



# Cover Letters: New Grads, Beware!

Top 10 entry-level cover letter mistakes.

Cover letters can stump even the most seasoned job seekers. And, they can be particularly tricky for new grads unfamiliar with the job application process. Here are common entry-level mistakes to avoid.

**1. Checking once—and done.** Few things are as egregious and inexcusable as typos. So, *triple-check* your cover letter for spelling, grammar, correct company name, and contact information, including yours and the employer's. AND, ask a friend, family member, or teacher to proofread your application. If the hiring manager chooses to scrutinize your cover letter as closely as she does your résumé, any spelling and grammar errors or inconsistencies could kick you out of the running for the role.

**2. Résumé rehash.** Don't parrot your résumé or cut-copy-paste your résumé bullet points. Instead, use the opportunity to present your information and experience in a fresh, compelling way that focuses on the *benefits* you bring to the company.

**3. Ditch the bio.** Cover letters are not the place to list your every accomplishment since grade school. Keep it to one page. Stick with your most current and relevant information that succinctly supports, in 3–4 short paragraphs, why you want to work for that company, what you can do for that employer, and how you'll follow up to make it happen.

**4. Being too casual and conversational.** Yes, the cover letter is a great way to introduce yourself, but not with "Hi, my name is John Smith." Instead, use a formal business letter salutation. Explain which job you are applying for, then tailor the following 1–2 sentences in the opening paragraph to quickly connect the dots on why you are a great fit.

**5. Saying too much/too little.** Highlight only the most relevant experience you have that relates to the open position. Your cover letter is a personal "billboard," so identify and advertise the top 3–4 selling points that will motivate the hiring manager to call you; save the other reasons for your interview. Wow the employer with your cover letter and résumé. Don't hold back anything major or compelling that could help you land the gig. Don't play coy, and "save the good stuff" for the interview; you may not get another chance to sell yourself into the role.

**6. No personality.** If you can't distinguish yourself from the start as a memorable, "Yes, I can picture you working for my company" type of candidate, you may not make it to the next level. Make sure your cover letter highlights your individuality and as someone who can connect with the employer.

**7. All about you.** Your cover letter, résumé, and interview—even thank you note—should all focus on what *you* have to offer the employer, not vice versa. Make meeting their needs your priority.

**8. Targeting the wrong person/company/job.** Don't guess or rely solely on company websites or social media for contact info. Dive deep, research, and confirm the name of the hiring manager. Address the letter to that person using the proper salutation with his/her last name. If you absolutely can't find that person's name, use "Dear Hiring Manager." Also, creating several templates with the same letterhead, general introduction, and closing is fine—*as long as you update and tailor the middle paragraphs for each job*. Expect cover letters and applications containing incorrect company name, job title, and duties to be discarded.

**9. Dropping names and little lies.** With permission, DO include the name of the person who referred and encouraged you to apply. Include, for example, in the first paragraph, "I am writing to apply for the open position X, which I learned about through John Smith in the Finance Department at your firm." Include only people who can vouch for your application. If you met someone at a company mixer, or shook the president's hand once DO NOT mention them. And, *never* lie.

**10. No cover letter at all.** The vast majority of job applications will require a cover letter. Even if you are applying and filling out a standard application form in person, including a cover letter—unless otherwise specified—can help garner attention and potentially tip the scales in your favor.



## **i** n a nutshell:

Cover letters are formal one-page business correspondence. To be considered a good fit, don't:

- **Torpedo yourself with typos**
- **Repeat your résumé**
- **Be inappropriately casual or remarkably forgettable**
- **Lose focus on what's relevant and important to the employer**
- **Fall short on specifics, or include the wrong information**
- **Drop names indiscriminately, or stretch the truth**
- **Fail to tailor your cover letter, or even include one**

Don't undermine your résumé with a poorly crafted cover letter. You'll lose more than just the employer's interest—like a chance at an interview.