

Title:

Writing Cover Letters That Sizzle

Word Count:

638

Summary:

Anything being sent to a decision-maker should sell you, not just state facts. When conducting a job search, your cover letter and resume are in a pile for the decision-maker to review, one by one, along with a vast number of other documents submitted by other hopeful individuals. The odds that YOUR document is the very first ones on the pile are about a zillion to one! This means the decision-maker has probably read X number of cover letters (and resumes) before reaching you...

Keywords:

Article Body:

Anything being sent to a decision-maker should sell you, not just state facts. When conducting a job search, your cover letter and resume are in a pile for the decision-maker to review, one by one, along with a vast number of other documents submitted by other hopeful individuals. The odds that YOUR document is the very first ones on the pile are about a zillion to one! This means the decision-maker has probably read X number of cover letters (and resumes) before reaching your set of documents. With that in mind, I never recommend you start the cover letter with the sentence used in so many other letters:

"Pursuant to your recent advertisement in the New York Times for the position of Staff Accountant, I am enclosing my resume for your review."

B-O-R-I-N-G!! Plus, the decision-maker probably just read this same (or very similar) sentence about five dozen times. Remember, you want to GRAB the decision-maker's attention and SELL yourself to them.

Since the cover letter is designed to market you to potential employers, don't state the obvious. If the cover letter does not create a sense of excitement and entice the reader, it is a waste of your time for writing it and a waste of time for the reader reading it.

Keep track of how many times you use the words "I" and/or "my". After you write

the letter, take a pen and circle all the I's and my's in the letter: more than five? Time to re-write some of the sentences.

Here's an illustration of how to do that: instead of writing "I am looking for an opportunity for advancement with a new employer. My background is in retail management and I feel well-qualified for the Store Manager position with your company" you can write, "A background in retail management and proven record of obtaining results as a Store Manager are key elements in qualifying me for consideration as part of your team."

Remember the PURPOSE of the cover letter: to highlight your background in the right light, sell your skills, and show the potential employer you are worthy of an interview. Explaining what you WANT throughout the letter doesn't tell the reader the BENEFIT of what you can offer, which is imperative for you to be successful.

One of the techniques I like to use in cover letters is to pull out the top 4 or 5 achievements and mention them in bullet form with the letter. It serves as a wonderful focus point for readers' eyes and draws their attention immediately to your strengths. Here's a brief highlight in what would naturally be a longer cover letter:

...Recognized as a top-performer and dedicated professional, my record of achievements include:

- Generating a 58% increase in new business during tenure as Regional Advertising Manager
- Boosting client media coverage 50% and developing partnerships with previously unsecured media contacts

There are many ways to say things but, as you can see, some words have a stronger impact on readers than others. In cover letters, e-resumes, and traditional resumes, you can change the reader's perception in a heartbeat by substituting various words or phrases for more traditional (and outdated) verbiage. See the outline below:

#### NON-AGGRESSIVE VERBIAGE

Set up entire department from scratch  
Worked closely with department heads  
Helped produce \$3 million in sales  
Helped new employees  
In-depth knowledge of capital markets and corporate finance  
Assisted marketing department in strategies and bids  
Reduced expenses by 10%

#### AGGRESSIVE VERBIAGE

Established department from inception through successful operation  
Fostered relationships with department heads  
Instrumental in generating \$3 million in sales  
Aided new employees  
Expertise in capital markets and corporate finance  
Actively participated in formulating marketing strategies  
Slashed (or cut) expenses by 10%

In short, aggressive writing makes you SIZZLE, while passive writing tells your "story." Remember your goal is to effectively market yourself, not to author your employment biography.