

Seven Cover Letter Don'ts

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When you meet someone new, what is the first thing you notice about them? Maybe you notice a nice smile, a pair of Jimmy Choo shoes, or beautiful brown eyes.

Now imagine someone has a piece of spinach between his teeth, toilet paper stuck to his shoe, or is avoiding eye contact.

While these may not be the kinds of things you'd hold against someone, an employer may not be as forgiving if her first impression is not a good one. Before an employer sees your resume or meets you in person, they begin forming an impression about you from your cover letter.

Here's a sample that includes mistakes we've seen in actual cover letters:

Dear Sirs:

I saw you're ad. This is the kind of job I've been looking for. I'm pretty sure I would enjoy it and it would be good experience for me. I've already sent out a bunch of resumes without much luck so I hope you'll hire me. As you can see I have everything your looking for. Its you're loss if you don't hire me. Call me at 555-1234.
Andy Applicant

You can learn from "Andy's" mistakes by avoiding the following don'ts in your own cover letters:

1. **Don't** address the letter "Dear Sirs". The person reading your letter may be a woman who won't be impressed with this salutation. Instead, find out the name of the person who will be reviewing your resume by contacting the company's human resources department, or address your letter "Attention: Human Resources Department" if they won't give you a name.
2. **Don't** forget to say which position you are applying for. Many companies advertise more than one position at a time.
3. **Don't** send a cover letter that has not been thoroughly proofread. Typographical and grammatical errors (such as confusing "you're" with "your") create a poor impression.
4. **Don't** focus on what you want. In this case the applicant said he thought he'd enjoy the job and get experience. Focus instead on what value you can bring to the employer, such as increasing revenues or cutting costs.
5. **Don't** send a generic letter. You can make a much better impression by mentioning the company name and doing a little research so you can say something flattering about the company. You can learn what companies pride themselves on, including their products and achievements, by checking their Web sites.
6. **Don't** appear desperate. Avoid comments such as "I've already sent out a bunch of resumes without much luck." Employers may wonder if there's a good reason why no one else has hired you.
7. **Don't** challenge them to hire you. Employers will be turned off if you say something like "It's your loss if you don't hire me." Instead, show them, with examples of your accomplishments, why you would be an asset to their company.

Remember, to leave a good impression, treat your cover letter as if it were the first meeting with your potential employer. Not many employers will give you a second chance (i.e. an interview) if you leave them with a bad first impression. So, make your letter count, even if you have some leftover lunch stuck between your teeth while you are writing it.