

How to Write a Cover Letter Worth Noticing

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INTRO

Welcome to another episode of *The Workforce Link Podcast*, where we're offering forward thinking conversations for the workforce, linking employers and job seekers to a brighter tomorrow. I'm your host Sundi Jo Graham with the Central Workforce Development Region and I'm glad to be back with you for another episode of *The Workforce Link Podcast*.

I'm about to share something with you that's gonna rock your world. Are you ready for this? According to a 2018 study done by [Ladders](#), you only have 7.4 seconds to get a recruiter's attention. I would bet to say it's less than that today. I'll share the link to that study in the show notes if you want to dive further into it.

Finding that dream job you want isn't always easy. You have to put in the extra work. You have to answer all the questions. You have to make sure your resume is in tip-top shape. And then you hope for the best, right? Ah.. but wait.. There's more. You **need** a cover letter. I'm emphasizing the word **need**.

What happens if you don't have the writing skills you need to create that cover letter? What do you do if you don't know what to say? How in the world do you create a formal letter that's supposed to impress the employer? Well.. don't panic. We're going to talk about that in today's episode of *The Workforce Link Podcast*. We'll face your fears together.

But before we do that, I'd love to ask you a favor. I'd love for you to share this podcast with others. Do you know someone who needs some helping finding that dream job and could benefit from this episode? Let them know about this podcast. We want to help as many people as possible win in the workforce, and word of mouth is the best way to make that happen.

You and your friends can listen to *The Workforce Link Podcast* on pretty much any platform: Apple, Spotify, or right on our website at theworkforcelink.com. We're everywhere so it's easy for you to spread the word. And thanks so much for being willing to tell others about it.

So, now that we've taken care of that, let's dive into today's episode on how to write a cover letter worth noticing.

DISCUSSION

You may know this already, but I want to go back to the basics for a second. Let's talk about exactly what a cover letter is. If you're thinking, *Sundi Jo, seriously, I think we all know what a cover letter is*, stick with me okay. There may just be someone who doesn't, so before we dig deeper, I want to cover the basics.

A cover letter is a short, notice I said short, letter that's written directly to the person who will review your resume or job application. And believe it or not, it's not always a person. If you're applying for a position at a larger company, the chances that your cover letter will be read by a robot before it gets to a human is very likely. More on that later.

Your cover letter provides the opportunity for you to impress the one doing the hiring. It's a chance to highlight your skills. A place to tell your story and talk about your experience. It's not a place to just say, "Hey, look how awesome I am, but it is a place to shower your awesomeness throughout the letter." Make sense?

The last thing you want to do is create a boring cover letter. You want one that stands out. Remember, you're fighting for the job you want, and so are a lot of other people. Your cover letter needs to say, without saying it, "Hey, hire me, because I'm amazing and will make your company better!"

So, let's talk about how to write a cover letter that's gonna knock the socks off the hiring manager.

Let's start with what not to do.

1) DON'T USE A COOKIE CUTTER TEMPLATE.

There are plenty of cover letter templates out there that can get you started with a specific format. There's nothing wrong with that. But, you need to personalize it.

Don't just copy and paste something that doesn't describe you at all. Don't open up a cover letter template from Word and just tweak a few words to make it look like you wrote it. That doesn't work. It doesn't make you unique.

Your cover letter needs to tell the employer why you want to work there and why you're the one they need to hire. You can't do that with a cookie-cutter template, so be careful.

Think about it this way. If you're texting a friend, because does anyone write letters anymore, you personalize it, right? This is exactly what you need to do with your cover letter - make it personal. Your cover letter should be personalized for **each** job you're applying for. Do **not** send the same cover letter for three different positions. There's no personalization there.

This may be time-consuming, but that's okay. Nothing worth having comes easy, right? You've got to be willing to do the work upfront to get the results you want.

Do your research and get to know the company that's hiring. What's their mission statement? Put that in your cover letter to let them know you're paying attention and that you've done your homework.

2) DON'T USE A BUNCH OF COLORS AND CRAZY FONTS

Your resume and cover letter should match in font, if at all possible. And don't try to use a bunch of fancy fonts no one can see. Employers are busy and don't have time for that. Don't overdo it. Remember, you're professional.

