

**COVER LETTERS: WHY BOTHER?
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JOB SEARCH IS A SALES PROCESS WITH YOU AS THE PRODUCT.

Cover letters are one aspect of your personal sales plan. Your plan should include:

- Define the product - what are you selling?
- Position the product - set yourself apart from other products
- Target the correct buyers - do your homework
- Develop marketing materials - tailored to your target market
- Communicate the 'benefits' - of buying your product

Each cover letter is marketing your benefits – another ad for you.

Well written cover letters are still uncommon enough to help you get a second look.

THE BASICS

Tailor each letter to the specific job ad/company target. Generic letters are more likely to hurt your cause than to help it. And, yes that does mean you have to do some research even though much of it may be similar in many cover letters.

Address it to the right company and person – and remember to Include your name and basic contact information. Silly but common mistakes.

Check writing style, spelling, and grammar before sending. Your letter should be professional in tone and in appearance.

If emailing:

- Remember the simple stuff: your email address should be professional, not 'cute'; use standard fonts; omit emoticons or unusual sig lines; use business English, not IM or casual email styles.

You can include your cover letter in the text of email message or, if you do not, do write an enticing paragraph in email and remember to attach cover letter and resume.

Keep it brief - one page MAX!

Simple Outline for Ad/Known Job

Para 1: include job title, where advertised/how learned of, and whenever possible a referral name

Para 2: Two columns listing
in Column 1 "Your Requirements" as bullet points
in Column 2 "I Offer" matching qualifications point by point

Example:

Your Requirements:

**10 years program management*

** project budgeting*

I offer:

**Over 10 years program management*

** Project budgets ranging from \$50K - \$2M*

Para 3: Some bit that shows how you could help the specific organization meet its goals. Quick summary of any other relevant talents and your interest.

Simple Outline for Target Organization - without known open position

Address to someone specific in right function. Make every effort to find a referral to the person - include that in first sentence. You can also find people through research but a referral is always more likely to get attention.

Para 1: Clearly state your referrer's name and your area of competency.

Para 2: Follow up with 2-3 very short 'successes' that are directly relevant to their needs. Again, based on your research.

Para 3: Ask for a short meeting about potential match. Give them your contact information here. Attach your resume.

Test your own cover letters

Exercise: Use others whose advice you value to help you "product-test" your cover letters. Ask for feedback on 2-3 cover letters you have written.

Best skills you offer are clearly demonstrated

Personal writing style

Language usage, spelling, and grammar

Other comments or ideas

RESOURCES

Using the Internet

Enhance your cover letters by showing knowledge of your target! You can find terrific information to help you understand an organization before you approach it, to tailor your approach, as well as for interviewing preparation. Questions you might try to address include organization goals and values, current stage of success, business media coverage of new plans or changed circumstances. Some examples include:

What is the strategy?	What is the vision? mission?
Who are major competitors?	Current trends in revenues, share?
What are the critical issues facing the organization?	
What is the culture?	Who should you contact?

Great advice on various aspects of job search:

<http://www.asktheheadhunter.com/>

Good basic info on letters, both process and what should be included:

http://www.career.fsu.edu/ccis/guides/write_eff.html

From CareerLab - explanations and examples of cover letters, some are free

<http://www.careerlab.com/letters/>

My columns on the basics of job search and career advancement

<http://www.SHRinsight.com/publications/>

Books to broaden your career ideas

“*Navigating the Badlands*” by Mary O’Hara-Devereaux

“*Five Regions of the Future*” by Joel A. Barker and Scott W. Erickson

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