Beginner's guide to writing cover letter

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A cover letter is perhaps your first and only chance to stand out and impress a potential employer. A well-worded cover letter will go through all your relevant work experiences and achievements, convincing the reader why you are suitable for the position. It is also a great way to go above and beyond to show your genuine interest. Although not mandatory most of the time, employers consider it a good practice to attach a cover letter with your CV.

Are cover letters still relevant in 2022?
Most certainly, yes. According to a recent survey by ResumeLab, 83% of hiring managers, recruiters and HR staff think it is an important decision-making component. Furthermore, 83% of the respondents thought they would interview a candidate with a great cover letter, even if their resume is not up to par. The survey also revealed shocking facts: even if a cover letter is optional, 77% of recruiters still prefer candidates who add cover letters. And a whopping 72% of recruiters would still expect a cover letter, even when they are optional. If you were on the fence about writing a cover letter, this should clear your doubts. You can level up your cover letter game using these simple tricks:

Add your contact info
You should add your email address and cell number right below your name. It will let them know where they can find you. Bonus tip: don't forget to add your LinkedIn profile/ personal website along with your contact details.

A warm but professional greeting
Remember that it is a fellow human being, albeit more experienced and skilled, who is hiring you. So, instead of using robotic salutations, like "Dear Concern", you should use "Dear Jenny Doe", "Dear Accounting Department", or "Mr Smith", etc. Avoid using casual language like, "What's up Kim" or "Hey Bob," even if you know them in person.

An impactful and bold opening paragraph

Start your cover letter with a direct introduction that also includes:
What position you're applying for:
Establish a specific contact. It can be a

senior who recommended you for the job, it can be a vacancy post you noticed on social media, and try to add specific details. Give some data on who you are and why this position intrigues you.

Why do you think you're a perfect match: Now that they know your interest in the position, it's time to convince them why they should be interested in hiring you. Try to relate to the responsibilities and challenges that this position holds. For example, say something logical like, "Let me draw your attention to the following three reasons why I will be a great addition to the team", or "I have noticed that your department is making comparatively slower progress in the following fields."

Relevant experience, degree, or achievements: Recruiters are often looking for people who can solve real-life problems. Draw attention to your previous research, work experience, and certifications on the matter at hand. For example, you could write, "I have been working on the potential reasons why the market demands have been going down for XYZ products of ABC Company. I am highly skilled in PQR software." Talk about how your previous work has met the demands of your clients, or how much success rate you have generated on what

project.

Showcase your qualifications: The second paragraph is where you explain your qualifications in detail. The related qualifications and how they will matter in this position will help convince the employers. Your qualifications will vary depending on who you are and what position you are applying for.

If you are a professional, highlight all the particular services that you can offer to this particular employer. This can be a very good platform to showcase all the qualifications you had to omit in the resume. You can add transferable skills like communication, teamwork, or time management, but it is better to be specific. If you have shown some great expertise in a particular project in the past, then this is your selling point.

If you are an academic then the best tip is to highlight all the relevant roles, jobs, extracurriculars, optional courses, seminars, summer schools and field visits that you had to omit in your resume. Maybe you were a teaching assistant, or a library or lab helper. This is your chance to showcase your lessons from these roles. If you have achieved any distinctive awards for performing well in academic or voluntary work, you should describe your story briefly. If you have some

publications, research work or thesis that align well with the department/professor you are applying to, you should add them too.

Relating to the company's needs: The job post must have mentioned the responsibilities for this position. You have to analyse them and relate them to your previous experience/education.

Closing remarks: Restate your interest and passion for this position and thank the managers for their time and attention. Give them a call to action, like, mentioning your availability for an online/ offline interview, an evaluation test, or a training period. Sign off with a professional closing phrase like, "Sincerely", "Best Regards", "With thanks", "Respectfully", etc.

Accuracy and format: Before submitting, remember to check multiple times for any grammatical errors. Ensure that all the information you put in your cover letter is honest and correct. Any discrepancy or false information might bring you trouble. Also, check that the letter is in .pdf/.docx format.

Do cover letters vary from profession to profession?
Yes, more or less. If you are a CS graduate, applying for the role of software engineer, your coding expertise will definitely have to be mentioned among your skills. Any achievement or relevant experience is a plus. But if you are a Business Communications graduate, applying for the role of an outreach officer, your skillset will be completely different. However, if you are an Arts student, applying for the position of graphic designer, you have to add your portfolio or at least a few examples of your work. But if you are a Science graduate, it's important to add relevant research work and publications.

Remember, the basic components of the cover letter will remain the same. But you have to tailor each letter differently according to your employer's needs. If your qualifications match well with the requirements, a killer cover letter can really help you stand out. So it is recommended to add a customised cover letter with your resume every time you apply for a new position.