

5 things employers wish they could say about your cover letter

When it comes to job applications, cover letters play a key role. They introduce you to the employer and tell them how the experience and skills in your resume make you a great match for the job.

So, what do employers care about in a cover letter? What makes a good impression, and what are the potential pitfalls that could make your application less appealing?

Here are five things Sian Havard, Founder and Consultant at recruitment company Milkshake Group, would like to tell you about your cover letter, so that you can write a winning one.

1.

If your application doesn't have one you're putting yourself at a disadvantage.

All employers and recruiters ask for different things in their application processes, but it's generally expected that you include a brief, relevant cover letter. If you submit an application without one, it could well be ignored.

A well-written cover letter can help you make a great impression. Cover letters can take different forms, so pay attention to what's requested in the job ad. If you're specifically asked to submit one as a Word document, follow those instructions. Otherwise a cover letter in an email may do, depending on the situation and job. Havard explains, "A lot of applications these days are emailed directly to someone. This means the content of your email replaces the traditional cover letter, so there's no need to attach a separate cover letter. A well written, brief email making reference to an attached resume will be a strong start to your application process."

2.

Keep it brief.

"Any email or attachment you send to a company you'd like to work at demonstrates how you might communicate with people inside and outside of the company if you worked there," says Havard. So, keep it professional, and concise.

"Usually around four to five short paragraphs will be sufficient for a cover email," she says. "An attached letter might be a little longer but shouldn't be more than one page. The purpose of a cover letter is to offer the person reviewing it a taster of who you are, your potential fit for the position and incentivise them to review your resume to learn more about you."

3.

It's better to get to the point.

Sometimes you want to build suspense and tell a longer story, but cover letters aren't the place for this. Be upfront and explain why you're the right fit for the job right away. Consider writing the opening sentence of your first paragraph to include your most relevant qualifications and your objective. For example, "With a background in closing contracts at top corporations, I am confident that I could excel in the role of Sales Executive."

"A cover letter is a great opportunity to succinctly tell the person reading it which role you're applying for and why you're interested in it," Havard explains. "Your resume should then showcase why you're a good fit for the role in more detail."

4.

Don't just repeat your resume.

A cover letter should expand on the relevant points in your resume, rather than repeat them. You want to give a sense of who you are and what you can offer. So, after your opening statement, focus on introducing yourself more. "Include things like how you found out about the role, why you're interested in applying for it, and any relevant understanding you have about the position and the company."

Show that you understand the culture of the company you're applying to. "If you've read about the company online and you can tell they're informal in their communication, use your cover letter to show you know how to communicate in their language."

5.

Know who you're talking to.

If a job ad states exactly who the person is going to, then use your cover letter to address it that person, Havard says. You could do some research to find out who the hiring manager is – this shows you've made the effort to learn more about the company as well. If it's still unclear, you could try 'Dear Hiring Manager' or try addressing it to the relevant department. 'Dear Sir or Madam' or 'To whom it may concern' are traditional options, but could seem overly formal in some situations. Havard says 'Hi team [company name]' may also be fine if you're applying to an informal environment, but it pays to be more professional unless you're really sure.

If you're sending your application to an email address – as opposed to uploading it to a website – Havard says it's likely a particular person will be reviewing what you've sent. "In this case, a well written, basic cover email mentioning that they can find your resume attached as an expression of interest for the position advertised is often enough to inspire them to open your resume."

By following these tips you'll be on the right track to crafting a cover letter that makes a great impression to employers and goes hand-in-hand with your resume to highlight the skills and experience you can offer.

While you're at it, make sure the personal summary in your SEEK Profile is up to date – it's a great way to introduce yourself to prospective employers.

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