

Here's the 411 on Cover Letters

By Kelli Robinson

Tip #1: Follow the formula

Cover letters contain four components with one essential question answered in each.

Paragraph One – Introduction - Who are you and why are you writing?

Paragraph Two – Highlight of Qualifications - How has your education, previous employment, or other experiences prepared you for the position?

Paragraph Three – Connection to the Company - Why is this company or job a good fit for you?

Paragraph Four – Closing Statement - How interested are you and where can you be reached for an interview?

Tip #2: Personalize it

Paragraphs one and four follow standard formats. The opportunity for your application to connect with a recruiter is in paragraphs two and three.

Paragraph Two: Draw attention to yourself

When you read the job description you declared, "I'm perfect for this job!" Tell the recruiter why. Is it because of a particular course you studied? Did you complete an internship that allowed you to perform similar duties and responsibilities? Were you able to develop a skill set through a part-time job or campus activity that is applicable to this position?

Make the connection between your past and this job. Don't repeat your resume, but rather make reference to items on it that you especially want the recruiter to be aware of.

Paragraph Three: "Professional Flattery"

Your job search will reveal many positions for which you are qualified, but not all of them are of interest. What makes this position or company different? Pinpoint specifics about the job description that catch your eye. Research the organization. If the company product or workplace philosophy is appealing, tell the recruiter why.

Pitfalls to Avoid

- A risqué e-mail address. Use a basic e-mail address comprised of your name, initials, or something similar. Save Partygirl@hotmail.com or Rugbyrocks@gmail.com for corresponding with friends.
- Greeting the recruiter by their first name. If you know the recruiter's name, don't forget that Mr. or Ms. is still necessary. Just because Ms. Jane Doe lists her first name doesn't mean you can call her Jane.
- A salutation that doesn't begin with "Dear." This is a business letter. Beginning the correspondence with "Greetings," "Hello," or "Hi There!" is not acceptable.
- Emoticons. Emoticons are used to convey attitudes or emotions, both of which are irrelevant in a cover letter.
- Acronyms. LOL, COB, FAQs. As with emoticons, acronyms have no place in job-search correspondence, unless they are standard acronyms, such as that used for a company or association. For example: NACE (National Association of Colleges and Employers) is appropriate. "The 411 about NACE is very positive" is not. ¹

¹Updated 7/2017