

10 SUGGESTED DOs AND DON'Ts TO COVER LETTER WRITING SUCCESS

DO:

- 1) Submit a cover letter to an employer even where a cover letter is not required.**

***Why?** A cover letter provides your resume and overall application with some added dimension and allows you, the job seeker, to expand upon the information provided in your resume. The cover letter can also explain or rehabilitate possible deficiencies about your qualifications that are identified in your application materials.*

- 2) Research your employer and carefully assess your qualifications before putting pen to paper.**

***Why?** Each employer will likely be looking for different skills and experience. Accordingly, you should distinguish your cover letters between the various employers. By using your cover letter to demonstrate some knowledge about an employer (where feasible), you are able to more effectively demonstrate your genuine interest in wanting to work for the employer. The inability to convey some familiarity with an employer in a few sentences of your cover letter will likely give an employer the impression that you are unwilling to truly invest in the employer on a long-term basis.*

- 3) Go beyond the information set forth in your resume when describing your experience.**

***Why?** You do not want to “parrot” your resume or else your cover letter will be duplicative and have no value. Utilize the cover letter to address information that is not discussed or discussed extensively in your resume. The cover letter is a perfect opportunity to de-emphasize and even rehabilitate deficiencies with your qualifications.*

- 4) Play “show and tell” in your “hard sell”.**

***Why?** Avoid providing an employer with vague, conclusory representations regarding your qualifications. Employers want concrete evidence of your abilities and performance potential.*

- 5) Give your letter some personality.**

***Why?** You want to distinguish yourself from other applicants. Your cover letter is considered business correspondence and thus, should remain professional in nature; you want to distinguish yourself from other applicants. You should implement “your story” in the cover letter where relevant/appropriate if it will truly convey why you are the best candidate for a particular job.*

DON'T:

1) **Lose the employer with a weak and boring introduction.**

Why? *Simply put, a boring introduction conveys nothing to an employer and that employer will quickly lose interest. You want to use your introduction to engage an employer. More specifically, you want to HIGHLIGHT your best qualifications, which will be discussed in more detail in the remainder of the cover letter.*

2) **Be so forthright about your qualifications that you end up underselling yourself.**

Why? *You are not yet in the job interview phase of the application process where the employer may take the opportunity to directly confront you about a deficiency. When writing the cover letter, you want to avoid calling attention to your weaknesses. Also, avoid the use of buzz words/phrases like: “While I am not qualified to do ABC . . .” or “Although” or “I realize I am not experienced in”*

3) **Submit your cover letter unless it has been proofread.**

Why? *A cover letter that contains typos, disorganized paragraphs and bad formatting demonstrates sloppiness and a lack of attention to detail. A cover letter rife with errors is only a strong indicator of poor job performance in the future.*

4) **Get too personal.**

Why? *With certain exceptions (to be determined on a case-by-case basis), you do not want to make your reader uncomfortable or feel offended by revealing too much information about your personal life (i.e., your political, religious beliefs). You are advocating for why you are the best candidate for particular job; thus, the cover letter should remain focused on your professional qualifications.*

5) **Throw in everything about yourself, including the kitchen sink.**

Why? *You want to demonstrate why you are the most qualified candidate. However, the cover letter does not have to focus on every qualification—this can result in information overload for an employer as well as a cover letter that is disorganized and lengthy. Identify your top three professional strengths that also match the employer’s requirements.*

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