Cover Letter Basics

Ten basic recommendations for cover letters:

1. **Research the company’s history.** In order to show you took the time to get to know about the employer, that you’re not just applying for every job in town, include information about the company that you have found by reading or talking to contacts.

2. **Be detailed.** Make sure the employer knows which job you are applying for and why you are an above average candidate. Focus on one or two of your most significant skills or endeavors that make you ideal for the job.

3. **Be polite.** Formal is best when writing a business letter to someone you don’t know. Address your letter to a specific person, not “hiring manager,” and use a title: Ms., Mrs., Mr., Dr., etc.

4. **Be positive.** Keep your tone upbeat and positive. Do not call attention to your weaknesses or raise questions about your ability to do the job.

5. **Be persuasive.** You know you can do the job - now, convince them! Using active voice, action verbs and industry keywords will keep the reader’s attention and show you are confident.

6. **Be organized.** Keep the flow of your writing such that related concepts are grouped with related concepts. Use strong topic sentences in your paragraphs.

7. **Provide proof.** Always provide proof of your statements by offering facts about and examples of your efforts and the outcomes. It’s not enough to say you’re “good with people”...give an example.

8. **Watch the jargon.** Whenever possible, avoid clichés and jargon. Buzz words can suggest a lack of creativity and originality.

9. **Proofread, proofread, proofread!** Nothing will spell “death” for your cover letter and resume faster than spelling errors and typos! If you’re not a good proofreader, and even if you are, make sure someone else reads your cover letter with an eye for editing. You will never be sorry if you proofread your paper one more time - but you certainly could be sorry if you skip this step!

10. **Do not lie or exaggerate.** Never misrepresent yourself, your skills, or your experience on a resume. Tell the truth by emphasizing your strengths. Being found out will be embarrassing, could get you fired, and can affect your future job search.

**P.S.** **Add a P.S.** Studies show that 80% of readers will read a postscript - even if they’re just skimming the letter! Use it to give your prospective employer another reason to hire you.