

Book Ultimate Cover Letters

Martin Yate
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Recommendation

Do you know how to create a dynamite cover letter to accompany your résumé, a letter that will grab a potential employer’s attention? If not, don’t worry: You can appropriate one of the great cover letters in this popular book by Martin Yate and adapt it as your own. That’s why he compiled them. Yate collected more than 4,000 excellent cover letters from human resource professionals and headhunters, and handpicked the cream of the crop for this volume. Just find the letter that suits you, and make it suitable for your job search. In addition to scores of excellent cover letters, Yate also provides numerous “power phrases” that you can put to work. *BooksInShort* recommends this valuable how-to manual to job hunters in any field.

Take-Aways

- Many job seekers find it difficult to sell their skills and experience in a cover letter.
- However, if you don’t include a strong cover letter, a prospective employer may not differentiate your résumé from others.
- As your initial communication to a prospective employer, a cover letter shapes the recipient’s first impression of you. Make it a good one.
- Keep your cover letter brief and to the point. It should not exceed one page.
- Never address a cover letter to some generic title or position. Do the research and find the name of the person who hires new employees.
- A professional cover letter arouses an employer’s interest. Be catchy but not cutesy.
- The aim of the cover letter is to make the employer want to interview you – and soon.
- Plan your cover letter with the employer in mind. Develop the letter around what he or she wants, and why you are the ideal candidate for the organization.
- Make your cover letter look professional and businesslike.
- E-mailed cover letters should be short and sweet. Use a punchy subject line.

Summary

Getting a Good Job Requires a Strong Written Presentation

Most people train for many years to become attractive to potential employers and to excel at their professions. But when the time comes to look for work, they struggle to sell their skills in a cover letter and résumé or curriculum vitae (CV) package. Such hesitancy and apprehension can make it hard for people to present themselves to prospective employers in the most compelling manner possible. This is self-defeating behavior. The vast majority of jobs require a high-quality written presentation – a résumé, plus a personalized cover letter that profiles the job seeker in an intriguing, compelling, catchy way. Can you create and prepare such powerful presentations? If not, you are liable to stay unemployed for a long time, or you may be condemned to remain in a job you dislike or one that pays less than you are worth.

Your Cover Letter Is Critical

If you don’t include a strong cover letter, some employers will not even review your résumé. Others will fail to give your résumé the full attention it deserves. This becomes increasingly relevant as you work your way up the job ladder. When it comes to finding employment, a quality cover letter is crucial. A cover letter opens the door and “sets the stage” for everything else. It represents the all-important initial salvo in your campaign to find work. It is the first communication from you that the employer sees. If your cover letter is a dud, your job-hunting campaign will be over before it gets started.

“When our livelihood suddenly depends on our ability to compose a compelling professional profile, we find ourselves in dire straits.”

You would not greet a prospective employer wearing loud Bermuda shorts, a sloppy T-shirt and sneakers. Why then would you present yourself through a weak cover letter that fails to spark a prospective employer’s interest? It is never easy to find the job that you want. It is almost impossible without a good cover letter. Equally important are follow-up letters that you mail after interviews, telephone calls and other employer contacts. Such correspondences can be crucially important when the job choice comes down to you and one or two individuals who are equally qualified. In this type of situation, the job almost always goes to the person who shows the most enthusiasm. Channel your enthusiasm and positivity through an energetic follow-up letter.

Cover Letter Requirements

Your letter should exhibit your enthusiastic attitude and your pride in yourself as a professional. The purpose of your letter must be crystal-clear: You want a job. Your letter should be both personable and businesslike. Include information that is directly relevant to the job you seek.

“If you are like most people, packaging and pitching yourself to others is both an uncomfortable and difficult prospect.”

If space is available, and if it makes sense to do so, include brief third-party endorsements to lend credibility to your description of your qualifications. Your cover letter should directly request next-step action (for example, a return phone call) in an unambiguous manner. Employers have no time to waste. Therefore, effective cover letters must be brief and to the point. They should not exceed one page. Creating a strong employment cover letter involves four basic steps:

Step 1: “Grab your reader’s attention”

Make your cover letter attractive. Ensure that the type is large and legible enough to read easily, and that the format looks crisp and clean. Use high-quality paper. Check for spelling errors.

Step 2: “Generate interest”

The best way to gain someone’s attention is to address that person by name. Therefore, research the name of the person who does the hiring. Be creative if you are not responding to a formal “personnel wanted” posting. Use some type of hook to gain the hiring manager’s interest, for example: “I came across the enclosed article in *Newsweek* magazine...It encouraged me to do a little research on your company. I am now convinced of two things: You are the kind of people I want to be associated with and I have the kind of qualifications you can use.”

Step 3: “Turn interest into desire”

By this stage you have captured the reader’s interest and attention. Now, you need to encourage him or her to want to learn more about you. Use a verbal bridge to make a connection, for example, “I would like to talk to you about your personnel needs and how I am able to contribute to your department’s goals.” Then, briefly focus attention on your merits and track record: “I have an economics degree...and a quantitative analysis approach to market fluctuations. This combination has enabled me consistently to pick the new technology flotations that are the backbone of the growth-oriented technical fund.”

Step 4 “Turn desire into action”

Don’t supply too many facts. Stimulate the reader’s desire for more information. Be clear that you want to meet the employer. Provide all your contact information, including the best times for the hiring manager to call. At the same time, force the action. Indicate that if you don’t hear from the employer before a certain date, you’ll get in contact.

“Writing a cover letter ...is a bit like baking a cake...What determines the flavor is the quantity of each ingredient and how and in what order they are blended and ultimately presented for consumption.”

