HOW TO WRITE Attention-Getting Cover Letters
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17 Tips to Write a Cover Letter that Will Get You Noticed!

By

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About Peggy McKee

Peggy McKee is an expert resource and a dedicated advocate for job seekers. Known as the Sales Recruiter from Career Confidential, her years of experience as a nationally-known recruiter for sales and marketing jobs give her a unique perspective and advantage in developing the tools and strategies that help job seekers stand head and shoulders above the competition. Peggy has been named one of the Top 25 Most Influential Online Recruiters by HR Examiner, and has been quoted in articles from CNN, CAP TODAY, Yahoo!HotJobs, and the Denver Examiner.

Originally from Oklahoma, Peggy grew up on a 1000-acre ranch. She earned a B.S. in Chemistry and an M.B.A. in Marketing from the University of Oklahoma, going on to great achievements in the medical sales arena. Eventually, she moved to her adopted state of Texas, where she lives with her husband and two children. She’s still a cowgirl at heart and loves ranch work, trail riding, and her favorite horse, Lucky.

In 1999 Peggy founded PHC Consulting, a very successful medical sales recruiting firm. When she consistently found herself offering advice to jobseekers who weren’t even her own candidates, she developed a new business model in order to offer personalized career coaching as well as the tools jobseekers need to thrive and succeed in the job search…and Career Confidential was born.

Today, Career Confidential offers more than 100 products, tools, books, videos, and webinars for job seekers. Peggy receives positive responses every day from candidates who have used them to land the job of their dreams, and she loves that she has been able to contribute to their success.

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Your cover letter is a great way to sell yourself to hiring managers before they even see your resume. Here are 17 tips to writing a fantastic cover letter that will help you get an interview.

**Tip 1: Get into the Right Mindset – What is the Purpose of a Cover Letter?**

It’s not just a structure you need to follow, like an “ABC” formula—it’s a mindset you need to get into, and I’m going to help you get into that mindset and show you how to put everything together. When we’re done today, you’re going to be able to write a great cover letter, comfortably and confidently.

On the surface, cover letters seem simple. But once you actually get into writing one, you start to understand that it’s deceptive. Your cover letter does need to be simple and quick, but when you really start to think about how this is probably your very first introduction to whoever it is that needs to give you a chance at a job, and it’s vitally important that you impress them—that you make them want to read your resume, and then call you for an interview—that’s when it starts to twist you up a little. And if it isn’t twisting you up at least a little bit, and then you just don’t understand how important this little introduction is.

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Tip 2: Sell, Sell, Sell Yourself to a Hiring Manager, Recruiter or Human Resources

Let’s start off by setting up the playing field here. Overall, your job search is a sales process. You, the candidate, are the product you’re trying to sell to the hiring manager. You want him to buy your product, which means to hire you. In this analogy, the resume is your marketing brochure that tells the buyer about the product. So what’s the cover letter? It’s your “commercial” or your initial ad that’s going to get the attention of the buyer and make him want to read the marketing brochure.

Your cover letter is a “teaser” for your resume. It’s the sign that says “look here!” It’s supposed to be brief but also grab attention and puts your resume in context. It’s the first impression of you for this person, and first impressions last. It demonstrates your professionalism, your personality, and your communication skills, right off the bat.

Tip 3: Don’t Make Your Cover Letter Generic…
Target the Position You Are Applying For

The most common mistakes job seekers make when they write cover letters is that they make them too generic, they make them too long, and they put no effort into making them easy to read. Maybe they even go find a basic cover letter template online and just change out the names of the job title and company. The result is a letter that doesn’t make the reader want to dig a little
deeper and read your resume, and doesn’t show good communication skills on your part. All that goes against everything I just told you is the goal of a good cover letter.

So, you want to make sure that each cover letter you write is targeted to that job, at that company, to that hiring manager; that it gets your point across quickly; and that it’s very easy to skim and still get the most important facts from it.

You want to be direct and get to the point quickly while being polite, friendly, and professional.

