

## How to Improve Your Cover Letter

Don't underestimate the power of a *cover letter*. When well-written, attractively designed and customized for the recipient, a *cover letter* is a powerful tool that can practically scream, "Interview this candidate immediately!"

But when they are thrown together using little to no consideration, personalization or creativity – as cover letters often are – letters are as ineffective in the job hunt as blank sheets of paper.

"This is a major misstep when job searching," say Wendy Enelow and Louise Kursmark, co-authors of "*Cover Letter Magic*." "You should take advantage of every opportunity there is to stand out from other candidates."

Enelow and Kursmark also say that writing a *cover letter* can be more fun than job seekers realize. "With the right perspective and a positive attitude, you'll find that it affords you great flexibility. There is no one set format in which they must be written. There is no one style in which they must be presented. In fact, there are very few rules at all, and because they are so flexible, cover letters allow you to positively present just those skills, qualifications, achievements and credentials you want to bring to the recipient's immediate attention."

**There are a variety of ways job seekers can get creative with their cover letter and bring them to life in ways they never considered. In their book, Enelow and Kursmark suggest a few of these techniques:**

1. Find out what your target employer's slogan, catch phrase or mission statement is and brainstorm ways to include it in your cover letter's introduction. This technique will quickly capture the reader's attention, demonstrate that you are familiar with the employer and stand out from other candidates' one-size-fits-all cover letters.
2. Add a table or two-column section that closely connects the employer's requirements to your qualifications and professional achievements. This strategy will quickly provide the employer with concrete evidence that you're a good fit for the job and worth learning more about.
3. Begin with a thought-provoking quote relevant to the position, the employer's goals or your target industry. Many people love to read, share and ponder quotes. Including one in your cover letter can be a quick and effective way to engage the reader.
4. Feature a strong headline near the beginning of the cover letter. To keep it brief, yet powerful, address one of the employer's key concerns or spotlight your expertise or an attribute that will be particularly appealing to the employer.
5. Develop your own slogan or mission statement and include it near the top of your cover letter. This technique will enhance your career brand and stand out much like a headline would. To draw even more attention to the phrase, place it inside a graphic element that is attractive and appropriate.
6. Add a "P.S." to the end of your cover letter. Often, it's the first thing a person will read.
7. Include testimonials about you in the body of your cover letter or in an attractive sidebar. Testimonials will emphasize your skills and achievements and support claims you make about your expertise and why you're the best candidate for the job.