

## WRITING A WINNING COVER LETTER

### A Marketing Communication that Pushes the Reader to Action

**Determine what you have to offer that relates to an organization's specific needs, what will be of interest to them, and what will entice them to read your resume and invite you for an interview:** Stay away from general letters and devote the time to develop targeted cover letters that will sell you for a particular position. Identify who you are, what you have achieved, and why an organization would want to hire you before you begin to write a cover letter.

#### Six Steps to Writing Better Cover Letters

##### STEP 1: IDENTIFY YOUR KEY SELLING POINTS - WHAT MAKES YOU UNIQUE

Be able to evaluate and quantify what qualifications, experiences, achievements, and skills you bring to the school.

- ✓ **Know Your Objective:** Identify who you are and what your job objective is (i.e., elementary, middle, or high school teacher)
- ✓ **Summarize Your Experience:** Be able to clearly identify why an organization would be interested in interviewing and possibly hiring you (i.e., because of the employers/schools you worked for, positions held, promotions earned, accomplishments, specific skills and qualifications, educational credentials, leadership skills, foreign language skills, and international experience).
- ✓ **Sell Your Achievements:** Don't just "tell" your responsibilities. Your achievements are what set you apart from others with a similar background (answer, "What can you do for me?" ... because they tell precisely what you have done for someone else... how you have benefited the organizations where you've worked)
  - **Making money** (revenues, profits, earnings, ROI/ROA/ROE increases, new customers)
  - **Saving money** (cost reductions, streamlining, automating)
  - **Creating new things** (courses, programs, techniques, methodologies, systems, processes, and more)
  - **Improving existing things** (reengineering, redesigning, developing new processes, consolidating)
  - **Improving student, teacher, or organizational performance** (productivity, efficiency, quality, delivery, and customer service)
  - **Winning honors, awards, and commendations**

In writing achievements, convey 2 pieces of information about your success

- What you did
- How it benefited the organization

##### STEP 2: PRE-PLAN

Before writing a single word, determine the appropriate strategy for that particular letter. You must be able to answer the following questions:

- ✓ **Why am I writing this letter?** Am I writing in response to a print or online advertisement, sending a cold-call letter, contacting someone in my network, writing to an organization at the recommendation of someone else, or writing a follow-up letter to an employer to which I already sent a resume.
- ✓ **Have I researched the organization and position?** Do your research! The more you know about a particular school and position, the more on target you can write your letter relating your experience to their identified needs (i.e., if you know the school has a large number of special-needs students, stress your experience designing special needs curricula). Your goal is to find common ground between you and the school and leverage that to your advantage.
- ✓ **Do I have a contact name?** Send the cover letter to a particular individual in a particular department. Check the correct spelling of the person's name and title, mailing or e-mail address.

### STEP 3: WRITE THE OPENING PARAGRAPH

The opening paragraph is your HOOK – your “SALES PITCH” – that tells your reader who you are and why you are of value to that specific organization. It should entice the recipient to read your letter in its entirety. Address the following three questions in the opening paragraph:

- ✓ Who are you?”
- ✓ Why are you writing?
- ✓ What message are you communicating?

### STEP 4: WRITE THE BODY

In order to sell yourself, you must highlight your attractive features and benefits. The body of the cover letter includes: Key qualifications, accomplishments, and successes. Put yourself in the shoes of the buyer and ask yourself:

- ✓ What will catch my attention?
- ✓ What’s interesting about this candidate?
- ✓ What’s innovative or unique about this candidate?
- ✓ Why is this candidate different from (or better than) other competitive candidates?
- ✓ Do I need this candidate?
- ✓ Do I understand the value I’ll get from this candidate?
- ✓ Do I want this candidate?

You must clearly communicate the answers to these questions to get people to want to “buy” you. An employer’s most compelling question is, “What can you do for me?” NOT “What do you want?” Include what is most relevant to the hiring company and its needs. You want to demonstrate that you have the right skills, qualifications, and experience for a particular job. However, you do not want the cover letter to be a “job description” or to simply reiterate what’s in your resume. Write a cover letter that complements the resume and brings the most notable information to the forefront.

### STEP 5: WRITE A CLOSING

To get started, ask yourself 2 questions:

- ✓ What style of closing paragraph do I want to use?
- ✓ Is there any specific personal or salary information I want to include that was requested in the advertisement to which I am responding?

There are two styles of closing paragraphs:

- ✓ **Passive:** Take a passive approach, waiting for the hiring company or recruiter to contact you, (i.e., “I look forward to hearing from you.”). This is not a recommended strategy.
- ✓ **Assertive:** Take an approach where you assert yourself, telling the recipient that you will follow up and asking for an interview. The only real objective of a cover letter is to get an interview, so **ask for it!** Outline an agenda that communicates you will be expecting their call and, if you don’t hear from them, you will follow up. However, there will be instances in your job search when you will not be able to follow up (i.e., blind advertisement, advertisement that states “no Phone Calls”, large mass mailings).
- ✓ The closing paragraph is also the preferred placement for any personal or salary information when it has been asked for in an advertisement.

### STEP 6: POLISH, PROOFREAD, AND FINALIZE

- ✓ Proofread the letter thoroughly and carefully for sense and flow, spelling, punctuation mistakes, and grammar.
  - **Spelling:** Use computer’s spell-checker, but don’t rely on it entirely.
  - **Grammar and punctuation:** Use an all-purpose reference guide.
  - **Interesting language:** Avoid clichés and outdated language and make sure the cover letter doesn’t sound like a cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all that could have been written by any job seeker.