

Top Mistakes to Avoid in Your Cover Letter

A compelling introduction is perhaps the most important part of writing a cover letter because it introduces you to hiring managers and helps them decide whether they want to know more about you. People often make many mistakes when writing their cover letter introductions. To help you avoid them, let's look at five of the most common and how you can make the changes necessary to improve your cover letters.

1. Avoid Starting with “To Whom It May Concern:” or “Hi,”

Starting your cover letter with “Hi,” or “To Whom It May Concern:” shows the hiring manager that you have no idea whom to address within the company. And I can assure you that it will “concern no one”. Instead, **find out who is hiring** or conducting interviews for the position, and then start your letter with “Dear (insert name):” to show that you want to directly address the person you hope will hire you. If you research and still don't know whom to address, use “Dear Hiring Manager:” as a backup option.

2. Bypass the Generic Opening Statement

Writing an opening such as: “I want to express my interest in applying for your Communications/Public Relations position” expresses the obvious to a hiring manager and is a statement made by thousands of job seekers.

A great way to sidestep the blanket opening statement is by diving in and **getting right to the point about who you are as a candidate** and why you're qualified for the position. It sets you apart as a candidate—which does wonders for personal branding.

3. Avoid Long, Run-On Sentences

Hiring managers read cover letters and resumes all day long. They've seen it all and can become bored quite easily with long, run-on sentences. So if your first sentence is a 98-word paragraph (read the first sentence of *Oliver Twist*), **you're sure to lose the hiring manager's interest**, and you'll decrease your chances of that person even bothering to read the remainder of the document.

4. Save the Full-Length Autobiography

You may feel that your professional history is so compelling that it deserves a narrative, but that's **best saved for your autobiography**—not a cover letter introduction. If you start the letter with “Beginning in 1995 with (insert company name), I always knew I wanted to excel in public relations...” you may receive an e-mail from the company that begins with the current date and ends with, “... but we’ve found another candidate who is more qualified.”

5. Proof read Your Cover Letter

There's nothing worse than reading misspelled words in a professional document, right? (See, it's not too much fun, is it?) So be sure to thoroughly check for typos, grammar and punctuation issues and misspelled words. This way, your resume won't be tossed in the trash over avoidable mistakes.

Cover letters open a window into your professional background and give you the opportunity to add the depth you can't provide in a resume. So handle your introduction with care to ensure all hiring managers who read your letter will want to learn more about you.

Author:

Jessica Holbrook Hernandez is an expert resume writer, career and personal branding strategist, author, speaker and President/CEO of Great Resumes Fast. She creates high-impact, best-in-class resumes and cover letters that transform job searches into interviews and ultimately job offers. For more information about professional resume writing or to read more career and job search related articles visit

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