**Tip 4: Make the Letter Addressed to Someone not Something**

First, always make sure your letter is addressed to an actual person. Never “to whom it may concern,” or to a title like “Marketing Manager at ABC Corporation.” Make the effort to find out the actual name, with the right spelling, of the person who’s going to be reading it.

**Tip 5: Write the Cover Letter to the Job, NOT Your Resume**

With your first sentence or two, put the whole thing in context. What job are you interested in? Make that very clear. Remember, each cover letter you write is going to be written for that particular job. You’re writing to an actual person.

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Talk to that person. You want to be direct and aggressive with your language, but also use your own voice. That’s what puts your personality into it and resonates with the person reading it.

And think about the person you’re sending this to. Is it a recruiter? Is it a hiring manager? Put yourself in their shoes. What pain are they experiencing right now? What problems are they having because that job is currently unfilled?

*Tip 6: Address Their Problems and Your Solutions*

Address that, and then show how you’re the solution to those problems. Your cover letter should always be focused on how you can help the employer. What’s in it for them? What are you bringing to the table? That’s your attention-grabbing opening. Think headline, almost. Or if someone they know has recommended that you contact this person, say that right up front.

*Tip 7: Support Your Solutions*

Then, in the body of the letter, you can go into a few details that support what you just told the reader. But don’t just copy and paste items from your resume. Don’t tell them what they’re going to be able to read on the next page. There are several different options you can go with.

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Tip 8: Steal Their Job Description and Requirements

If you have a job description you’re working from, use the requirements they’re asking for. List a few of them, and note how you fit. For instance, if they’re looking for someone who “will drive the growth of XYZ division,” you say, “At ABC Company, I led my team to a 25% increase in revenue.” Or whatever it is. You’re answering their need. And as much as humanly possible, do it with numbers.

If you don’t have a specific job description you’re applying for, feel free to just pull the stats that sell you. Put yourself in their shoes, figure out what they need, and show them why they should be interested in talking to you about meeting that need. Why are you good at what you do? And where’s your proof?

Compare These Examples

If the Job Description Says This:
- Position Summary: We are currently searching for a New Business Sales Representative (New Contracts Sales Hunter) who will aggressively grow our landscape maintenance business in a defined territory. This position will cover the Los Angeles market, local qualified candidates currently residing in those areas are highly preferred.
- Being a New Business Sales Representative for ABC Company is both challenging and rewarding, and it might be a great career opportunity for you if:
  - You are driven, disciplined and focused, and consider yourself as a HUNTER of new business
  - You enjoy PROSPECTING and you’re able to open new doors
  - You can create rapport, credibility and build trust-based RELATIONSHIPS
  - You can effectively QUALIFY opportunities with key decision makers to gain valuable intelligence
  - You’re obsessed with developing value-based solutions for customers
  - You can build and present compelling and customer-centric PROPOSALS
  - You love to work in a service industry with a product that is beautiful
  - Like being challenged with ACTIVELY SELLING to many different customer segments
  - You like working in a team-selling environment
  - You are resilient and persistent in CLOSING DEALS

Then the Bullet Points Could Say This:
- Gained 25 new customers in 6 months, a 25% increase
- 50% of customer base is repeat business
- Cold call success rate of 30%
- Voted “Most Valuable Player” for sales team 2 years in a row
- #1 out of 17 sales reps
- Grew annual sales 40%
- Lived in Los Angeles area for 15 years

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Tip 9: Quantify, Qualify & Measure

Numbers are what really get the attention of most hiring managers. For them, that proves that you’re not just all talk. You can back that up with measurable results. That’s either dollars, numbers, or percentages. Some way you can offer an objective measure of your achievement, in whatever form that takes for your industry. Hopefully, that’s a main focus of your resume. For your cover letter, you’re going to just sprinkle in a few of the more impressive figures to grab attention.