It's okay to use colors, but stick with a color theme. For example, I helped a client with her resume and cover letter a few weeks ago. She has a bright and popping personality, so I used a pink color theme for both, with the same fonts. It gave it more of her personality, but wasn't tacky. Make sense?

3) DON'T USE CLICHES

This applies the same as not using a cookie cutter template that's the same all the time, or as we'll talk about later, making your greeting lame. You want to make sure your words are interesting. Remember, you only have 7.4 seconds to get their attention.

Find new ways to come up with the same old sentences that have always been used. Don't say:

- "I have exceptional written skills." If that's the case, they can see it in your resume. You've already shown them. You don't need to tell them.

- “I think outside of the box.” What if instead of saying this, you told them a story, a quick story, about a time you creatively solved a problem. Again, you’re showing them, not just telling them.

Get creative here. Don’t do the same thing everyone else is doing.

Now, let’s talk about what to do.

1) PUT YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION IN THE HEADER.

Your contact information should be on both your resume and your cover letter - at the top. Don’t make people guess. You want to include:

- Your name
- Phone number
- Email
- Depending on your field, you can put other follow-up information, like a link to your LinkedIn account, website, portfolio of your work, etc. If you don’t have these, that’s okay, too.

Put all of this information under your name at the top of the page, which is personally my favorite place, or you can put it in the top right corner. Again, I suggest the center top, because it’s just right there in your face.

Now, here’s something else I recommend adding because it makes you stand out and looks like you’ve done your homework, because, well, you have. On the left side below the header, put the name of the person you’re addressing, if you have their name. You’re probably going to have to do a little research to find this, but with some digging, you can.

- Search their website and see if you can find a name.
- Search for the HR person or owner on LinkedIn.

This is just my opinion, so do with it what you will, but if you have this information, put it on there. Only if you can’t find it should you leave it off.

2) PERFECT YOUR GREETING

Please, please, please, for the love of all things cover letter writing, do **NOT** start out with “To Whom it May Concern” or “Dear Sir or Madam.” We are not living in 1985 and it makes you sound like a robot.

- Like I said previously, use the name of the hiring manager if at all possible.
- If that's not possible, use the name of the company. You can say something like, "Dear ABC Team".
- "Dear Hiring Manager" or "Dear ABC Hiring Manager."

Again, make those last two examples your last resort. It just doesn't sound personal.

PROMO - ELEVATOR PITCH

Hey there. Taking a quick break from this episode to share something with you.

Picture yourself standing behind the counter at the shoe store. A customer walks in and wants to buy the best pair of shoes you have. They want a quality product, but also want to save money. There's another shoe store across the street having a huge sale, but the customer came to you first. You only have a few minutes to explain why the customer should buy your shoes vs. the shoes across the street.

You help the customer try the shoes on, all the while explaining the benefits of the cushioning, the upgraded technology, the comfort, and not to mention, how fantastic they look.

Think of your elevator pitch the same way when you're in a job interview with a potential employer. Your elevator pitch is a brief explanation describing the benefits of buying a product – except YOU are that product!

An elevator pitch is one of the most important tools you have when applying for a job. When you position yourself with confidence, clearly summarizing your experience, your skills, your desirable characteristics, the employer is ready to listen.

Put in a nutshell, you're going to impress the employer.

We want to help! That's why we created [How to Create the Perfect Elevator Pitch](#), a free guide with four proven simple steps that will help you wow your next employer!

You can download it for free at cwdregion.com/elevatorpitch

And now.... back to the show.

3) HOOK THEM WITH AN EYE-CATCHING HEADLINE

You need to start with a catchy opening line. You have 7.4 seconds to impress them, remember? Give them something in the very beginning that's going to make them want to stick around.

If you're a music lover, think about it this way. If the song doesn't catch your attention in the first few seconds, will you listen to the rest? No. Why would you listen to a 3:30 song if the first two lines don't impress you. It's the same here.

Make your opening line stand-out appearance-wise, too. Make it bold and a little bit larger than the rest of the text.

