

# Cover Letter Guide

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2017

Cover letters are a bit of a throwback to another era in job hunting where we didn't have LinkedIn and Facebook profiles to provide additional information personality beyond the CV to our application submission. In the more modern industries the cover letter is becoming increasingly less relevant.

While an official letter may not be required for an application, the exercise of crafting a letter can still provide a valuable outline and understanding of ones offering to a prospective opportunity. It is essentially a personal branding and marketing exercise where you are illustrating a problem and how you can be the solution.

This is a digest of information collected from around the web, LinkedIn Quora, blog posts, Forbes, Business Insider and elsewhere. There are a few different frameworks collected here and template suggestions. The final concept is the “disruptive cover letter” which is a change from the traditional, with some links to more info.

## Consider alternatives:

- Don't apply online but email your resume to a recruiter or hiring manager instead.
- Don't make it an actual "letter." Instead, make it the body of the email with your resume attached. When people attach a letter AND a resume to an email, it's safe to say only one attachment is getting opened, and it's always the resume. So don't even bother.
- Keep it short and to the point. Five to ten sentences is all that's necessary. Maybe a few bullet points but no multiple paragraphs. Long cover letters are simply not going to get read.
- Inject some personality into it...please. If your cover letter sounds like that of everyone else, you have completely defeated the purpose.

## General Thoughts

- The starting point to any cover letter always has to be the job advert itself and even more importantly the job description. Any good advert will give clues as to what it is the recruiter is looking for in candidates. Try to read between the lines of the job description as there can sometimes be useful pointers as to what they are looking for.
- Effectively connect with a job post through your cover letter by creating a connection and telling your story utilizing the keywords from the job description. Make sure you use the keywords from the posting to describe your experience. By demonstrating that you know and understand what the job would entail based on your understanding of the job description and your own experience, you can create the connection that the reader will need to make between you and the open position.
- The cover letter is a great place to showcase your connection and enthusiasm for the company you are applying to. Your resume tells them why you are qualified for the position but your cover letter should tell them why you belong there. Telling a story of how you are connected to the company is a great way to start. You want your story to make them feel like you are already part of the team. Have attention grabbing headlines and keep it to one story so the cover letter is better focused.
- Of course you need to get over some key messages about yourself in terms of experience, background and qualifications but there are other equally important points you have to make. What all prospective employers want to see is initiative, ambition, creativity and enthusiasm. This is what you need to convey. When you are talking about a specific strength of yours, explain exactly why that would benefit them. This is important because simply saying what you're good at isn't enough. They want to know how this will add value to what they do.
- Create a “disruptive cover letter.” Highlight a connection you have to the company or one of its products. If you have no connection to the company or one of its products; highlight the connection you have to the type of work you'll be doing.
- Cover letter = Pain letter. The document is called a Pain Letter because in your letter, you're going to talk about your hiring manager's biggest problem. How will you know what your hiring manager's biggest problem is? Put yourself in his or her shoes. Think about what your possible future boss is up against in his or her job.

Every organization has pain! When you begin your Pain Letter congratulating your target hiring manager on something cool the organization has done recently (an item you found in the company's About Us or Newsroom page) and then make a hypothesis about the most likely Business Pain for your manager, you're in a great spot. Your manager has a huge incentive to keep reading your Pain Letter. When you tie the most likely Business Pain to your own experience through a Dragon-Slaying Story, your hiring manager's brain may wake up. He or she may say “I'd like to talk with his person, at least.” That's all you need!

## Basic Template

Remember, the biggest thing to keep in mind about your cover letter is that you are:

- Creating a connection
- Showing an accomplishment
- Closing strong

### **Details:**

Make sure you put the typical details at the top of the page, get all the details right and check them a few times before sending off:

- Your Address
- Date
- Mr. /Ms. (Name of Employer)
- Title
- Company Name
- Their Address
- Dear Mr./Ms. (Their Name Again)

### **First paragraph:**

Opening: Start with a story.

The first part of the cover letter is your opening. This is how you hook them in. You tell an engaging story about why that company resonates with you. When you tell a story of connection, you increase the chances of getting your letter read. Open with a story. Share a reason why you started working in this industry or something about the company that interests you.

We begin with stating our business, basically telling the reader what job you are applying for and why. Let's keep this short and to about three sentences, cover these points:

- Reason for writing and which role you are applying for.
- Drop any names of people you know in the organization here, e.g. "John Smith in your department encouraged me to send an application as he thinks I have the required skills to succeed."
- Give any compelling reasons you have applied for the position or company. Keep it short and sweet, with the view to inspire the reader.

## **Second paragraph:**

Middle: Hit on an accomplishment.

In the middle, target a couple of your key accomplishments. This is the part where you tell them you have a gift, talent, skill that they need to grow their business. Remember, it's about the employer. What value do you bring them?

Here's your chance to tell the employer why you are the man/woman for the job. Bring out some of your most relevant skills and experiences and mention how they will be applied in the new position. Pick out three examples of major achievements and provide the story to back these up:

- Start out with a short introduction focused on your achievements and how your skills and experience will be a good match for the new job.
- Use the rest of the paragraph to support and back up your introduction. This is where you exhibit your evidence in terms of specific positions/roles/responsibilities and so on.
- Keep this paragraph punchy and designed to impress, not to bore anyone. Don't write too much about one accomplishment that you are the most proud of as you don't know what the reader will think.
- Wrap things up with the final sentence, repeat the job title and company to further position yourself as the right person for the job in the mind of the reader.

