

How to Prepare a Cover Letter

If you are submitting your resumé by mail, fax or e-mail, include a cover letter. While it's okay to photocopy your resumé, your cover letter should be **personalized** and explain why you are a good candidate for the job. To see what to do – and what not to do – in a cover letter, here are a couple of sample letters prepared in response to this job ad:

ABC Company, an international association of more than 1,250 insurance and financial services companies, is currently seeking a Meeting Planner. Responsibilities include acting as a meeting manager for approximately 25 domestic meetings per year; coordinating registration, printing, audio/visual setup, menus, and expenses; developing a Request for Proposal; and maintaining relationships with ABC's clients, purchasing agents, suppliers, and venue personnel. Please send cover letter, resumé and salary requirements to humanresources@abccompany.com

Sample Letter 1

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 resumés without much luck so I hope you'll hire me. As you can see I have everything you looking for. It's your loss if you don't hire me. Call me at 555-1212.

Polly Planner

In the cover letter above, Polly has done a number of things wrong. See how many of these mistakes you noticed:

Incorrect Salutation

Polly could make a better impression by addressing the letter to the appropriate hiring manager by **name**. If you don't know who to send your letter to, you can access the company website and look for the appropriate person. If this tactic is unsuccessful, you can **call** the event planning department at the particular company and ask who the appropriate manager is, then address your letter to that person.

Even if the advertisement reads "send letters to human resources," don't address the letter to "Human Resources." Send your letter to the **decision maker** because, nine times out of ten, the decision maker is going to be the person you would eventually work for if you get hired.

In most cases the human resources department screens applicants, so **go directly to the source**. The worst thing that can happen is that the manager of the appropriate department or division will forward your materials up to human resources. It's worth a shot.

If there is no other way but to address your letter to human resources and you don't know the gender of the person you're sending the letter to, then **avoid gender salutations** such as "Dear Sirs," and rather write "Dear Hiring Manager."

What's the Position?

The letter doesn't state what position Polly is applying for. Many companies advertise more than one position at a time. Omitting the position demonstrates carelessness.

Typographical and Grammatical Errors

Letters must be **proofread** before being sent. You'll never hear a compliment on an error-free resumé or cover letter; they're supposed to be perfect. While there's no correlation between good spelling and intelligence, nothing turns off a prospective employer more than a **sloppy resumé**. The attitude is that a sloppy resumé equals an employee that doesn't pay attention to details.

Furthermore, don't rely too heavily on your word processor's spell check since it won't catch mistakes such as using "two" instead of "too." Ask a friend to read the letter for you — the most difficult part of proofreading anything is catching your own mistakes.

Failing to Address the Company's Needs

The letter doesn't address the company's needs that are clearly written in the advertisement. Polly writes that she wants to "enjoy the job and get experience," instead of directly addressing what the company wants. Employers want to know what **value** you will bring to them.

Employers are also very concerned with results. The major focus of the job experience section of your resumé should focus on what the **results** of your efforts were — it should not be a rehash of a job description.

Failing to Mention the Company by Name

Polly could make a much better impression by doing a little **research** in order to say something flattering about the company. You can find out what a company prides itself on by checking its website. The best place to start would be in the "About Us" section.

Negativity

By stating, "I've already sent out a bunch of resumé's without much luck," and "I hope you'll hire me," Polly sounds **desperate**. Employers may wonder if there's a good reason why no one else has hired her. And as you can imagine, writing something such as, "It's your loss if you don't hire me" does not make a good impression.

If you were an employer, wouldn't you be **more impressed** with the following letter?

Sample Letter 2

Ms. Jane Doe

Vice President, Event Planning Division

ABC Incorporated

Dear Ms. Doe:

In response to your [Day, Month, Date] advertisement in the Tribune, I'm writing this letter to offer myself as a candidate for the position of event planner with ABC Incorporated.

Having read the mission statement on your corporate web page, I find that our professional personalities and goals for service, dedication and excellence are closely aligned.

As you will see in my resumé, I have previous experience as an event

planner with an established client base that I've grown since my tenure with XYZ Corporation. In fact, the last three events that I've planned have come in 10 percent under budget. I offer these skills to ABC Incorporated.

My experience and education make a strong recipe for success with ABC Incorporated. I excel at customer service, can multi-task, and have numerous letters of recommendation.

I would be thrilled to meet with you or one of your associates to discuss my candidacy for event planner with ABC Incorporated at your earliest possible convenience.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you

soon. Best,

Polly Planner

This letter addresses what Polly has done and what she can do for ABC Incorporated.

Your own cover letter will of course depend on the position you are applying for and the company you are applying to. It should also include your **name** and **contact information** at the top of the page.

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