The conclusion to your cover letter is your final chance to make a great first impression. Insert a “power phrase” that demonstrates your intention to act assertively, such as, “I will be in your area around the 20th, and will call you prior to that date to arrange a meeting,” or “A brief phone call will establish whether or not we have mutual interests. Recognizing the demands of your schedule, I will make that call within a week.”

“The evaluation process starts the moment you make contact – which means that the content and style of your cover letter set the tone for your entire application.”

This type of approach shows that you are an earnest person with a firm objective. However, some employment experts believe this tactic is pushy.

No matter how you handle it, if you write that you will call at a certain time or date, be sure to follow through. Failure to honor your appointment as promised is the surest way to take yourself out of the running for the job.

Which Kind of Cover Letter Should You Send?

The four basic categories of cover letters are:

1. **“General” letter** – This format is ideal when you are unaware of any particular job opening at a firm. A general letter clearly communicates that you want to find a job, briefly discusses your background, highlights some of your primary achievements, lets the hiring officer know that your résumé is attached and lists your contact details. End it with “Yours sincerely,” followed by your name.
2. **“Executive briefing” letter** – This letter directly and succinctly compares your background against the job requirements listed in the job’s specification. This enables human resource (HR) personnel, who may not have a full understanding of the post, to quickly scan your relevant qualifications. Format the experience-comparison portion of the letter in two columns. The left-hand column should state the firm’s requirement; the right-hand column should list your corresponding experience.
3. **“Broadcast” letter** – Job seekers often use this kind of correspondence as a substitute for a résumé. It can be the ideal type of letter to send to headhunters or to companies with highly specific openings that perfectly match your background and career strengths. Encapsulate your experience under a set of paragraph headings, such as “Sales,” “Marketing,” “Project Management” and so on. In general, do not use this type of letter as your primary job search vehicle. You can also use it when you are mailing a number of contacts at the same company regarding the position.
4. **“Recruitment agency” letter** – Be completely truthful and accurate. If a recruiter catches you lying, you may greatly damage your prospects. Get right to the

point. For example, state “I am forwarding my résumé because I understand you specialize in representing clients in the banking field.” Always include your salary requirements in letters to recruitment agencies.

“Do you need to compose more than one letter? Almost certainly. There is a case for all of us having letters and CVs targeted for different specific needs.”

If it is appropriate (and much of the time it is not), you can include salary expectations in your cover letter. However, never refer to salary in your résumé. Don’t limit your desired salary to a single sum. Instead, provide a salary range that you consider appropriate.

Before writing your cover letter, try to think like the person who will receive it. Imagine what will be uppermost in that person’s mind upon reading your letter and what benefits you can deliver to his or her organization. Prepare your letter accordingly.

“The Internet offers you an array of opportunities to get your CV on the desks of thousands of companies and recruiters.”

Understand that employers base their hiring decisions on these criteria: aptness and aptitude, dedication and effort, “manageability,” problem-solving capabilities and good conduct. Try to display your strengths in each area.

Cover Letter Checklist

Review the “final product” before mailing your cover letter. It should achieve the following objectives:

- Does your cover letter clearly state that you are seeking a job?
- Does it mention the company where you are looking for work?
- Does it focus on a specific job by referring to your skills for that job?
- Have you prioritized your relevant experience?
- Have you avoided wasting space on extraneous information?
- Did you point out why you left your last job, or explain why you want to leave your current one? Don’t. This is superfluous. Save such justifications for the interview.
- Have you removed all references to salary expectations or consciously decided to leave it in?
- Are you limiting your availability for employment? The first rule of finding work is to accommodate the needs of the employer. Do not expect the employer to adjust to meet your needs.
- Did you include your highest level of educational achievement?
- Does your cover letter spotlight your most significant professional achievements?
- Is your letter of sufficient length and detail to capture the reader’s interest, while leaving him or her with a strong desire to learn more about you?
- Does it use short words instead of long ones? Do your sentences average 25 words or less? Are your paragraphs five lines or less? In any written communication, always keep things short and sweet.
- Does it use action verbs to describe your experience, such as “accomplished, advanced, chaired, coached, consolidated, expanded, generated, managed, produced, reduced, trimmed,” and so on? It should.
- Did you proof and re-proof your letter? One misspelled word will kill your letter – and your chances for a job.
- Did you print your letter on a nice, “white, off-white or cream-colored paper?” Does the envelope match the notepaper?
- Is your letter as professional and business-like in appearance as possible?

Online Job Searches

The rules for conventional cover letters also apply to e-mail communications. Recipients will ignore long e-mails or ones that do not immediately get to the point. Arrive at your main points as quickly as possible. Try to restrict your e-mail to one “screen view.” An e-mail cover letter should not contain more than “three to five carefully constructed paragraphs.” Make your subject line a “factual, professional and intriguing” teaser that will garner interest from a potential employer.

“I look forward to meeting you again and hope our discussion will precede a long-term working relationship.”

Your e-mail cover letter must focus on the main reasons why the recipient should quickly review your attached (not enclosed) résumé. Customize your e-mail cover letter for each job search. You will need to send letters and resumes to companies with vacancies, companies that you solicit in the hope that they may have a job for you, recruiters, networking contacts and so on.

Follow Up Your Written Communications with Calls

When it comes to a job search, your traditional letters and e-mail correspondence should represent just a small part of your self-marketing activities. Always follow your letters and e-mails with a timely, carefully planned telephone call to the employer. You may be the only applicant that takes this approach, which will make you stand out from the crowd, earning you bonus points when you reach the next stage of the hiring process.

About the Author

Martin Yate is a bestselling business author. His titles include *Great Answers to Tough Interview Questions* and *Ultimate CV*.
