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Cover Letter Tips

Many resume books will tell you that your cover letter introduces your resume. This is not the case. In fact, more often than not, your resume determines whether the reviewer ever reads your cover letter. The reviewer will read your cover letter only if your resume passes an initial review.

Recruiters, staffing managers, and HR managers are interested in facts not fluff. A resume offers a quicker route to the facts than a cover letter. Most people who review resumes and cover letters for a living quickly learn to discount and ignore a candidate's cover letter unless the resume gives the reviewer a good reason to consider the candidate for an interview.

Here are some important facts you should know about cover letters:

- **90% of all cover letters are never read, or scanned:** Most recruiters and staffing managers will *scan your resume first* unless your cover letter is brief and is placed in the body of your email or online submission form. If they do not like your resume, they will not read your cover letter. If you have something important to say, say it in your resume unless it does not properly belong in a resume. Your cover letter is not a chance to make a first impression--it is a second chance to *maintain* a good impression.
- **The other 10% can break good resumes:** If a recruiter reads your cover letter first, and it is poorly written, he or she may decide not to spend any time (not even ten seconds) scanning your resume. On the other hand, a well-written cover letter could persuade the reader to pay special attention to your resume.
- **So, you must have an outstanding cover letter:** If your resume survives a ten second scan, and a thorough review, the recruiter or staffing manager will want to read your cover letter. For this reason, your cover letter must stand out and make a strong positive impression. In short, cover letters are seldom read but you should have one, and it should be superbly written.

Just the facts:

A cover letter is not an autobiography. It should be short and sweet, brief and to the point. The cover letter should support the resume in demonstrating that you meet or exceed the requirements listed in the job description, that you are interested in the position, and that you are available. Any additional information is superfluous and can be counterproductive.

Avoid providing a salary history:

A salary history is more likely to cost you a job than not. If the job ad says that resumes without a salary history will not be considered, give a historical salary range and state that your salary requirements are flexible. Be sure to see our [sample salary history example](#).

Make your cover letter easy on the eyes:

It should be easy to scan and have a logical progression. Bunched up text in long paragraphs will frustrate anyone who has to review hundreds of resumes and cover letters a week. Don't repeat your resume. Your cover letter is not a summary of your resume - listing previous employers and

job roles can be counterproductive.

Don't repeat worn platitudes and clichés:

Experienced recruiters know that almost every candidate promises "excellent written and verbal communication skills", and the ability to "think outside the box" and "juggle multiple tasks" while walking and chewing gum. Be different. Demonstrate your written communication skills by writing a good cover letter.

Offer a solution to their problem:

Most employers hire people because the employer needs to accomplish a task—not because they want to provide employment opportunities to the public. Your cover letter should be solution-centric; not "I" centered. Keep the "I would like" stuff to a minimum and explain what you offer.

Personalize your cover letter if possible:

Your cover letter should be addressed to a specific person whenever identifying information is available. Form letters insult the reviewer's intelligence and indicate that the writer is broadcasting her resume to every employer or has not made an effort to learn more about the company. Generic/canned cover letters can lead to failure. Even if you do not know the name of the recipient, if you conduct basic research, you can customize the cover letter to suit the position and the company. Tell the reader that you are interested in the company and the position, and why.