

Cover Letter Steps

Step One

Grab your reader's attention. Do this by using quality typesetting, stationery, and envelopes. Use the same paper your resume is printed on. This way your letter and resume will match and give an impression of balance and continuity.

Step Two

Generate interest with the content. Do this by addressing the letter to someone by name and quickly explaining what you have to offer. The first sentence grabs attention; the rest of the paragraph gives the reader the old one-two punch. The rule is: Say it strong, say it straight forward. Do some research? Even a little can get your letter off to a fast start. A case in point:

“I came across the enclosed article in Newsweek magazine. It encouraged me to do a little research on your company. I am now convinced of two things: You are the kind of people I want to be associated with, and I have the kind of qualifications you can use.”

Of course, in the real world, we cannot all apply for jobs with companies that are featured in the big magazines. Here are some more everyday examples.

“I have been following the performance of your fund in Mutual Funds Newsletter. The record over the last three years shows strong portfolio management. With my experience working for one of your competitors, I know I could make significant contributions...”

“Recently I have been researching the local _____ industry. My search has been for companies that are respected in the field and that provide ongoing training programs. The name _____ keeps coming up as a top company.”

“Within the next few weeks, I will be moving from New York to _____. Having researched the companies in my field in my new home town, I know that you are the people I want to talk to....”

Step Three

Now turn that interest into desire. First, tie yourself to a specific job category or work area. Use phrases like:

“I am writing because...” or “My reason for contacting you...”

“...should this be the case, you may be interested to know...”

“I would like to talk to you about your personnel needs and how I am able to contribute to your department's goals.”

“If you have an opening for someone in this area, you will see that my resume demonstrates a person of unusual dedication, efficiency, and drive.”

Next, call attention to your merits with a short paragraph that highlights one or two of your special contributions or achievements:

“I have an economic background from Columbia and a quantitative analysis approach to market fluctuations. This combination has enabled me to consistently pick the new technology flotations that are the backbone of the growth-oriented mutual fund.”

Similar statements applicable to your area of expertise will give your letter more personal punch. Include any qualifications, contributions, and attributes that prove you are someone with plenty to offer. If an advertisement (or a conversation with a potential employer) reveals an aspect of a particular job opening that is not addressed in your resume, it should be included in your cover letter:

“I notice from your advertisement that audio- and video- training experience would be a plus. In addition to the qualifications stated in my enclosed resume, I have over five years of experience writing and producing sales and management training materials in both these media.”

Step Four

Here’s where your letter turns that desire into action. The action you’re shooting for is that the reader will dash straight on to your resume, then call you in for an interview. You achieve this action with brevity—leaving the reader wanting more. Just as you worked to get the opening right, labor over the closing. It is the reader’s last impression of you; make it strong, make it tight, and make it obvious that you are serious about entering into meaningful conversation.

“It would be a pleasure to give you more information about my qualifications and experience...”

“I look forward to discussing our mutual interests further...”

“While I prefer not to use my employer’s time taking personal calls at work, with discretion I can be reached at _____...”

“The chance to meet with you would be a privilege and a pleasure.”

“May I suggest a personal meeting where you can have the opportunity to examine the person behind the resume.”

“My credentials and achievements are a matter of record that I hope you will examine in depth when we meet...”

“I look forward to examining any of the ways you feel my background and skills would benefit (name of organization). I look forward to hearing from you.”

“With my training and hands-on experience, I know I can contribute to _____, and would like talk to you about it in person.

“Thank you for your time and consideration; I hope to hear from you shortly.”