## **Last paragraph:**

Close: End strong and show how the company resonates with you.

You want to make sure that your cover letter closes strong. Make sure you let them know that their organization resonates with you and that you would like to take the relationship to the next level.

- A short paragraph that simply mentions your attached resume, tells the employer you are looking forward to an interview and let them know you will be in contact by a specific date.
- Don't forget to thank the person reading your cover letter for their time and consideration.

## **Sign-off**

## Alternate Template

A well-written cover letter or marketing letter should highlight your personality, qualifications, achievements, and more importantly, enthusiasm.

Avoid creating a cover letter more than 3-4 paragraphs and honestly, you can still write an effective letter that is shorter than that. So here's how you go from "who is this?" to "let me call him/her" in just a few words.

**PARAGRAPH #1:** Get their attention immediately with a powerful intro statement in your introductory paragraph. Use this paragraph to give the reader an overall impression about one or more of the following:

- **What achievements have been consistent in your career?**
- **What value or benefit do you bring to the employer?**
- **What is your professional/ corporate reputation?**
- **What are your core competencies or areas of expertise?**

### **Examples:**

Low-Impact: "Your recent posting for the Director of Sales position closely matches my qualifications and experience. I have enclosed a copy of my resume for your review and consideration."

High-Impact: "Implementing marketing initiatives that increase product and service sales, expand market share and improve corporate brands are ways I add value. With extensive experience and deep expertise in sales management and new product development, I am well-qualified to serve as your next Director of Sales."

**PARAGRAPH #2:** Pique the readers' interest and support your bold introductory statements with hard evidence of achievements. Using a recent accomplishment or career success story from your current position is an easy way to do so.

### **Examples:**

Low-Impact: "In my current role as Chief Operating Officer, I oversee a \$25 million which impacts the programming and services for over 5K customers in the Washington DC area."

High-Impact: "More recently as the COO of the NCCP, I was instrumental in stabilizing the organization during a season of uncertainty and internal chaos. By forging partnerships and strategic alliances, I garnered \$15M+ in operational support and increased the organization's industry standing in less than six months."

**PARAGRAPH #3:** Make sure that your top accomplishments and career milestones really stand out in the cover letter.

### **Examples:**

Low-Impact: "Was efficient by developing and implementing a shipping system."

High-Impact: "Saved company over \$250K annually by proactively renegotiating new service agreements with existing vendors." (Technology Manager - ABC Communications)

**PARAGRAPH #4:** Sell your soft skills in two or three final statements in the cover letter.

**Examples:**

Low-Impact: "My leadership and relationship building skills are finely tuned to bring you to the next level."

High-Impact: "While my enthusiasm for Teleconnect Solutions, Inc remains, the telecommunications market has experienced a dramatic decline. Consequently, I am seeking new professional challenges that could benefit from my strong, decisive leadership and top management performance."

**CLOSING PARAGRAPH:** Be assertive. Never make the mistake of ending your cover letter on a passive note. Remember that today's job market is too competitive for meek and overly reserved candidates.

**Examples:**

Low-Impact: "I look forward to your call."

High-Impact: "I would welcome the opportunity to speak with you about the contributions I could make to your company. I will contact you on Wednesday, October 29, 2014 to schedule a possible meeting."

In closing, never forget to thank the reader for their time and consideration.

## Disruptive Cover Letter

Prezi guide: <https://prezi.com/qaqwn9jcg1ha/disruptive-cover-letters/>

### Would You Say It In Person?

A great way to tell if your cover letter is sending the right message is to ask yourself, "If the hiring manager was standing in front of me, could I read this cover letter to them and sound normal?" The answer is usually "no," because we tend to mistakenly write cover letters in a formal, self-promotional tone.

### 4 Tips for Creating a "Disruptive" Cover Letter

If you want to improve the chances of your cover letter getting read, then you need to give it a F.A.C.E. Lift. You should focus the content of the letter to include the right:

**Format** - Clean-lined font, 11 point in size, left-text justified with one-inch margins. Stay clear of fancy, scripted fonts and tiny type - both make it impossible to read. And, keep margins in place so there is plenty of whitespace on the page for easier reading.

**Attitude** - Use conversational speech (no fancy words) and don't be afraid to show enthusiasm. This is your chance to let your personality show.

**Connection** - Discuss how you feel connected to the company's product, service, mission, business model, etc. You have to share how you feel part of their corporate tribe.

**Experience** - Tell a story about a personal or professional experience that taught you how important the work is they are doing. Find a way to back-up the connection you share with them by validating it with an experience that taught you what they do is valuable.

### PS - Always Start With An Exciting Statement

The best cover letters get hiring managers at "hello." Don't be afraid to open the cover letter with a bolded, powerful statement like,

- I remember the first time I used your product.
- My life was changed the day I learned how to \_\_\_\_\_.
- I've been tied to your company for 10+ years now. Here's how...