

**Quick cover letter tips to use now**

By Jenny Lloyd

**After your resume, your cover letter is generally your most important employment tool, so the better it reads when applying for a job, the better your chances are of landing an interview.**

But this doesn't mean you have to spend hours penning a masterpiece to make a great impression. By doing a few quick and simple things you can stand out from the crowd and rise to the top of an employer's application pile – all before your mid-morning cuppa.

**1. Make it personal**

Why does it matter? Because addressing your cover letter to a named individual will create a quicker connection with the reader than a generic salutation. Likewise, if you can demonstrate your knowledge of the company or its products, your cover letter will stir the reader's interest and stand head and shoulders above the rest.

**2. Decide what makes you unique**

It pays to differentiate between what you have to offer your employer and what your competitors can offer. Making a list will help you determine your personal point of difference, which will help not only in terms of knowing your own value, but will give your cover letter that competitive edge.

**3. Think about specifics**

A common recruitment complaint from employers is jobseekers not addressing selection criteria - so it pays to get it right. Make a list of the selection criteria then use bullet points and the SAO technique to demonstrate where and when you gained similar experience (**Situation**), what you did and how you did it (**Action**), and what the result of your actions were (**Outcome**.)

**4. Flaunt your achievements**

Every potential employer expects to hear about your achievements, but presenting the ones that best represent your relevant experience or transferable skills is critical. How to choose? Make a list of key achievements and only use the ones that relate best to the selection criteria and prove your abilities.

**5. Think about the layout**

Next to the content of your cover letter, its layout is probably the most important decision you'll make. There are a lot of things to consider, and it pays to use bullet-points for ease of reading, but one of the most important layout considerations is that your cover letter spans no more than one page in total.

**6. Don't be afraid to follow things up**

So you submitted your job application on time, the application closing date passed a week ago, and you still haven't heard a response? Don't be afraid to reiterate your interest in the job with a follow-up phone call to your potential employer. Asking if your application was received and gently re-stating your suitability for the job can increase your chances of being interviewed.

*Published: 25 September 2007*