

Cover Letter 'Don'ts'

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Your cover letter is the first thing employers see when they open your application. Avoid these mistakes and make your first impression a lasting one.

Don't Overuse "I."

Your cover letter is not your autobiography. The focus should be on how you meet an employer's needs, not on your life story. Avoid the perception of being self-centred by minimizing your use of the word "I," especially at the beginning of your sentences.

Don't Use a Weak Opening.

Job seekers often struggle with how to begin a cover letter. What results can be a feeble introduction lacking punch and failing to grab the reader's interest. Consider this example:

- **Weak:** 'Please consider me for your sales representative opening.'
- **Better:** 'Your need for an experienced web developer is an excellent match to my three-year history as an IT Officer, specialising in website development and maintenance.'

Don't Omit Your Top Selling Points.

A cover letter is a sales letter that sells you as a candidate. Like your resume, it should be compelling and spell out the main reasons why you should be called for an interview. Good cover letter strategies include emphasizing your top accomplishments or creating subheadings culled from the job posting. For example:

Your ad specifies:	And I offer:
Communication Skills	Five years of public speaking experience and an extensive background in executive-level report writing.
Strong Computer Background	Expertise in Web site development and design, with additional skills in MicroSoft applications, including helpdesk functions.

Don't Make It Too Long or Too Short.

If your cover letter is only one or two short paragraphs, it probably doesn't contain enough key information to sell you effectively. If it exceeds one page, you may be putting the reader to sleep. Keep it concise but interesting.

Don't Repeat Your Resume Word-for-Word.

Your cover letter shouldn't just repeat what's on your resume. Reword your cover letter statements to avoid detracting from your resume's impact.

Don't Be Vague.

If you're replying to an advertised position, refer to the specific job title in your cover letter. Include the position reference number if there is one. The person reading your letter might be reading hundreds of letters for dozens of different jobs. Make sure all the content in your letter supports your ability to meet the employer's specific needs.

Don't Forget to Customize.

If you're applying for a number of similar positions, chances are you're tweaking one letter and using it for multiple positions. This is fine, as long as you are customising each one. Do not forget to update the company, job, and contact information -- if Mr. Jones is addressed as Mrs. Smith, he won't be impressed. If you are re-working a previous cover letter, read the finished version very carefully to make sure you have all the details correct.

Don't Be Impolite.

Your cover letter should thank the reader for his time and consideration.

Don't Forget to Sign the Letter.

It is proper business etiquette to sign your letter. If you are sending your cover letter and resume via email or the Web, then type your signature in *italics* to represent a hand-written signature.