

Cover Letter Do's and Don'ts

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Here are the keys to writing successful (and dynamic) cover letters. Follow these simple rules and you should achieve success in this important phase of job-hunting.

- **Don't** ever send your resume without a cover letter.
- **Do** address your letter to a named individual.
- **Don't** use a sexist salutation, such as "Gentlemen" when answering a blind ad.
- **Don't** waste your first paragraph by writing a boring introduction. Use the first paragraph to grab the employer's attention; give the employer the reasons you are qualified for the position.
- **Do** send an original letter to each employer.
- **Don't** use such clichés as "Enclosed please find my resume" or "As you can see on my resume enclosed herewith." Employers can see that your resume is enclosed; they don't need you to tell them. Such trite phrases just waste precious space. And **don't** use pleonasms (wordy phrases), which also waste space.
- **Don't** depend on the employer to take action. Request an interview, and tell the employer when you will follow up to arrange it. Then, **Do So**. It is imperative that you follow up. You will greatly increase your chances of getting interviews if you call the employer after writing instead of sitting back and waiting for a call. Those who wait for the employer to call them will generally have a long wait indeed.
- **Don't** send a cover letter that contains any typos, misspellings, incorrect grammar or punctuation, smudges, or grease from yesterday's lunch.
- **Do** use simple language and uncomplicated sentence structure. Ruthlessly eliminate all unnecessary words. Follow the journalist's credo: Write tight!
- **Do** write cover letters that are unique and specific to you.
- **Do** speak to the requirements of the job, especially when responding to an ad.
- **Do** keep your letter brief. **Never, Never** more than one page, and it's best to keep it well under a full page. Each paragraph should have no more than one to three sentences.
- **Do** tell the employer how you can meet his or her needs and contribute to the company.
- **Do** distinguish your cover letter from those of other job-seekers by quantifying and giving examples that amplify and prove the claims you make in your letter.
- **Do** try to answer the question that the employer will be asking while reading your letter: "Why should I hire this person?"
- **Don't** rehash your resume. You can use your cover letter to highlight the aspects of your resume that are relevant to the position, but you're wasting precious space -- and the potential employer's time -- if you simply repeat your resume.
- **Do** avoid negativity. Negativity never has a place in a cover letter.
- **Do** be sure the potential employer can reach you.
- **Do** use action verbs.
- **Don't** forget to personally sign the letter, preferably in blue ink.
- **Do** use e-mailed cover letters, but keep them shorter and more concise.