

## 7 common cover letter mistakes to avoid

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There's definitely an art to writing the perfect cover letter, and it's one that many job seekers don't take the time to learn. While it does require some effort to get right, once you learn how to write an effective cover letter, it gets easier and easier each time you do it. Here are the biggest cover letter mistakes career coaches and job search pros see, and what they tell their clients to do instead to seal the deal.

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### **1. Regurgitating your resume**

When candidates don't know what to write in their cover letter, they often resort to restating their job history. But this isn't a great tactic. "Remember, the employer already has your resume, so there's no need to repeat your entire work history," points out Amanda Augustine, career advice expert for TopResume. "Focus on making your career narrative and relevant qualifications crystal clear." In other words, tell the reader a story about not just your past jobs, but how you got where you are today and why you think this position you're applying for is the right next step.

It's also okay to make things a little personal, as opposed to your resume, which should be totally professional. "Your cover letter should not only whet the reader's appetite, but also add value to your entire job application," Augustine says. "Use this opportunity to give the reader a sense of your personality. While the resume can be a dry document, your cover letter is your opportunity to imbue your personality so the reader can begin to assess your cultural fit for the organization."

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### **2. Using a generic template letter**

"I often see cover letters that were obviously copied-and-pasted," says Christopher K. Lee, founder and career consultant at Purpose Redeemed. Basically, you don't want to

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use the same cover letter for every job with just the contact name, company name and position title swapped out. “Even when the hiring manager and company name are correct, you can tell that it’s a generic template letter.”

“Instead, take time to review the job listing again and identify the top three things the hiring manager appears to be seeking in an ideal candidate,” Augustine suggests. “Use this information to customize your message. Explain how you are a good fit for the role by summarizing your qualifications based on their requirements. Better yet, open your cover letter with a story that provides proof of your skills the employer cares about most.”

“For an added personal touch, look up the hiring manager on LinkedIn or Twitter,” Lee recommends. If you can find something you have in common, like a school, volunteer organization or hometown, find a way to slip it naturally into your cover letter. “Don’t force this, however — it must be a genuine connection,” he says.

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### **3. Only talking up your soft skills**

“The worst mistake I see in cover letters is candidates adding too many soft skills rather than focusing on job-related skills,” says Nancy Spivey, a career coach. “Many fill the cover letter with content about how they are reliable, motivated and dependable. Well, let’s hope that you’re reliable, motivated and dependable. Those characteristics are bare minimums that a hiring manager expects from any applicant.”

Instead, do your best to set yourself apart by explaining how your hard skills and experience could add value to their organization. “Tell them about your accomplishments with those skills as it relates to the job,” Spivey says.

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### **4. Writing too much**

“An overly wordy cover letter is a waste of time and a big mistake,” states Jessica Hernandez, an executive resume writer and president and CEO of Great Resumes Fast. Keep the body of your cover letter to 150 words or less, she suggests.

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“Employers are pressed for time and simply do not see the value in investing their time reading a lengthy cover letter,” Hernandez says. “Additionally, many employers and recruiters are reading on their mobile devices, so keeping your cover letter brief will ensure it is easier to read... which increases the chances that it actually will be read.”

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### **5. Including non-essential information**

The main thing you want to get across in your cover letter is why you’re the right fit for the job. That means everything you include should be specific to the company and the position you’re applying for. “The manager doesn’t need to read about extracurricular activities that are not work-related or about every book you’ve ever read,” Spivey says. “In fact, an applicant that I know had a hiring manager respond to his cover letter once to give him some advice.

The manager stated that he had initially thought that the candidate was a close match for the position based on his resume. However, the cover letter had changed his mind because of the way it rambled and included so much unnecessary and irrelevant information.”

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### **6. Not easing fears about relocation**

“Out-of-town applicants are typically at the bottom of the list of candidates since the odds of this candidate coming to work for them is less than slim and expensive,” notes Russell Cranford, the owner of Resume Pundits. If you’re applying for a job somewhere far from your current city, be sure to use the cover letter as an opportunity to quash and concerns they might have. ”

Find a way to connect yourself to the area. Examples could be: You are originally from the area, you have family in the area or your partner/spouse accepted a position in the area,” he says.

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### **7. Not referencing next steps**

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Don't miss the opportunity to plant the seed of an interview in the recruiter or hiring manager's head. "This is one of the oldest sales strategies known to man, but it works," Cranford says. "Close your cover letter by giving the employer your interview availability. By doing this, the reader automatically thinks in their head, 'Hmm, what am I doing that day?' By getting into their mental schedule, you are already penciling yourself in." Cranford's suggested closer: "Based on your requirements and my passion for this position, I feel like I would be an ideal candidate. I am available to speak via phone or in person on Wednesdays and Fridays after 1 p.m. and welcome the opportunity to discuss my candidacy." According to Cranford, it works like a charm.

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