cover letter will create expectations that will have to be met at the interview stage.
- 12) **Adopt a positive attitude.** Avoid raising negativity in your cover letter. People don’t want to work with someone negative. If you raise something negative about yourself in your cover letter, you won’t be in position to respond to concerns or

questions that the reader may have. If you feel something negative needs to be addressed, let it be addressed at the interview stage, to the extent that the issue is raised by the interviewer. For instance, you may be considering a career change and are worried that your lack of experience in the field that you are applying to may affect your candidacy. Don't refer to this issue from a negative standpoint in your cover letter. Instead, address how your past experience or qualifications can help you bring a new perspective to the position. To the extent that the recruiter feels that this point needs to be addressed, he or she will address it during the interview and you will be able to answer his or her concerns at that stage.

- 13) Be professional.** Being professional is a general proposition, but can give recruiters a good impression of your work ethics. For instance, if you project the image that you are professional, you will also project the idea that you can service customers, you are diligent in your work, you are punctual, you are organized, etc.
- 14) Formulate your ideas and propositions clearly.** You don't want the recruiter to read your cover letter twice in order to understand what you are trying to say. You want your letter to be clear so that the person reading it will understand your message the first time. This is also about setting a good rapport with the recruiter. If he or she has to read your cover letter many times before understanding what you are trying to convey, he or she might become impatient. If your cover letter is unclear, it will shed a negative impression on your application upfront.
- 15) Avoid addressing compensation issues.** Don't address issues that relate to your compensation package this early on in the process. Even if this is something that is important to you, wait until the interview stage before raising the salary issue. At that point, you will have a better picture of what the job entails and will be in a better position to argue your case in person.
- 16) Distinguish yourself from other applicants and answer the following question: Why should we call you in for an interview?** When recruiters look at applications at the preliminary stage, meaning when they screen cover letters and resumes, they are essentially trying to determine who should go on to the next round. Because of time constraints, they obviously cannot ask all applicants to attend an interview. Unless you distinguish yourself from others and give the recruiter a reason to call you for an interview, you will not make it to the next round.
- 17) Support your propositions.** So what if you mention that you have good writing skills? Does your cover letter support your contention? So what if you mention that you are good at modeling documents on Excel? How can the reader know that for sure? You should support your assertions by giving concrete examples of your accomplishments. This will give more weight to what you state in your cover letter and will make it more concrete to the recruiter.
- 18) Use your cover letter as a primer for your resume.** Use your cover letter to create interest for your application. If, after reading your cover letter, the recruiter sees

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something special in your candidacy and, accordingly, spends more time reviewing your resume, your cover letter has accomplished its mission. You were able to set the stage for your resume to shine. Think of it like a show. You have the presenter and the artist. What is the role of the presenter? To “present” the artist in a way that will spark the interest of the audience and create the ambiance for him or her to perform.

- 19) **End your cover letter by reiterating your interest in the position.** Concluding on a good note is as important as starting on a good footing.
- 20) **Proofread.** To send out a cover letter that contains a typo is like going to an interview with a shirt that is stained. Presentation is important.
- 21) **Once you have finished drafting your cover letter, let it rest and review it the next morning.** This is a trick used by most professional writers. By leaving your cover letter aside and reviewing it later, you will approach the cover letter with a fresh mind and a new angle.
- 22) **Have someone else review your cover letter.** You may think that you wrote a good cover letter, but what if you’re wrong? It’s a good idea to let someone else review your cover letter. Try to keep an open mind during this process. You don’t have to agree and you will still have the last word, but this will allow you to bounce your cover letter off someone else before it is sent out. You know yourself and things that may seem obvious to you may not be so for others.
- 23) **Format your cover letter to match the layout of your resume.** Your cover letter should always accompany your resume. They are an ensemble and should look the part too. Use the same fonts, headings, and formatting.
- 24) **Don’t give the person reading your cover letter a reason to reject your application.** Avoid having your application “rejected” for silly reasons. Don’t give a reason for the recruiter to reject your application because you addressed it to the wrong person, there is a typo, you failed to include all the information that was asked in the job posting, etc.
- 25) **Keep a copy of the cover letters that you send out.** You may send out a lot of applications while looking for a job. Some recruiters may call you weeks down the road. Be prepared for that eventuality.