

## Things Not to Include in Your Cover Letter

We live in a world where [90% of hiring managers don't read cover letters](#), yet [53% of employers](#) admit that they prefer candidates who send a cover letter. Meaning, your cover letter is positively acknowledged, but it probably won't get read.

...So if nobody's reading it, why bother?

Because anything that sets you apart from the candidates you're up against is an absolute must.

**1. Any spelling or grammar errors.** Your cover letter is viewed as a sample of your ability as a writer and evidence of your attention to detail. Even a minor typo or error can knock you out of contention for the job.

Review these proofreading tips to make sure your letters are perfect.

**2. Overly long paragraphs.** Employers will skip over your cover letter and move right to your resume if it is too difficult to read. Each paragraph of your letter should include 5 - 6 lines of text with no more than three sentences in each. Here's how long a cover letter should be.

**3. The wrong company name or the wrong name of the contact person.** This is a tip off that you are mass producing your documents and may lack attention to detail. Nobody likes it when they are called by the wrong name.

**4. Anything that is untrue.** Facts can be checked, and lies are grounds for rescinding offers and dismissing employees. I've heard from job seekers who were in a panic because they stretched the truth or outright lied in their cover letter or resume, and didn't know how to rectify it. You don't want to be one of those people.

**5. Salary requirements or expectations,** unless directed to do so by the employer. It's important to demonstrate to the employer your interest in the job itself and not make it seem like money is your primary motivation. It's always wise to let the employer mention salary first if possible. Here's when and how to mention salary to a prospective employer.

**6. Any negative comments about a current or past employer** as part of why you are looking for work. Employers tend to view such comments as an indication of possible attitude or performance problems.

**7. Personal information.** The employer doesn't need to know you want this job because of personal reasons. Keep your focus on the professional reasons you'd love to be hired, and keep the personal ones to yourself.



**8. Any portrayal of the position as a stepping stone,** unless the employer has referenced the issue. Most employers will be looking primarily for someone who is motivated to do the job that they are advertising for a reasonable length of time.

Mentioning future advancement can lead them to believe you would not be satisfied doing that job for long.

**9. What you want.** Don't mention what you want to get out of the job or the company. The precious space in your cover letter should focus on what you have to offer the employer. Here's what to include in the body section of your cover letter.

**10. What you don't want.** Don't mention anything you don't like about the job, the schedule, the salary or anything else. Save your thoughts for when you're offered a job and in a position to negotiate.

**11. Qualifications you don't have.** Addressing what might be missing in your candidacy with statements like "Despite my lack of sales experience..." is not a good idea. Don't draw attention to your limitations as a candidate. Keep the focus on your credentials and how they will enable you to get the job done.

**12. Explanations for leaving past jobs which sound like excuses.** Any excuses may needlessly direct attention to less positive chapters in your work history. Pointing out that you were recruited for a better job is fine

**13. Excessive modesty or overly flattering language.** You need to convey positives in your letter but do so in a matter of fact way. Speak about accomplishments and results, but avoid using adjectives to describe yourself which make it seem like you are arrogant or conceited.

**14. Overwhelming interest.** Excessive interest can hint of desperation or undercut your leverage for salary negotiation. You're pitching your candidacy, not begging for an interview.

**15. Repeating your resume word for word.** Your cover letter shouldn't regurgitate what's on your resume. Reword your cover letter statements to avoid dulling your resume's impact. Consider using the letter to tell a brief story, such as "my toughest sale" or "my biggest technical challenge."



## Cover Letter/Letter of Application Sample Layout

Your Street  
City, State, Zip Code  
Date  
[3 spaces]

Name of Individual  
Title of Individual  
Name of Employer  
Street Address or PO Box Number  
City, State, Zip Code

[1 space]  
Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. \_\_\_\_\_:  
[1 space]

**Opening Paragraph.** Attract attention. Clearly state the reason for writing, naming the position or type of work for which you are applying. Identify how you heard of the opening or how the employer's name was obtained (i.e., the Career Services Center informed me of your opening or Professor Smith in the Technology Department at Western Washington University recommended that I contact you.)

[1 space]

**Second Paragraph.** State your reason for writing this particular employer. Specify concrete reasons for the type of work you desire. Highlight: **your skills**; your goals; and/or how your education, experiences and other qualifications support your capacity to succeed in this job (in this organization.) **"Show your Stuff!" Describe what you can do for the employer rather than what the employer can do for you.** Significant accomplishments can be noted, but the resume should not be repeated any more than absolutely necessary. Basically, you are emphasizing your key qualifications -- selling yourself -- elaborating on background areas which will attract the employer for the specific career field or job you want.

[1 space]

**Closing Paragraph.** Restate your interest by indicating your availability for a personal interview. Either suggest a time or state your willingness to come at the convenience of the individual employer. End on a strong note. Indicate your resume is enclosed (and your placement file has been forwarded-if appropriate).

[1 space]

Sincerely yours,

[3 spaces]

(signature)  
Full Name Typed  
[1 space]  
Enclosure



## Letter of Application Sample

1592 29th Street  
Bellingham, WA 98225  
(360) 673-3235

October 17, 20xx

Ms. Lynn Wedenberg  
Manager, Human Resources  
Immunex, Corp.  
51 University Street  
Seattle, WA 98191

Dear Ms. Wedenberg:

I am applying for the position of lab assistant in the molecular biology department (job #7820205). This position fits very well with my education, experience, and career interests. My research has revealed that Immunex is the leading biotechnology firm in the state and second in the U.S. Your work with Leukine, as well as with PIXY-321 and other colony stimulating factors, is definitely the type of research I am prepared for.

The position requires detail-orientation as well as an ability to accurately perform repetitive tasks in compliance to written protocols. During my nine months at Western Washington University's Toxicology Lab, I did precisely this in conducting various forms of chemical analysis, each many times over. Every series had to be identical and accurate. While in this position, I initiated and maintained a spreadsheet data analysis program which enabled virtually instantaneous data analysis. Working without much supervision, I made time management a priority and typically finished tasks ahead of schedule. This complements Immunex's requirement for data entry and time management.

During my year at Western's Cell Tissue Culture Lab, again I performed numerous repetitive tasks, especially reagent and media preparation, according to exact directions. Also, I maintained the lab's stock of chemicals and other materials. In both these positions, I performed my duties well and even beyond the job requirements. At Western, I have specialized in biochemistry and genetics, having completed many classes directly relevant to the lab assistant position I am seeking at Immunex.

Given my education and experience, I am confident that I have the abilities to be an effective contributor to your company. To further discuss my qualifications in an interview, I can be reached at (360) 676-0000.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to talking with you.

Sincerely,

Melissa Valenchenko  
Enclosure