

How to write a better cover letter

A cover letter is a personal letter that you send with your resume or job application. It's the first thing the hiring manager sees when she opens your envelope or email. It's your hello, your smile, your chance to create a rapport, your reason for writing.

Q. “Does everyone send a cover letter with their resume or job application?”

No. Most people don't include a cover letter. And that's why you should send one. It shows that you're different. It shows that you are serious about the job and you cared enough to write.

Q. “Do I have to create a new letter each time I apply to a different company?”

Yes and no. You certainly want all employers to feel that you are writing to them personally. But, you can recycle paragraphs and include them in most of your letters.

Q. “Who should I address my letter to?”

This is important—the hiring manager is usually the manager of the department where you want to work. If you want a job

in human resources, send your letter to the human-resource manager. If you want to work in maintenance, send you letter to the maintenance manager. At a small business, send your letter to the owner of the business.

Q. “How do I get the manager's name?”

If you are getting a referral from a friend, ask your friend for the hiring manager's name. When writing, address your letter and envelope to that manager by name and title: Ms. Iva Joboffer, IT Manager. Make sure the manager's name, title, and address are accurate and spelled correctly.

If you are writing to a company and you don't know the manager's name, call the company and ask for it. The receptionist who answers your call will be glad to give you the information you need.

If you are answering an advertisement or job posting that gives no contact person's name

Eighty-six percent of executives said cover letters are important when evaluating job candidates.

—National Association of Workforce Development Professionals

or no company name, address your letter to *Hiring Manager*.

Q. “How long does my cover letter have to be?”

Keep your cover letter short and simple. One page is perfect.

Q. “Could you help me write my letter?”

You bet. But first, I'd like you to meet AIDA.

Q. “Who’s AIDA?”

The folks who write professional sales letters use a magic formula. It's called AIDA. That's short for—Attention, Interest, Desire, Action.

AIDA sells billions of dollars worth of goods and services every year. If it can work for business, it can work for you. So, let's use AIDA to convince a hiring manager to give you a job interview.

1. Attention

In the very first paragraph of your letter, grab the hiring manager's attention simply by telling her why you are writing. Below are several solid reasons for writing to a hiring manager. Adapt the ONE that works best for you.

- “I would like to apply for the sous chef's position I saw advertised in...”
- “My friend, Frieda Friendly works in your department. She recommended that I write to you.”
- “I stumbled upon your website. Wow. I'd like to interview for a position with your firm because...”
- “I shop at your store and...”
- “I would like to learn about the career opportunities for mechanics at your shop.”

2. Interest

In the second paragraph of your letter, rouse the manager's interest by explaining what makes you special. Here are a few examples. Adapt the ONE that works best for you.

- “I have three-years experience as a...”
- “I worked on the Slingshot project at David's and...”
- “I just graduated from school and...”
- “I have three special abilities I can bring to the job...”
- “I have an idea I'd like to discuss with you...”

3. Desire

If you are responding to a help-wanted advertisement or a job posting, be sure to talk about the job requirements the ad says are important. Otherwise, create a desire for the hiring manager to meet you by offering three solid accomplishments.

- “I am very familiar with...”
- “I know how to use...”
- “I also have experience with...”

4. Action

Ask the hiring manager for a job interview. Adapt ONE of the following statements that works best for you.

- “I would like to interview for your nursing position. Please call. You can reach me anytime on my cell phone at 555-666-7777.”
- “I would like to interview for your nursing position. I hope you won't mind if I call in a few days to see that you received my resume and hopefully to schedule an interview.”

WHEN RESPONDING BY EMAIL

Some help-wanted advertisements will ask you to email your resume and a cover letter to the employer.

Here are a few general tips. But, always follow the employer's instructions.

If the advertisement gives you a contact person's name like Ms. Smith or a job code number, type it in the “Subject” box of the email. This will ensure that your email gets routed to the proper hiring manager within the company.

If the advertisement does not include a contact person's name or a job code, type the advertisement's job title, Carnival Barker's Job in the email's “Subject” box.

Unless the employer tells you otherwise, copy and paste your letter into the body of your email. Include your resume as an attachment.

You may be asked to send your attached resume as a Word document, text file, or a PDF.

To create a text file or PDF in Microsoft Word, go to: File > Save As > Format > Plain Text or PDF.