

THIS IS HOW THE COVER LETTER HAS EVOLVED THROUGHOUT THE YEARS

These days, competition for jobs is stiffer than ever. That's why it's no longer sufficient to tell the hiring manager what a great candidate you are. You need to demonstrate that you can add unique value to the job that they're hiring for.

BY ANDREW FENNELL

If you bring up the subject of cover letters to a group of hiring managers and recruiters, you'll probably get a mixed bag of opinions. Some will say the cover letter is dead, while others still deem it an application essential. But what's the real deal on cover letters in 2019 and beyond?

The truth is, not submitting a cover letter won't necessarily land you an immediate rejection. But if your application lands on the desk of a hiring manager who considers cover letters a necessity, then you could be out of the game at a glance. Plus, when you consider that a punchy, brief cover letter can help you to stand out in a mile-high stack of résumés, it makes total sense to include one.

You do, however, need to make sure yours is on point. Cover letters have changed a lot in recent years. While a copied-and-pasted page of self-promotion may have once been the norm, it's now a hiring manager's worst nightmare. Here's how the cover letter has changed throughout the years and how to make sure yours is up-to-date and gets heads turning.

FROM A LENGTHY SUMMARY TO A SHORT, CONCISE INTRODUCTION

Back in the '90s, the average cover letter was a lengthy, detailed promotion of the candidate's career history and skills. They were often a page or two in length and contained the ins and outs of the individual's education. They also squeezed in a mention of every job they'd ever had.

A hiring manager today probably won't have time to go through a cover letter that reads like a life story. That's why the modern-day cover letter needs to be concise and snappy. Recruiters have different opinions on the ideal length, but the consensus is that candidates should keep it short and sweet. The purpose of your cover letter is to draw recruiters in and entice them to read your résumé. You need to make sure that every sentence is highly relevant to the target company and proves how you could add impact.

FROM FOCUSING ON SELF-PROMOTION TO AN EMPHASIS ON ADDING VALUE

Not so long ago, it was common to send the very same cover letter out to numerous companies, with only a simple name change to differentiate. That meant that rather than focusing on the unique needs and requirements of the organization, the document merely waxed on about how great the candidate was.

Nowadays, it takes recruiters just a few seconds to spot a mass-produced cover letter. What's more, competition for jobs is stiffer than ever. That's why today, it's crucial to tailor your cover letter to your target company. It's not just about convincing them that you're a great candidate. You also need to demonstrate how you're uniquely equipped to meet their needs.

You can do this by reading the job description carefully and identifying the core qualities the company is looking for in candidates. Focus on hard skills, such as IT systems, industry experience, and languages, rather than soft skills. Then, in your cover letter, give brief examples of how you've used these skills in the past and the results you achieved. The more you can quantify (like increasing sales or leads by X %), the better. While it's important to showcase that you're an ideal match, do bear in mind that your cover letter should never be a carbon copy of your résumé. It should only zoom in on the most critical, high-level qualities that the employer values the most.

Lastly, you should also make a point of detailing why the company's mission, values, products, or services resonate with you. Of course, you need to do this in a way that reinforces your commitment to the specific role. Remember to keep the tone on par

with the company culture. While a modern marketing agency may appreciate a more creative and conversational tone, a traditional corporate office may prefer that you keep it professional.

ELIMINATING THE POLITE SIGN OFF IN FAVOR OF AN ASSERTIVE CALL TO ACTION

Back in the day, many people ended cover letters with an indirect, fluffy phrase, such as “I hope to meet you” or “I look forward to hearing from you.” Now, being polite isn’t a bad trait, but a statement like this wouldn’t urge recruiters to pick up the phone and invite the candidate for an interview. It signals a lack of confidence and gives the impression that the individual is nervous and unsure about their capabilities.

Round up your cover letter with a polite yet confident call to action. You want to encourage the recruiter to read your résumé and subtly plant the seed of an interview in their mind. You don’t need to overthink this. Something as simple as “Please find attached a copy of my résumé. I welcome the chance to discuss how my experience will contribute to the success of your company. Please contact me via phone on...” does the trick perfectly. Ending with a statement like this comes across as strong, enthusiastic, and confident and shows the reader that you know you’re capable of carrying out the role.

We’ve long waved goodbye to the days when cover letters were all about endless, shameless self-promotion. By writing a brief, punchy cover letter that focuses on the needs of the company, you’re far more likely to land that all-important interview. Remember, it’s not just about convincing the hiring manager that you’re a great potential employee—it’s about how your experience, skills, and attitude as a candidate provide the most value to the company.

Source: <https://www.fastcompany.com/90392304/this-is-how-the-cover-letter-has-evolved-throughout-the-years>
