

Cover Letters

Who Needs a Cover Letter?

Everyone who sends out a resume does! Even if the cover letter never "came up" in conversation or wasn't mentioned in an advertisement, it's expected that you will write one. It is regarded as a sign of laziness (sorry about that) to send out a cover letter that is not tailored to the specific company. In the days before word processors, you could maybe get away with it.

Yes, it adds to the wear and tear of looking for a job! But the good news is: the cover letter gives you another chance to emphasize what you have to contribute to the company or organization. Don't give the person screening the resumes a second to entertain the thought: "But how can this person help US?" Your cover letter will answer that question in your own words. Your resume will also answer that question but in a somewhat more rigid format.

What makes a Good Cover Letter?

1. No spelling or typing errors. Not even one.
2. Address it to the person who can hire you. Resumes sent to the personnel department have a tougher time of it. If you can find out (through networking and researching) exactly who is making the hiring decision, address the letter to that person. Be sure the name is spelled correctly and the title is correct. A touch of formality is good too: address the person as "Mr.," "Ms.," "Mrs.," "Miss," "Dr.," or "Professor." (Yes, life is complicated.)

3. Write it in your own words so that it sounds like you--not like something out of a book.

4. Being "natural" makes many people nervous. And then even more nervous because they are trying to avoid spelling errors and grammatical mistakes. If you need a little help with grammar (do they still teach grammar?)--check out Jack Lynch's Grammar and Style Notes. He's an English teacher who gives down-to-earth advice. Or on my website listed under Blending technology in the classroom then click on Language Arts.

5. Show that you know something about the company and the industry. This is where your research comes in. Don't go overboard--just make it clear that you didn't pick this company out of the phone book. You know who they are what they do and you have chosen them!

6. Use terms and phrases that are meaningful to the employer. (This is where your industry research and networking come in.) If you are applying for an advertised position, use the requirements in the ad and put them in BOLD type. For example: the ad says-- "2 years' experience processing Storing and sorting data using magnetic media (cartridge, tape, disc); interface with benefit plan design, contracts and claims; and business background with strong analytical & technical skills—Data-Base, Excel, and Word."

Make sure your cover letter contains each of these requirements and shows how you measure up.