

Title:

No More Generic Cover Letters!

Word Count:

737

Summary:

Creating a job search cover letter doesn't need to be a laborious process. Effective cover letters are short, skimmable and easy to read (a good rule of thumb no matter WHERE your cover letter is going) - three to four paragraphs tops.

If you are answering an ad, address the requirements in the ad and speak to how your experience relates to each. If you are sending the letter cold, make sure your letter reflects some research on the company, how your background relates, a...

Keywords:

interview tips, career, job change, new job, resume, cover letter, how to write

Article Body:

Creating a job search cover letter doesn't need to be a laborious process. Effective cover letters are short, skimmable and easy to read (a good rule of thumb no matter WHERE your cover letter is going) - three to four paragraphs tops.

If you are answering an ad, address the requirements in the ad and speak to how your experience relates to each. If you are sending the letter cold, make sure your letter reflects some research on the company, how your background relates, and why you have an interest in that company.

But instead, what generally happens is this. Bob is looking for a job. He looks through the paper, finds a bunch of ads that sound interesting, and circles them all with red pen. Then he sweats out the cover letter, personalizes each address, attaches his resume, mails them out, and congratulates himself on a job well done.

Then nothing happens. He wonders why. He shrugs his shoulders and starts all over again. On the other hand, Bob could take control of his career and set out to find his perfect job.

First, he gives some careful thought to his previous jobs: which ones he's liked

and why, which ones he hasn't liked and why, where did he excel - or not, and why he left each one, what his supervisors were like, what his job description was in each place. That begins to give him a clue about what motivates him, who he is, under what circumstances he functions productively, and what he's looking for in his next job.

Then he begins to look for companies that fit this profile - whether they have ads in the paper or not. Not all companies advertise their openings. Frequently openings are still in the contemplative stages, such as an expansion or confidential replacement. Then he sits down to write his cover letters. Two would suffice, with a bit of personalization in each: one for companies actively advertising their openings, and one for companies that he's researched which sound appealing to him.

In the first paragraph, Bob says why he's writing to that particular company. Instead of "I am writing because I saw your ad," he writes, "I am responding to your ad because.....". For the letters he's sending cold: "I am sending you a copy of my resume because in researching companies that I feel I could be of benefit to...." (as opposed to "...companies I think I'd like to work for...") Emphasis goes on the benefit to the company. Not the benefit to you.

In the second paragraph, Bob personalizes it. This is the paragraph (or two) that varies with each company or ad. Two or three sentences will do it if there's one paragraph, or add another paragraph of about the same length. This part comes from the heart. Why are you writing this company? What's it got to do with what you do and who you are? It needn't be a long introspective story - but if there's something specific in the ad or about the company that appeals to you, speak to it. (And if there isn't, why are you writing them?)

The third paragraph winds everything up. And don't forget to be pro-active. Give the person to whom you are writing about 10 days to receive the letter and contact you (which probably won't happen because things usually don't move that fast), and then follow up. State the date you will be doing so, and then DO IT on that date!

Don't think you can get away with a generic cover letter. You can't. They're spotted at 100 steps, especially by recruiters and human resource people. And they don't put you to the top of the pile. Is all this a lot of trouble? Yes, it is. But that's how you stay in control of your career: by going those extra steps. A personalized cover letter gets you remembered. Writing to the person by name gets you remembered. Saying you'll follow up and then doing so on the date indicated, gets you remembered.

That gives you much better odds than ending up at the bottom of some pile on a desk. Because if you're called in to interview, then YOU are part of YOUR deciding process. If you go generic, skip the salutation, and wait around, you blend into the woodwork. You won't even have a chance to reject the company if they've already rejected you.