

Cover Letter Do's and Don'ts

Adapted from Randall S. Hansen, Ph.D., and Katharine Hansen, Ph.D.

Here are the keys for job-seekers in writing successful job-search cover letters. Follow these simple rules and guidelines to achieve success in this important phase of job-hunting, helping lead you to the next phase... job interviews.

- Generally speaking, **don't** send your resume without a cover letter (unless requested).
- Whenever possible, **do** address your letter to a named individual.
- **Don't** use a sexist salutation, such as "Gentlemen" when answering a blind ad. Instead, **do** say "Dear Hiring Manager".
- **Don't** waste your first paragraph by writing a boring introduction. Use the first paragraph to grab the employer's attention; give the employer the reasons you are qualified for the position. Read more at www.Quintcareers.com.
- **Do** send an original letter to each employer.
- **Don't** use such clichés as "Enclosed/attached please find my resume". Employers can see that your resume is enclosed/attached; they don't need you to tell them. Such trite phrases just waste precious space.
- **Don't** depend on the employer to take action. Request action. Request an interview, and tell the employer when you will follow up to arrange it. Then, **Do so**. It is imperative that you follow up. You will greatly increase your chances of getting interviews if you call the employer after writing instead of sitting back and waiting for a call.
- **Don't** send a cover letter that contains any typos, misspellings, incorrect grammar/punctuation or smudges if you send it via snail mail.
- **Do** use simple language and uncomplicated sentence structure. Ruthlessly eliminate all unnecessary words. Follow the journalist's credo: Write tight!
- **Do** write cover letters that are unique and specific to you, but if you're having trouble getting started, **do** review cover letter samples on our website (www.Hofstra.edu/zarbcareers).
- **Do** speak to the requirements of the job, especially when responding to an ad.
- **Do** keep your letter brief. **Never** more than one page, and it's best to keep it well under a full page. Each paragraph should have no more three to five sentences.
- **Do** tell the employer how you can meet his or her needs and contribute to the company.
- **Do** distinguish your cover letter from those of other job-seekers by quantifying and giving examples that amplify and prove the claims you make in your letter.
- **Do** try to answer the question that the employer will be asking while reading your letter: "Why should I hire this person?" Answer with your personal branding message.
- **Don't** rehash your resume. You can use your cover letter to highlight the aspects of your resume that are relevant to the position, but you're wasting precious space -- and the potential employer's time -- if you simply repeat your resume.
- **Do** avoid negativity. Negativity never has a place in a cover letter.
- **Do** be sure the potential employer can reach you; include your email and cell phone number. It is no longer necessary to include a physical address.

- **Do** use powerful, active verbs.
- **Don't** forget to personally sign the letter if you are sending it via snail mail.
- **Do** use e-mailed cover letters, but keep them shorter and more concise.

Some of these do's and don'ts are taken from ***Dynamic Cover Letters***.