

Tips for Writing a Cover Letter

Tips on writing a cover letter that will make employers want to review your resume.

1. Include the name of a personal contact, if you have one
2. Be clear and concise regarding your request
3. Remember the point of a cover letter: Convince the reader that you should be qualified for the position!
4. Make a strong connection between their needs and your abilities
5. Interpret your resume without being redundant, don't repeat it
6. Support your abilities with specific evidence
7. Use short paragraphs or bullets rather than one large mass of text

Resume Writing Tips

Tips on writing resume that will get you an interview.

1. Proofread your resume multiple times and consider having someone else proofread as well
2. Order information based on importance
3. Don't use a font that is smaller than 10 points and use a sans serif font
4. Use bullet points, not paragraphs
5. Adapt your resume for each position you apply for
6. Only include information relative to the position
7. Update your resume frequently
8. Don't use fancy colored backgrounds, fonts, or images. Keep it simple!
9. Make sure your name is the first thing on your resume.

Interview Tips

Tips on how to prepare and ace your interview.

1. Plan ahead - Research the company and the people you will be interviewing with prior to your interview. Review your resume and be prepared to discuss/support your past experiences. It is also beneficial to review some of the commonly asked interview questions and prepare appropriate answers.
2. Dress for success - Wear conservative and professional clothing. A suit or button-up shirt with slacks is preferred. Ensure your clothes are laundered and ironed.
3. Arrive on time - Give yourself plenty of travel time to accommodate for traffic, parking, or any other variables that may come up. If you are unfamiliar with the area, you should make a test drive to ensure the you won't get lost.
4. Make a strong first impression - Stand when your interviewer enters the room and greet him/her with a firm handshake and strong eye contact. Greet your interviewer by using their last name (ex: Ms. Smith, not Joanne). Bring extra copies of your resume in case you meet with more than one person.
5. Be positive - Maintain a positive attitude throughout the interview. If asked about why you left your last job, keep your answer neutral, not negative. Never speak poorly of past employees or coworkers.
6. At the end of the interview - Shake your interviewer's hand and thank him/her for taking the time to meet with you. Ask for a business card and be sure to send a thank you note within the next couple of days.

Common Interview Questions

Review the following questions and prepare possible answers.

1. Tell me about yourself? (try to hold your response to 2 minutes)
2. What do you know about our company?
3. Why should we hire you?
4. What do you look for in a job?
5. How does this assignment fit into your overall career plan?
6. Why are you looking for a new career?
7. How would your colleagues describe you?
8. How would you describe yourself?
9. What do you think of your present or past boss?
10. Can you work well under deadlines or pressure?
11. How much do you expect if we offer you this position?
12. Why do you want to work for us?
13. What other positions are you considering?
14. What are your career goals?
15. What are your strong points? weak points?
16. What position do you expect to have in 2 to 5 years?
17. If you took the job what would you accomplish in the first year?
18. What was wrong with your current or last position?
19. What kind of hours are you used to working or would like to work?
20. Do you have your reference list with you? (Remember don't give it out unless it is asked for).
21. Do you have any question for me?

Questions to ask the Interviewer

Review the following questions and consider making up some of your own based on your research of the company/position.

1. Why is this position open?
2. What would you like done differently by the next person who fills this position?
3. What are some of the objectives you would like to see accomplished in this job?
4. What is most pressing? What would you like to have done in the next 3 months.
5. What are some of the long term objectives you would like to see completed?
6. What are some of the more difficult problems one would have to face in this position?
7. How do you think these could best be handled?
8. What advancement opportunities are available for the person who is successful in this position, and within what time frame?
9. In what ways has this organization been most successful in terms of products and services over the years?
10. What significant changes do you foresee in the near future?
11. How is one evaluated in this position?
12. What accounts for success within the company?

So You're Hired... Now What?

Tips on how to excel at and keep your new job.

1. Show up on time, and ready to work.
2. Strive to be the best employee they've ever hired.
3. Always keep a positive attitude. Don't complain about coworkers at your current, or past job.
4. Don't meet expectations, exceed them! Regardless of how critical or medial the job might be.
5. Play it safe and avoid office gossip.
6. If you're given a task that you are unclear how to perform be sure to ask questions and always put forth your best effort. Do not make excuses, present what you have done for review.
7. Talk early and often. Don't be afraid to communicate with your supervisor about difficult situations.
8. Work tirelessly to ensure that your personal life doesn't interfere with your work life. Give yourself the opportunity to advance, by minimizing the impact of your personal life on your work life.
9. Understand your impact on the company. Entry level jobs have an impact on the vision and goal of the company
10. Enjoy your new job!

Learning to Co-Exist With Co-Workers

Eight hours a day. Five days a week. Fifty weeks a year. You spend almost as much time with your co-workers as you do with your family. The moral of the story? Good relationships with co-workers are the single most important factor for job satisfaction. Without them, the hope of a great working environment becomes just a fairy tale.

