

COVER LETTERS: GOOD VS. BAD: MAKE THE BEST OF YOUR COVER LETTER

Takeaway Points

- A strong cover letter can be more important than the resume in landing an interview.
- The ideal cover letter emphasizes your fit for a position and how your skills and experience can help the employer.
- The factors that differentiate your cover letter from the rest include style, error-free content, length, and conclusion.
- The cover letter is the opportunity to match your skills and experience to the exact needs stated in the job description.

By: Team Pongo

A focused, well-written resume is essential to a successful job search. But a strong cover letter can make an even bigger difference in whether you get called in to interview for a job. Like the resume, the cover letter serves as a sales tool for your skills and experience, and the value you can bring to an employer.

In fact, think of your cover letter as an advertisement for a new car. You need to sell the car fast, so what will make readers interested enough to call?

Would You Buy This Car?

Car makers don't just create one advertisement that says, "Our vehicles have four wheels, an engine, and seats!" An ad for a car identifies the features that appeal to potential buyers of that one specific vehicle. Some ads emphasize towing capacity; others talk about gas mileage; others tout safety features. They target the needs of the specific buyers of each type of vehicle.

Like a car advertisement, your cover letter should target the employer's needs for the specific job you want. It should differentiate you from the crowd, and call attention to the features in your resume that are most relevant for the hiring manager.

If your cover letter speaks to the hiring manager's needs, he or she will take the next steps and read your resume, and if all goes well, call you in for an interview.

The ideal cover letter specifically emphasizes your fit for the position and how your unique skills and experience can help the employer.

Characteristics of Good and Bad Cover Letters

	A GOOD COVER LETTER...	A BAD COVER LETTER...
Style	<p>Gets to the point early in the first paragraph.</p> <p>Contains mostly crisp, concise sentences (a couple longer ones are OK).</p> <p>Presents skills and accomplishments in bulleted format for ease of reading.</p> <p>Omits needless words.</p>	<p>Has long, detailed, rambling sentences that don't grab attention.</p> <p>Hides your skills and accomplishments in paragraphs among less-relevant details.</p>

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Did you know?

The Pongo LetterBUILDER (www.PongoResume.com) enables you to craft well-written cover letters to accompany your resumes. LetterBUILDER can even help you write post-interview follow-up letters!

www.pongoresume.com

Content	<p>Answers the employer’s top question: “What can you [job seeker] do for my business?”</p> <p>Highlights your most relevant qualifications.</p> <p>Focuses on how your skills, background, and accomplishments align with the employer’s needs.</p> <p>Contains exact keywords and phrases taken from the actual job description.</p> <p>Points out relevant information that is well supported in the resume.</p> <p>Expresses confidence without being arrogant.</p>	<p>Focuses on your needs rather than the employer’s (“This job is just what I’m looking for – creativity, flexibility, and a short commute.”).</p> <p>Simply repeats details that are in the resume.</p> <p>Assumes the reader will notice similarities between keywords in the job description and “similar” phrasing in the letter.</p> <p>Introduces information that is not substantiated in the resume.</p> <p>Uses arrogant-sounding “puffery” (e.g., “Look no further, I am a perfect fit for the job.”).</p>
Errors	Is 100% error-free.	Has one or more spelling or grammatical errors.
Length	<p>Fits neatly within one page, or is well balanced between two pages.</p> <p>Includes substantial white space for visual appeal and note-taking.</p>	<p>Has a second page with just a few lines that wouldn’t fit on Page 1.</p> <p>Looks cramped, with tiny margins and no room for notes.</p>
Conclusion	<p>Expresses thanks to the reader.</p> <p>Emphasizes your strong interest in the position.</p> <p>Announces when you will follow up.</p>	<p>Fails to acknowledge the reader’s time.</p> <p>Leaves the reader uncertain whether you really care about the job.</p> <p>Puts the next step in the employer’s hands, not yours.</p>

Pongo Resume is a premier full-service online resume-building resource that provides a suite of tools to help job seekers market and manage their career. Pongo generates over 100,000 resumes per month through its 4+ million registered users and has in excess of 1/2 million unique visitors per month. The company is privately held and headquartered in Northborough, Massachusetts.