



Over 85% of employers feel cover letters are important or very important. So, before preparing a cover letter, go through this list and learn about the most common cover letter mistakes. After you've completed your cover letter, review this mistake list again. If you find that you've fallen prey to any of them, make the necessary changes and talk with your job search counselor before you send it for their final review.

Visual Impact Mistakes

- Unprofessional appearance...doesn't use appropriate business form, structure or design.
- Uses colored, bordered or background scenery stationery. (*Use white or ivory.*)
- Inappropriate paper quality. (*Good quality bond, yes. Parchment paper may be over the top.*)
- Mismatched envelopes or missized envelopes.
- Poor typed appearance. (*Columns don't line up, bullets misspaced.*)
- Printed or handwritten. (*Demonstrates lack of computer and keyboard skills.*)
- Sloppy corrections. (*Retype if there's anything forgotten or needs redoing...no notes, white out.*)
- Poor use of white space, margins too tight, leading too small. (*1/2" - 1" margins, normal leading.*)
- Justified both right and left. (*Use left justification and ragged right edge.*)
- Typeface is too small or too fancy. (*Use 10 pt. or higher, common font - Helvetica, Times, etc.*)

Style Mistakes

- Relies on gimmicks to draw attention. (*Folder style, unusual typefaces, video letter, telegram, etc.*)
- Use of cute phrases. (*Since my name is Rich, I'd fit right into the finance dept.*)
- Too narrative...no use of bullets to highlight abilities. (*○ Word ○ Powerpoint ○ Quark Express*)
- Too long. (*If you don't get their attention in one page, you won't get it at all!*)
- Cliche ridden. (*Best thing since sliced bread, I'm a people person, quality is my job #1*)
- Comes on too strong. (*Over-hyped, too aggressive, know-it-alls.*)
- Regurgitates the resume. (*Cover letters should enhance, not repeat the resume's content.*)
- Using unknown abbreviations. (*Unless its common to the industry it does little good.*)

Mismatch Mistakes

- Doesn't stress a match of skills, experience and education to the company or the job demands.
- Seems more interested in their own needs vs. how they'll fit into the company.
- Doesn't link the needs of company to their own job or career goals.
- Doesn't read advertisement to insure meeting ad requirements.

Research Mistakes

- Demonstrates little knowledge of the company, field, products or services.
- Tries to "buffalo" interviewer with general statements. (*I'm familiar with your company.*)
- Isn't specific about what they found out about the company and how they found out about it.
- No future focus. (*I've prepared for the next generation of computerized inventory control by...*)

Grammar Mistakes

- Includes spelling, grammatical, typo's and punctuation errors. (*their, co-operated, thank you*)
- Uses awkward, archaic language, passive voice, past tense.
- Uses inappropriate pronouns. (*I (first person) vs. he/she (third person) is preferable*)
- Overusing the word "I".

Detail Mistakes

- Wastes space...presents personal/irrelevant information. (*My interest are varied, enjoys sports, etc.*)
- Doesn't specify the type of position being sought. (*Desires a growth position in your company.*)
- No indicator of how you found out about the opening? (*In response to your 10/13/02 Tribune ad.*)
- Doesn't include the cover letter recipient's title. (*Bolivar J. Shagnasty, H.R. Director*)
- Forgetting to sign the cover letter. (*Forgetting the small stuff indicates lack of attention to detail.*)
- Forgetting the salutation in the cover letter.
- Forgetting to date the cover letter.

Interest Generation Mistakes

- Doesn't grab the readers attention immediately. (*Dull, trite, boring, and uninspiring opening*)
- Doesn't present any quantifiable achievements. (*Saved \$40,000 by improving quality control.*)
- Writing tone is problematic. (*Do statements enhance candidacy or convey any problems?*)
- Misrepresentation, fraud, deceit or exaggeration. (*Everything on paper must be supportable.*)
- Making personal demands or stating preferences. (*I'm looking for a car allowance.*)
- Presenting salary history or salary requirements. (*Even if an employer requests it, don't do it!*)
- Including reference lists, work samples, portfolio, etc. (*Do this only if requested!*)
- Closes weakly...doesn't request interview. (*I'll wait eagerly for your response.*)

Personalization Mistakes

- Obviously sent out as a computer template, form letter, mass e-mailed or mass faxed.
- Doesn't target a real person. (*To Whom It May Concern, Dear H/R Director, Dear Sir/Madam*)
- Says little about accomplishments, or what person expects to achieve in the future.

Pre-Delivery Mistakes

- Using P.O. Box. (*May show transiency or long range job search.*)
- Faxing, mailing without specific job opening. (*This requires broadcast letters, not cover letters.*)

Post-Delivery Mistakes

- Doesn't call to check receipt or follow up within one week. (*They who hesitate, loses.*)
- Accepts first rejection letter as a "real" rejection. (*Real rejection happens only after interviews.*)

Employer Response Mistakes

- Not having an answering device to catch calls. (*They may only call once.*)
- Placing an unprofessional message on answering machine.
- Having young children, teenagers or parents take messages without being trained to do so.

Just Plain Dumb Mistakes

- Doesn't address perceived problems. (*Career changing, job gaps, job hopping, etc.*)
- Appearing desperate. (*I'm willing to take any position to make my mortgage payments.*)
- Presenting weaknesses or shortcoming. (*Even though I a felony conviction, I can still do the job.*)
- Not including applicant's phone number, pager number, e-mail address, etc.
- Forgetting to include a resume. (*What have you been smoking?*)
- Forgetting to include your return address on the envelope and letter.
- Mentioning one job title in the cover letter and sending a resume for another
- Forgets to put appropriate postage on envelope. (*Employer has to pay postage due.*)
- Includes inadequate or inaccurate applicant contact information (*Wrong zip code, phone #, etc.*)
- Addressing cover letter to the wrong person, incorrect address or wrong department.
- Using computer template and forgets to change:
ABC Company
1234 Work Blvd.
Employment City, USA 12345

