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# Six basic tips for writing cover letters

**B**efore I begin discussing basic tips for writing cover letters, I want to suggest to you the idea the job search is actually a sales process. As Peggy McKee of Career Confidential relates, “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 résumé 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.” In other words, a well-written cover letter can sell you for the job, and your résumé will serve as icing on the cake.

Let’s review six basic tips that can guide you to write a winning cover letter:

- **Tip 1 — Target your letter.** A cover letter, letter of application or letter of interest all have the same goal: to make the case for why you are the ideal fit for the position for which you are applying, and combined with your résumé, to get you invited to an interview. Every now and then, I have a client who asks me to write a “generic” cover letter. In my opinion, there is no such thing. Each cover letter you write should be customized to the job. The idea is to merge the

qualifications identified in the job posting with your background to show what a great fit you would be.

- **Tip 2 — Use a specific salutation.** “Dear Ms. Brown,” “Dear Mr. Elliott,” or simply “Ms. Brown” or “Mr. Elliott.” It’s to your advantage to have a specific name, preferably the name of the hiring manager. I seldom say “never,” but in this case never use “To Whom It May Concern.” You may ask, “What if I’m unable to find a name?” Do your research, ask around or check the company’s LinkedIn profile. If after an exhaustive search you still discover nothing, then consider using a greeting based on the department/position for which you are applying, such as “Sales Representative Hiring Manager,” “Administrative Support Hiring Manager” or “Accounting Manager Search Committee.”

- **Tip 3 — Open with an attention-getting paragraph.** Your first paragraph should mention the job for which you are applying, why you are interested in pursuing the opportunity and quickly highlight how your skills are a great match for the position. It would be fantastic if you mention a mutual acquaintance in your opening.

- **Tip 4 — Include a brief summary of your career in the second**

paragraph. Be sure to tailor it to the position and company.

- **Tip 5 — Highlight relevant accomplishments in the third paragraph.** Using bullet points here makes for an easy read; plus, it’s a good idea to list these achievements in order of pertinence to the position.

- **Tip 6 — Recap and ask for an interview.** The last paragraph recaps how you will bring value to the company and indicates you look forward to an interview when you can further discuss your fit for the position. Make sure you include your contact information, both email and cell phone number.

On an online application, when the cover letter and résumé are requested or when a note says a cover letter is optional, there will be “boxes” in which you will upload the documents. By the way, though a cover letter may be optional, you should definitely write one. Remember, it’s part of your sales package and a way to stand out. In addition, if you are emailing your résumé as an attachment, your cover letter will be the email message.

**For more information on Dr. White’s programs and publications, visit [www.successimages.com](http://www.successimages.com) or call (225) 769-2307. ●**

## Links to additional resources and sample cover letters:

- [www.monster.com/career-advice/cover-letter-resume/cover-letter-samples](http://www.monster.com/career-advice/cover-letter-resume/cover-letter-samples)
- [www.livecareer.com/cover-letter-examples](http://www.livecareer.com/cover-letter-examples)
- <http://chameleonresumes.com/2014/09/15/formatting-your-resume-for-a-long-distance-job-hunt>