

Cover letter mistakes you should avoid

Nix these things and make sure your first impression isn't the equivalent of a limp handshake.

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Your cover letter is like a handshake—it's how you introduce yourself to employers when you apply for a job. Like a good handshake, you want your cover letter to be strong, succinct, and make a great first impression.

This isn't a part of the job application process you want to skimp on, either. A cover letter allows you to go into more detail than your resume allows, explain gaps in your employment history or your need for a career change, and make a case as to why you would be a great fit for the position. And a great cover letter can open the door to scoring an interview and, ultimately, landing a job.

Make sure your first impression is a good and lasting one by avoiding these common mistakes below when writing your cover letter.

1. Overusing "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-centered by minimizing your use of the word "I," especially at the beginning of your sentences.

2. Using a weak opening

When writing a cover letter, job seekers frequently struggle with the cover letter's opening. This difficulty often results in 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 a top-performing sales representative is an excellent match to my three-year history as a top-ranked, multimillion-dollar producer.

3. Omitting your top selling points

A cover letter is a sales letter that sells you as a candidate. Just like your resume, it should be compelling and give the main reasons you should be called for an interview. Winning cover letter tips include emphasizing your top accomplishments or creating subheadings culled from the job posting.

For example:

- Your ad specifies: Communication skills
I offer: Five years of public speaking experience and an extensive background in executive-level report.
- Your ad specifies: The need for a strong computer background
I offer: Proficiency in all MS Office applications with additional expertise in website development and design.

4. Making it too long

If your cover letter exceeds one page, you may be putting readers to sleep. A great cover letter is concise but compelling, and respects the reader's time.

5. Repeating your resume word for word

Your cover letter shouldn't regurgitate what's on your resume. Reword your cover letter statements to avoid dulling your resume's impact. Consider using the letter to tell a brief story, such as "my toughest sale" or "my biggest technical challenge."

6. Being vague

If you're replying to an advertised opening—as opposed to writing a cold cover letter—reference the specific job title in your cover letter. The person reading your letter may be reviewing hundreds of letters for dozens of different jobs. Make sure all of the content in your letter supports how you will meet the employer's specific needs.

7. Forgetting to customize

If you're applying to a number of similar positions, chances are you're tweaking one letter and using it for multiple openings. That's fine, as long as you customize each letter. Don't forget to update the company, job and contact information—if Mr. Jones is addressed as Ms. Smith, he won't be impressed.

8. Ending on a passive note

When possible, put your future in your own hands with a promise to follow up. Instead of asking readers to call you, try a statement like this: I will follow up with you in a few days to answer any preliminary questions you may have. In the meantime, you may reach me at (555) 555-5555.

9. Being rude

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

10. Forgetting to sign the letter

It is proper business etiquette (and shows attention to detail) to sign your letter. Err on the side of formality, and if you need any help figuring out how to close your cover letter, consider these possible sign-offs.

However, if you are sending an email cover letter and resume, a signature isn't necessary.

Find all cover letter writing tips—and check out a sample cover letter to help get your started—on [Monster](#).