

Cover Letters that Catch the Eye

Heather Boerner, for Yahoo! HotJobs, Yahoo! HotJobs

Throw away your form letter. These days, getting your cover letter noticed means getting creative.

"A good cover letter can be the difference between getting a job and not getting a job," said Gretchen Hirsch, writing coach and author of "Talking Your Way to the Top." "How you stand out, how you tell your story, is with cover letters."

Consider these tips from hiring managers and writing coaches:

Start Strong

News reporters know most people only read three paragraphs, so they lead with the most important information. You should, too. Start with a relevant professional accomplishment, said Sherry Mirshahi, a resume writer and interview consultant with Interview Roadmap.

"The accomplishment should be aligned with at least one of the qualifications the employer seeks," she said. "This encourages the reader to continue reading and automatically positions you as an expert."

Keep It Employer-Focused

Talk about how the job fits your goals in the [interview](#). Use the cover letter to show how you can help the employer meet her goals, said Alison Farrin, hiring manager and owner of Innovative Pension.

Make sure your cover letter shows that:

- You've looked at the company website and know what they do.
- You can help cut costs or increase profits.
- You have something that makes you special and will make the company special.

Farrin suggests the following example:

The description of your company's range of services indicates that you place a high value on quick response to clients but with particular attention to details. In my position with XYZ Company, I was employee of the month six times based on my fast, accurate service record. I look forward to improving on that record with a company that values my skills in this area.

"If I received a resume that took the time to come up with anything remotely close to this kind of thoughtful information, once I picked myself up off the floor, I would be picking up the phone," she said.

Write a 'Charticle'

Short charts in magazines attract more eyes than long articles. So ditch paragraphs in favor of columns, said Malcolm Munro, a career coach and author of "Marketing Yourself for Your Dream Job."

In one column, list the attributes the employer needs. In the next, show how you meet them. For instance, if it asks for four years experience, list that you have six. If it asks for a self-starter, list your experience starting and leading a team and how it increased profits.

Keep It Short

"If you're a hiring manager and you're going through [resumes](#) for eight hours a day, cover letters better be real short," said Munro. "No one wants to read a long one."

Keep it less than one page with lots of white space and in 12-point type. If it's longer, ask yourself if each sentence meets the qualifications in the first section. If not, cut it.

Munro says, "What you're telling the hiring manager [in a short cover letter] is, 'I'm the perfect fit, write notes here and call me in.'"

Also on Yahoo! HotJobs:

[5 steps for updating your resume](#)

[A good impression is in the details](#)

[4 steps to a better job interview](#)

[Find a new job near you](#)

Copyright © 2007 Yahoo! Inc. All rights reserved.