

Sample Cover Letters: First Impressions Count - Avoid Common Cover Letter Mistakes



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Despite the fact that companies consistently demand applicants to submit cover letters along with their resumes, many still believe the cover letter to be nothing but a mild formality. Sometimes they don't bother sending a cover letter at all or just one paragraph notes, quickly belted out with little thought.

When you send a poor cover letter, you send the message that you can't get the job done, even when quality is essential. Unless you enjoy sitting around in the house ducking calls from bill collectors, that's not the kind of message you want to send.

Too short is too bad

Many people send one paragraph, two- or three-sentence throwaway notes in place of real cover letters. Or, they confuse the Cover Letter with a dashed-off note, such as the fax coversheet. A cover letter should have three to four paragraphs, no paragraphs of over six lines long, with the longest one being the middle one or two, and the shortest one being the final, summation paragraph. The idea is to make the document brief and easily readable while still demonstrating a professional, thoughtful manner.

Silliness

In attempt to let their personality and humor soak through the cotton-bound paper, many applicants try to make their cover letters funny. But these attempts rarely work. You have no way of knowing if your prospective boss shares your sense of humor. More broadly speaking, the cover letter offers a sample of your ability to conduct business-like communications. Clowning around can disguise your professionalism.

Poor Grammar and, Mispelings

No one wants to make grammatical or spelling errors but many applicants nevertheless submit cover letters with small and thoughtless, yet deadly, errors.

Many problems slip through because people have a difficult time seeing the mistakes in their own writing. So ask someone else to proofread the cover letter for you. If that's not possible, read

the document aloud, slowly and word by word. Every time you make a correction, read the whole document over again. Writers make many mistakes during the final editing process as they make corrections, particularly with tense and word placements. Spell checks can also be typo insinuations, causing writers to change misspelled words into wrong words, as demonstrated by one cover letter writer who boasted that "Referees are available on request."

Cliches put egg on your face

It goes without saying that the best way to sound unremarkable and insincere is to fill your cover letter with cliches. So if that's what you were planning, go back to square one and get busy as a beaver at putting together a collection of original thoughts instead of a collection of those same old employee buzzwords. Even if those buzzwords represent honest information you are trying to relay, remember, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. The best way to express your desires is to say how you really feel. True statements run circles around cliched phrases. So if you come up with the real McCoy, take a bow, because you're moving in the right direction faster than a speeding bullet.

Pontificating with immoderately labored interpretive phraseologies (That is, writing overdone sentences)

Sometimes, in an effort to impress, writers go overboard. How many times have you seen someone strain to play it cool, only to crash and burn after misusing an impressive-sounding word? In an attempt to sound intelligent, cover letter writers regularly produce sentences that use big, impressive, but unfamiliar words. The resulting mistakes cause embarrassment for both the reader and writer, and ensure prompt dismissal of your application. (Even if the reader understands your meaning, she may be put off by your pretentiousness).

Egomaniacal tone

A golden rule for cover letter writing: make sure that by the time you've finished your writing, the person most impressed by your letter isn't you. This is an opportunity for you to give employers an idea of who you are, what you've accomplished and how you can contribute to their company. Nobody likes a self-absorbed narcissist, and even fewer less people want to work with one. The best way to avoid such errors is to avoid unqualified, grandiose statements and assumptions about how impressed your reader will be with you.

It's the sentiment that counts

When you tell potential employers why you're interested in working for them and their companies, be sincere. Don't bother pouring on a bunch of flattering statements. If you're interested in a position or company, just say why.

Okay:

"Cymad's increasing stake in the booming semiconductor market makes this position intriguing indeed."

"I've admired your company's products for some time, especially the Nibok 5000."

No good:

"You have the most fabulous company ever and it would be the culmination of my life dream to work with you."

"I would DIE to work at Microdex."