Want some great lessons on getting along with co-workers? Consider these four work fables:

The Man With a Secret

Bill just could not get along with Tom. Whenever Bill asked his co-worker a question, Tom was always short with him. They had the same job responsibilities, so Bill didn't understand why Tom seemed so much more stressed than the rest of the team. One day, when Bill and Tom were the only people in the lunch room, Bill decided to make one last attempt at conversation. Tom responded, and they started talking about their personal lives. Bill discovered that Tom's wife was battling a serious illness, and Tom was stretched to the breaking point. By the end of the conversation, Bill offered to take over some of Tom's responsibilities. The two became good friends.

Moral: When you get to know fellow employees, you're more likely to understand them and find ways to work well with them.

The Scent of a Colleague

Susan couldn't understand why Jenna did not like her. Susan always made an effort to be friendly, but Jenna barely acknowledged her. In fact, Jenna never associated with Susan at all—on a work or a personal level. After several months, Susan finally asked Jenna why there was tension between them. It turned out that Susan wore too much perfume, and Jenna really disliked the smell. Susan appreciated Jenna's candor and stopped wearing that fragrance. Their working relationship improved immediately, and they even asked to work together on a recent project.

Moral: Even when inconsiderate actions are unintended, they can really strain relations in the workplace.

The Woman With Deaf Ears

Julie was recently promoted to team leader. She respected and liked her entire staff. That's why she couldn't understand it when they started complaining to her boss Marc. After a number of people came to him, Marc called Julie into his office and told her that the grumbling centered on her inability to listen. She constantly cut people off with her responses, assuming she knew what they were asking her. Julie agreed to take some training classes to improve her listening skills. The results were great—her team noticed the change and came to enjoy working with her.

Moral: Really listen. That means taking in all the information and analyzing it *before* you respond. You

show your co-workers that you value their concerns and respect their input.

The Man Who Didn't Do Much

None of the field technicians wanted James as their support associate. He failed to respond promptly to service requests, so when technicians arrived at client sites, they had to calm irate customers. When the technicians called James and asked for information or parts, he was slow to get back to them. Their efficiency—and their good humor—suffered as a result of James' poor performance. Unfortunately for James, he was finally let go after repeated warnings. And while the technicians wished James their best, they were glad to begin working with a new support associate with much better work habits.

Moral: Treat your co-workers as you would your customers. By pulling your weight, you're providing good "customer service".

The Lesson Learned

You don't have to be Aesop or a Grimm brother to learn the key to getting along with your fellow employees. It's this: appreciate the work they do and respect them as people. If you follow that golden rule, the story almost always ends happily!

12 Tips For Smoother Conversations

Recently, I heard someone say, "Communication is easy." I disagree. Talking is easy; communication, which means an exchange or communion with another, requires greater care and skill. An exchange that is a communion demands that we listen and speak skillfully, not just talk mindlessly. And interacting with fearful, angry or frustrated people can be even more difficult, because we're less skillful when caught up in such emotions. Yet don't despair or resign yourself to a lifetime of miscommunication at work or home! Good communicators can be honed as well as born. Here are a few tips to get you started.

1. Don't take another person's reaction or anger personally, even if they lash out at you in what seems a personal manner. Another person's mood or response is more likely about fear or frustration than it is about you as an individual. Take a deep breath and count to ten, and see it as a way of letting the other person vent before he is able to communicate what's really on his mind.
2. You don't have to have all the answers. It's OK to say, "You know, I don't know." If you want to find out, say so, then follow up to share your findings. Or you might decide to problem-solve together to find the answer.
3. Respond (facts and feelings); don't react (feelings), e.g. "Tell me more about your concern" or "I understand your frustration" instead of "Hey, I'm just doing my job" or "It's not my job" (which is sure to cause more irritation). Share responsibility for any communication in which you're a participant, and realize that sometimes, maybe often, your own personal reactions might be causing your frustrations about communicating with others.
4. Understand that people want to feel heard more than they care about whether you agree with them. It's strange how many people complain about others not hearing them, yet they don't listen to others either! You can show that you're listening by giving someone your complete (or as near complete as you can muster) attention and by saying things like:
 - "Tell me more about your concern." "What is it about XYZ that concerns you?" "I'm interested in what you've just said. Can you share a little bit about what lead you to that belief?"
 - "What would have to happen for you to be more comfortable with XYZ?"
5. Remember that what someone says and what we hear can often be amazingly different! Our personal filters, assumptions, judgments and beliefs can really distort what we hear. Repeat back or summarize to ensure understanding. Restate what you think you heard and ask, "Have I understood you correctly?" If you find yourself responding emotionally to what someone said, say so, and ask for more information: "I may not be understanding you correctly, and I find myself taking what you said a bit personally. What I thought you just said—'XYZ'; is that what you meant?"
6. Acknowledge inconvenience or frustration and offer a timeline, particularly if you need someone else's cooperation or your activities will affect them. For example, if you'll be

updating someone's desktop computer system and need access to her office, you might say, "I know it's frustrating to have someone in your space at a time that might not be convenient for you, and I appreciate your cooperation. It'll help us to keep your system working well. We expect to be in your office at about three o'clock, and out by five."

