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SSC – 245

Professional Cover Letters

Overview: A cover letter is a short (typically one-page) letter that may be required as part of an application for many jobs. This letter is an opportunity for you to introduce yourself in a more personal way than your résumé or CV and to explain how your experience makes you well-suited to the job.

Content

It's important to write a cover letter that is tailored to the job you are applying for. While some material may be reusable with minor edits, one letter will not work for every application you send in. What follows is a list of some of the things you might include in your cover letter depending on the position you are applying for:

1. Introduce yourself: Briefly explain who you are. Are you a senior in college? A recent MBA graduate? What background information do you want them to know about you as a person?
2. Explain how you heard about this job: Did someone who already works there recommend it to you? Did you meet a representative at a career fair? If it was something less interesting like an internet job board it might not be worth mentioning.
3. Discuss how your qualifications fit the job you are applying for. Highlight any work experience, volunteer positions, internships, degrees etc. that make you well suited for the position and explain how your experience there applies to this position. Anticipate the specific needs of the employer and don't hesitate to borrow language from the job posting.
4. List the materials that are included in your application packet, and offer to provide any additional items that may help them make their decision such as a portfolio, a writing sample, additional references or letters of recommendation, creative samples, etc.
5. Politely request an interview.
6. Thank the reader for their consideration.

Do

1. Be clear, concise, and direct. Overly complicated sentences can easily confuse your reader.
2. Proofread carefully! Errors can be mistaken as carelessness on your part.
3. Include all the same contact information you have on your résumé.
4. Use a standard, professional-looking font.
5. Sign in ink.

Don't

1. Don't copy and paste from your résumé or write "see résumé" or something similar. They have your résumé already, this cover letter is your chance to add to the information they already have. Show them you have put serious thought into why this is a good job for you.
2. Don't use clichés, buzz-words, or jargon. You don't want your cover letter to sound just like every other letter they read.
3. Don't make jokes. In many cases your application materials will be screened by HR before being passed along to the hiring committee. You want your letter to appeal to everyone who sees it, and it's impossible to predict how your sense of humor will be understood by strangers.

Practice: Step back and consider your letter as a whole. Do all of the pieces work together? Is there anything that doesn't fit and should be removed? Anything you should add? Are the transitions smooth? Is the tone consistent?