Quantify Your Accomplishments

State your accomplishments in terms of:

- Numbers
  - Voted Most Valuable Employee 6 Times
- Dollars
  - Increased Revenues by $2MM with XYZ Project
- Percentages
  - Developed procedure that reduced costs by 50%

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**Tip 10: Don’t Copy and Paste from Your Resume into Your Cover Letter**

Again, you don’t want to just restate what’s in your resume. Your cover letter should complement your resume. You can direct the hiring manager’s attention to the parts of your resume he would be most interested in, or you can add some details that don’t really “go” in your resume but that might be beneficial for the employer to know. Overall, you’re answering the question, “Why should I talk to you about this job?” Don’t copy and paste from your resume into your cover letter.

![Resume Image]

**Tip 11: Use Bullet Points!**

The easiest way for the reader to understand and focus on what you’re trying to say in the body of your letter is with bullet points. I love bullet points. They are easier to read than paragraphs and they naturally draw the eye down the list. They are bite-sized nuggets of information that are very easy to skim, take in, and digest.

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You have a much better chance of having your cover letter read if you incorporate bullet points into it.

**Example 1:**

My long-term experience in the service industry shows that I have learned to meet and exceed each customer's expectations with service. I have worked with all types of customers in a variety of settings. I realize how important it is to gain repeat business through customer loyalty and word-of-mouth advertising. I have been able to consistently position companies for better exposure and greater marketability many times.

I also consistently achieve ongoing success with my teams with excellent training. My training focuses on building morale, maintaining teams' self-confidence and training them to build the sale by improving their people skills.

**Example 2:**

- Exceed customer’s expectations with service
- Experienced with all types of customers
- Actively cultivate valuable customer loyalty and repeat business
- Consistently successful at gaining exposure
- Build successful teams through training and morale-building

**Tip 12: Close with a Call to Action**

Now: your closing. Sum up why they should see you, and let them know when you intend to follow up with a phone call. You can say something like: “I am very excited about the potential for this company and this position, and know that my skills in x, y, and z will advance your goals for this division. I look forward to discussing it with you, and I will call within a few days to set up a time to meet. Thank you for your consideration.” Basically, close with a call to action. What does that mean? You want to set up the next step in your closing statement. Is it a phone call, is it a meeting? Here is another example: “I look forward to speaking with you soon. The best number to reach me is 555-5555. Thank you

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for your time and consideration of my resume for XYZ position.” Make sure there is a next step or call to action.

Tip 13: Be Yourself, Let Your Personality Shine

That’s just an example. Whatever you say throughout your cover letter should be in your own words. You want it to be direct and aggressive and to the point, but you also want your own personality to shine through. That’s one reason you don’t want to use a cover letter template you can find online. That’s not your personality, that’s someone else’s. The other reason you don’t want to use a template is exactly because everyone else is doing it. You want your cover letter to stand out, and be unique. It’s going to stand out by acting as a selling document that grabs attention, and it’s going to be unique because you’ve written it yourself, using the words you would use if you were talking to the reader.

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**Tip 14: Spell-Check then Proofread Again and Again**

OK. End the letter with “Sincerely,” then your name, and you’re done. Use an easy-to-read font, like Times New Roman, Arial, or Helvetica. Make sure there are no errors in it. Proofread it, proofread it again, and then get someone else to proofread it. Spell-check doesn’t catch everything, so you need an actual person to go over it.

**How to End Your Cover Letter**

- Always write “Sincerely,”
- Below that goes your name.
- Your contact information:
  - Address
  - Phone Number
  - Email Address

Best fonts are 12-point:
- Arial
- Verdana
- Times New Roman,
- Helvetica

Proofread... proofread... and get someone else to proofread it.

**Tip 15: Never Attach Your Cover Letter**

Once you’ve put all your blood and sweat into crafting the perfect cover letter, how do you make sure it actually gets read by the person you’re sending it to?

If you’re mailing it, just print it on the same paper you’ve used for your resume and send it. You’re good to go.