7. Don't offer advice unless asked. This can be tough, particularly if we have experience that we think might benefit another person. Use respectful expressions such as "One potential option is..." or "One thing that helped me in a similar situation was X. I'd be happy to share more about my experience if you think it'd be helpful to you" instead of "We want you to do X, Y, Z..." or "You should do X."
8. Look for common ground instead of focusing solely on differences. What might you both be interested in (e.g. making the experience as non-disruptive as possible)? One way to begin discovering commonality is to share your underlying intention, for example, "My intention in sharing this is to help you be really successful on this project."
9. Remember that change is stressful for most people, particularly if your activities affect them in a way that they aren't scheduling or controlling. Our routines can be very comforting in the midst of what appears to be a chaotic world. So if you're in someone's space or need them to do something on your timeline, provide as much information as you can about what you'll need from the person and when. If you can, tell him how what you're doing will benefit him.
10. Work to keep a positive mental focus. One of the choices we always have is how we see or experience any given circumstance. Many people who are considered skillful and successful, including professional athletes and cultural leaders, work to maintain a positive mindset. Ask yourself, "What's great about this?" or "What can I learn from this?" to help maintain a positive state. Don't forget to adopt a variety of stress reduction practices that work best for you.
11. Understand that most people, including you, have a unique, often self-serving, agenda. This isn't necessarily bad, as it helps us achieve and protect ourselves. Just don't assume that someone will know or share your agenda, so talking about what's most important to you and asking what's most important to others, specifically, can help build a solid foundation for conversation.
12. Improve your listening skill. Most people think they listen well, but the truth is that most people don't listen at all, they just speak and then think about what they're going to say next. Good listening often means asking good questions and clearing your mind of distractions, including what you're going to say next, who you're meeting with next or what's going on outside. When someone makes prickly comments or complaints, there's often a concern or fear lurking deeper. Like a detective, ask questions that get to the bottom of someone's real concern or agenda. Only then can you have a truly rich, beneficial conversation.

5 Tips For Being More Conscious At Work

Are you conscious at work? While most people are not fully asleep at work, neither are they fully awake and putting forth the full potential of their skills and talents. To what degree can each of us heighten our awareness of how and what we contribute to the organization, who we have an effect on, and how our actions help to define the culture and business results?

While not a topic on the agendas of most company meetings, the underlying benefits of this type of consciousness infuse every single action, behavior, interaction and outcome. Consciousness can be related to morale, productivity, effectiveness, ethics, communication or efficiency. The less conscious you or your coworkers are at work (or elsewhere), the greater the likelihood of decreased potential and increased misinterpretations or misunderstandings.

For instance, consider the employee who recognizes that his role requires him to ask probing questions to ensure that he has the information needed to excel. Rather than only doing the bare minimum that is required, this person is doing what it takes to excel for his own benefit as well as for his colleagues and customers.

On the flip side, imagine the person who has performed the same role for 10 years, receiving accolades for her work, but hasn't shifted as the needs of the group have changed. She has a particular way that she prefers to work with the group, which no longer is efficient or effective for other group members or for customers. This person is almost causing her own "extinction" from the group, or is at least significantly decreasing the group's performance potential and reward, rather than being conscious of what evolutionary changes are needed to suit her own growth and the organization's goals.

5 steps to help build awareness and take action

Reflect or think back:

Reflect back on and reconnect with the reasons why you joined the organization, and what you had planned to contribute. Apply these same motivators to today's reality, and identify areas where you may have become complacent or forgotten about these ideas, and list several ways you can put them to work in the present.

Do a reality check:

Your opinion of your role might not be the same as the perspective of your coworkers, supervisor, mentor or advisor. Ask them for an outside perspective on what your role is, how you contribute to the enterprise, what they see your strengths as being, and what improvements you can make to become more skillful and contribute more fully to your group. Their honest comments will definitely help raise your consciousness about your role in the organization.

Allow time to get grounded:

Each day, eliminate, reduce or ignore the distractions that enter your work day. If this requires you to take a walk, do it. If you need to listen to music, do it (in a way that is conscious of others, of course). Whatever practice helps you to center your thinking on what's most effective and valuable -- for yourself and the organization -- do it. Without a grounded perspective, you'll most likely waste energy with unproductive

thinking or activities instead of focusing action on the most rewarding activities.

Perform a personal visioning session:

Consciousness is about being aware, and if there's one thing most of us know, it's our personal goals. Link this consciousness with organizational goals or revisit this exercise if you've done it before. Determine how the organization, and your job in it, can help you refine or expand your skills and reach your personal goals. Likewise, since you're being paid by your employer (or your clients) for an agreed upon contribution, think about ways that your skillful efforts and clear thinking can be of real value to your organization and its customers.

Debrief:

Either on your own or with a group, dissect interactions, results, processes and plans to learn how your performance affected your business environment -- everything from coworkers' schedules and workloads to project outcomes and relationships. It's helpful to debrief with others, rather than solo, so that your own filters and assumptions aren't preventing a clear and accurate perception. Use these learnings to help you understand what you are conscious of, where and when you tend to "do first and regret what you've done or said later," and identify how you might elevate your awareness and skillfulness in future scenarios.