Here are a few ideas to get your mind rolling:

- Use words or phrases that the company uses. What's their mission statement? How do you fit in with that culture? Show them that you do in the very beginning.
- Do you have your own mission statement? This is kind of like an elevator pitch to sell yourself to the hiring manager. I'll give you an example of mine. *I'm Sundi Jo. I'm a caring, compassionate, thought-provoking communicator who loves to offer hope to others.* This could fit into a number of jobs I would apply for: career manager, employment specialist, marketing director, social worker, other types of management, etc. It shows I care about people, I'm a thinker and creator, and a great communicator. Tell the hiring manager who you are.
- If the company sells a product, have you ever used that product before? Tell them a story about it. What did you feel like after you used it? How did you get drawn to the product?

Remember, you want to grab their attention.

4) TELL THEM WHY YOU WANT THE JOB.

This is where you get to wow the one hiring. This is your opportunity to shine with your enthusiasm and knowledge about the position you're applying for. But.. you don't just want to make it about you here, either.

Weave the company's mission statement and values throughout. Let them know you've done your research and tell them why you line up with their mission. Let them know why you're excited to contribute to their goals.

5) HIGHLIGHT YOUR SPECIFIC SKILLS FOR THE JOB

Write a few sentences here letting them know you have the skills for the job. Be confident in your abilities.

This is where you want to include both hard and soft skills. We actually did specific episodes on understanding hard and soft skills, so if you want to hone in on how to perfect those on your cover letter, go back and listen to those episodes.

I believe it's [episode 3](#) and [episode 6](#) of season one. I will share the link in the show notes so they're easier to find.

This is also your opportunity to tell them what you can bring to the team. What do they do that lines up with your passion that will produce great results for their company? What are your core motivations and how do they line up with the skills you have to help the company move forward?

Don't write a book here. Be clear and concise, and excited.

6) MAKE THE ASK

You have to ask for the interview. Don't just assume they know you want it. Yes, that's obvious, but again, you're trying to keep their attention.

Ask for the interview in the closing paragraph of your cover letter. Make it one of the last things the employer sees.

Statistics show that those who ask for the interview in their cover letter are twice as likely to get the interview.

I dedicated a whole episode to this as well in season one, [Episode 8: Why You Need to Ask This Question on Your Cover Letter](#). I'll share the link in the show notes for you. I provide some specific examples and scenarios in that episode for how to ask this question correctly. Again, I'll share it in the show notes for you.

7) DO A FINAL REVIEW

Spelling, grammar, and accuracy are vital. Every detail of your cover letter should be right on. Check, check, and check again for typos. Don't just do a Word spell check. Print it off and read it out loud. Then send it to a friend and ask them to edit it for you. Or you can contact our [Missouri Job Center staff](#) and ask for their assistance, too.

You want to keep your cover letter at around 300 words. Short, to the point, but packing a powerful punch. That's what makes you stand out. Show them why you're a good fit. Make sure your resume is doing the talking for you.

RECAP

So, let's do a quick recap of what we went over today in order to write a cover letter worth noticing:

1. Don't use a cookie-cutter template.
2. Don't use a bunch of crazy colors and fonts.
3. Don't use cliches.
4. Do put your contact information in the header.
5. Do perfect your greeting
6. Hook them with an eye catching headline
7. Tell them why you want the job.
8. Highlight your specific skills for the job.
9. Make the ask
10. Do a final review

Remember, you only have 7.4 seconds to impress whoever it is reading your resume. Don't waste the opportunity. Spend time investing in a cover letter that sells and you'll reap the rewards later.

CLOSING

I hope this episode was helpful for you today, and if so, please share with others, oh.. And if you haven't already, don't forget to go leave us a review... preferably 5-star.

And again, if you need some assistance with creating a winning cover letter, resume, or both, don't hesitate to reach out to our Central Missouri Job Centers for assistance from one of our Career Manager. You can find your closest Job Center at cwdregion.com/jobcenters.

Have a great week and we'll meet again in the next episode. Until then.. Remember this... There's always a brighter tomorrow if you're willing to find it.

Links in Today's Episode:

[Ladder's Study](#)

[Understanding Soft Skills Episode](#)

[Understanding Hard Skills Episode](#)

[Why You Need to Ask This Question on Your Cover Letter](#)

[Job Centers](#)

[How to Create the Perfect Elevator Pitch](#)