

1

Importance of Cover Letters

The cover letter you choose for transmitting your resume to an employer or important networking contact can be one of the most significant factors in the success (or failure) of your job-hunting campaign. In fact, a survey of nearly 600 employment professionals, conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), suggests some 76% of employers may automatically eliminate an employment candidate from any further hiring consideration, based solely on the quality of his or her cover letter alone. Further, 43% of survey respondents also reported they view the cover letter as equal to the resume in importance. When it comes to running an effective employment campaign, therefore, this data should cause you to sit up and take notice! (*Note: A copy of the full survey, which covers both cover letters and resumes can be obtained by contacting SHRM by phone, (703) 548-3440, or by e-mail at SHRM.org.*)

If well written and informative, the cover letter can grab the reader's attention, raise his curiosity, and stimulate immediate interest in your employment candidacy. In fact, if particularly well written, it can sometimes raise sufficient interest to compel the reader to extend an interview invitation without reading the resume document to which it is attached.

By contrast, a poorly written cover letter can be disastrous to an otherwise successful job-hunting campaign, serving as an immediate roadblock to any further consideration of your employment candidacy. The way it is organized, what it says, how it is stated, what is included/excluded, what is highlighted/emphasized—all are critical factors impacting cover-letter effectiveness. Cover letters that are poorly conceived and fail to give due consideration to these important factors can (and will) prove devastating, causing employers to discard both the cover letter and the companion resume accompanying it.

As an employment professional, with years of experience, I am continuously amazed that people will invest hours (or sometimes days) in the preparation and design of the "perfect" resume, yet spend little or no time writing the cover letter that serves as the overlay document that introduces their employment resume and summary of professional credentials. This is the print equivalent of wearing a dirty, rumpled, ill-fitting suit over a well-starched, clean, white shirt to the job interview.

Let's face it, the cover letter is the very first thing that greets the reader's eye. And there has been a great deal written about the importance of "first impressions" during the employment and interview process. The cover letter is no exception! It is the document that creates that all-important first impression, and can have a great deal of impact on how the reader "perceives" you right from the start.

If the cover letter is neat and well-written, it creates a positive impression, suggesting you are equally conscientious and fastidious about your work. Conversely, if sloppy or poorly written, the cover letter suggests you are someone who has little professional pride.

Besides appearance, what you say in the cover letter (and how you say it) can have considerable impact on the reader. Such factors immediately tell the reader something about your general communication skills. For example, they telegraph whether you are expressive, concise, articulate, and generally an effective communicator—or whether you are inexpressive, overly detailed, inarticulate, or generally have poor communication skills. These factors (that is, what you say and how you say it) can also telegraph something about your intellectual capacity and ability to think. For example, they can suggest to the reader that you are conceptual, strategic, analytical, logical, or (if the letter is not carefully choreographed) that your thinking is muddled, overly simplistic, illogical, and disorganized.

Finally, if well designed, the cover letter will "pre-market" your candidacy. If, as a result of reading your cover letter, for example, the reader is feeling positive and impressed, these feelings will typically spill over into the resume, which will then be read with a less critical eye. Conversely, if the cover letter is poorly written, your resume is likely not to be read at all.

Although perhaps difficult to believe, I have had prominent people tell me they place more stock in the cover letter than they do the resume. Some have said they invited candidates for employment interviews based solely on the strength of their cover letter alone, without regard to the resume. Although I find this equally amazing, some even volunteered they seldom bother to read the resume if the cover letter is impressive.

Considering such overwhelming evidence, we can only conclude that the cover letter is a very important document indeed. How it is designed and written can make a significant difference in job-hunting success. Your cover letters deserve deliberate and careful attention if you wish to maximize your opportunities in the marketplace. This book, if carefully followed, should provide you with a distinct competitive advantage, when it comes to producing high-impact cover letters that will stimulate interest in your employment candidacy.

TYPES OF COVER LETTERS

When most people think about cover letters, they have in mind the letter that is used to transmit their resume to a prospective employer. Actually, there are five types of cover letters, each designed a little differently and each having a slightly different purpose. These are:

Importance of Cover Letters

1. Letters to Employers.
2. Letters to Search Firms.
3. Advertising Response Letters.
4. Networking Cover Letters.
5. Resume Letters.

This book will thoroughly familiarize you with each of these letter types and provide you with numerous examples as the basis for modeling and writing your own cover letter. By carefully studying these sample letters and following the instructions provided at the beginning of each chapter, you will have all you need to write a highly effective cover letter and add a good deal of zest and positive impact to your job-hunting campaign.