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If you’re emailing your resume to a recruiter, Human Resources department, or hiring manager—never, never, never send your cover letter as an attachment. All of the work you just poured into your letter will go straight down the drain, because they’ll almost certainly never open it. You want to make it very, very easy for the reader to get the information he or she needs. You might think, “Well, how easy is it to click and open just one attachment?” But you’ve got to put yourself in the shoes of your reader. How many people are applying for that position? How many resumes and applications do they handle for all the positions they’re trying to fill? It could easily be hundreds. It is for me, on a weekly basis. That one little extra click starts to add up fast when you have to do it hundreds of times.

### Don’t Send Your Cover Letter As An Attachment

- One **huge mistake** a lot of people make:
  - Send Cover Letter as an Attachment
- They’ll **never open it**.
- That **extra click** adds up fast.

Make it easy for the hiring manager to get your information.

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So, when I get a cover letter that’s been sent as an attachment, I just don’t even open it. That’s just the cold, hard truth. And to be completely honest with you, it sometimes even edges toward annoyance that this person is trying to make my life more complicated with this extra, unnecessary step. I’m not saying that’s an attractive quality, I’m just telling you that’s why you’ve got to sort of put yourself in the position of the person who’s reading your email. Make life easy for them.

But the way to get around that is very simple: just write your cover letter in the body of your email. Your email is your cover letter. I always read an email. Or at least skim it before I open the resume that’s attached. So that’s the ideal place for you to write whatever it is you need to say to me before I read your resume. Don’t let your cover letter and resume end up in the trash with everyone else’s.

**Tip 16: Overcoming Follow-Up Issues**

Now, what do you do if you’ve sent your resume with your cover letter and they don’t respond? You’ve called like you said you would, and couldn’t get through, or had to leave a message and they didn’t call you back.

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Wait a few weeks, write a new one, and send it again. If you can include some new piece of information you’ve learned about the company or the larger industry, or some new accomplishment of yours, or some conference you’ve attended that pertains to that position, all the better.

Now, most folks would be a little afraid to take that step. The thinking is that “if they didn’t call me for an interview right away, they must not be interested in me.” Well, maybe. But maybe they just weren’t interested right now. What happens when right after they delete your resume, their best person comes in and turns in his two weeks’ notice? Now they need someone. You’ve got to remember, that recruiter or that hiring manager is a busy person, with a lot going on, with a whole lot of factors at play here. You don’t know what’s going on with them at any given moment. In August they might not be interested, but by September or even October, that might change.

If you think that’s weird, just remember: the job search is a sales process. Advertisements don’t just run one time. They show up over and over again. That doesn’t mean you should email them every day, because then you’re definitely becoming a pest, or even stalker-ish. But reasonably periodic contacts that include something new and fresh won’t hurt.

**Tip 17: Get Ready to Sell, even if YOU are NOT a Salesperson**

So, keep in mind that the job search is a sales process, and your cover letter is the “ad” that’s going to encourage the reader to look at your resume.

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The job search is one big sales process.

You Are the Product  The Hiring Manager Is the Buyer

You want them to buy your product, which is to hire you.

It should first grab the reader’s attention, highlight a few of your most relevant accomplishments and skills in the body of the letter using bullet points, and briefly close with a promise to make contact. Make it interesting and easy for the reader to get the information about why he should call you for the job, and you’ll have a great cover letter.

Use Your Cover Letter Like a Commercial

A Good Cover Letter Should:

✓ Show Your Communication Skills
✓ Show Why They Should Talk to You
✓ Make Them Excited to Read Your Resume
✓ Be Targeted to the:
  • Job
  • Company
  • Hiring Manager
✓ Get Your Point Across Quickly
✓ Be Easy to Skim
✓ Be:
  • Polite
  • Professional
  • Friendly

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Additional Resources for You:

- Job Search and Interview Training Webinars
  [https://careerconfidential.com/training-webinars/](https://careerconfidential.com/training-webinars/)
- Career Confidential Products
  [https://careerconfidential.com/job-search-tools/](https://careerconfidential.com/job-search-tools/)
- Peggy’s Personal Coaching
- Total Access Club (TAC)
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