

Media Article



Vocational Guidance Services

A PERFECT COVER LETTER

We all know the importance of a perfect CV. But there is one thing that hits a potential employers' eyes even before your CV- and that is your cover letter. Given the more competitive job market, your cover letter is becoming an increasingly important tool for ensuring your career success.

Let us talk basics before content. It is very important that your cover letter portrays 100% professionalism. So get it typed, neatly laid out, checked and justified. There is nothing more depressing than a cover letter scribbled in blue biro on a scrap of A4 torn out of an exercise book. If your hand-writing and presentation when asking for employment is that sloppy, the employer will surely wonder about the effort you will put into the job, and such applications will end up in the bin.

Start with your name, address, two telephone numbers and an email on the top right of the page. Top left should be the name and contacts of the person you are applying to.

Please note I say the name of the person- not the name of the organization- as you should always address it to a particular person who will have the power to hire you. Personal letters get further than those addressed as purely 'Dear Sir/Madam'. So do your calling around and get the name and title of the person you would most likely report to- the line manager of the department you would work in.

Note I do not say address to it Human Resources, who tend to get bogged down with applications constantly. If you impress the line manager, he will bring it to the Human Resource department's attention-which can be a more successful way in. If you really want to get your application binned all you have to do is spell the name of the person or organization you are applying to wrong- then you are sure never to be called for interview! Another thing to consider is that you should not be over ambitious by applying to the Director or CEO level, as they most likely will have gate- keepers who screen their mail.

The content of the cover letter is important in that you can make it specific to each position you are applying to, whereas CVs tend to be generalized and it is often left to the employer to interpret, analyze and predict how the experience and qualifications shown on your CV can be put to use by them immediately. So, a customized cover letter gives you a chance to spell out the specific skills and competencies you have that are relevant for the role you are applying to. Indeed, a common cover letter mistake is just to repeat what you say in your CV. A good cover letter should do much more- it should be short, have impact and answer in the employers mind the one key question- 'why should I hire you?' The cover letter, if properly used, should distinguish you from the other hundred people who sent in CVs showing similar experience and qualifications.

Keep it short- you really ought to do the job in three main paragraphs, and the letter should never run to more than a page. Keep it personal- don't just mention you saw a job advert, show you know something about the organization, and how that ties in to what you have to offer- 'I hear you will be branching out in to micro finance, so felt I should send you my details as I have 5 years management experience in the area for a leading provider'. In your opening lines communicate something personal about the person or organization you are writing to that shows you have done your background homework. Create interest in yourself, and make it clear how you would be of value to the organization. Ensure, however, that your tone is not condescending (I know much more about this field than you do) and not groveling (it would be an honor to work for your esteemed organization).

Close by asking for a 'meeting'- not interview. Even suggest a date and time, which gives you a reason to ring them to see if that is possible and convenient. After all, those who do their homework, and those who dare- win!

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