

# 3 steps TO A great COVER LETTER

By Kathi MacNaughton

**E**very great résumé deserves a great cover letter. A cover letter is crucial because it's the first thing the hiring manager sees. And you only have seconds to grab his or her attention. So you have to make sure the cover letter stands out from the dozens—or maybe even hundreds—of others that cross the hiring manager's desk each week.

Use the steps we've outlined here and you'll be well on your way to a dynamite cover letter.

## **Make a Connection**

There are 3 basic parts to making a connection:

1. Draft a strong opening paragraph.
2. Show your personality.
3. Research and target your audience.

## **Draft a Strong Opening Paragraph**

You must capture the hiring manager's interest immediately. The best way to do this is with a dynamic opening sentence and paragraph. Be sure to refer to the position you're vying for, and state why you are qualified for the job.

Remember to frame your statements in terms of how you can bene-

fit the company, not the other way around.

If you can, mention the name of someone the hiring manager knows and respects. For example, you could say, "Joe Smith recommended that I contact you about your opening for a sales manager."

It's also important to know what tone to set in this opening paragraph.

In some cases, this may depend on the industry in which you're trying to get a job. For example, a friendly, informal tone may work well if you're applying to a small, entrepreneurial company. A more formal, professional tone might work better for a large law firm or corporation. On the other hand, a bold statement might work really well if you're seeking a leadership or sales position.

## **Show Your Personality**

While your writing style should be matched to your audience to some extent, as explained above, it should also reflect your personality. Start to give your prospective employer a sense of who you are and what you value.

Pick one or two of your best accomplishments or abilities, and highlight them in your letter. Sure,

they're listed on your résumé too, but this tactic makes sure the hiring manager sees them right away.

## **Target Your Audience**

You want to sell the hiring manager on the belief that you're a great fit for the company. The only way to do this is if you know enough about the company to understand what makes it tick. Be sure you've taken the time to learn a bit about their mission, their products, their history and their goals for the future.

Always address the cover letter to a specific person. If necessary, take the time to call the company to learn the name of the person doing the interviewing. This, in itself, says a lot about your initiative and attention to detail.

Finally, it's important that your cover letter be easy to read and professional looking. Neatness counts. Also, don't forget to run the spellchecker! ♦

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Kathi MacNaughton, a freelance writer and editor, has years of management and recruitment experience. For tips and advice on powerful résumés, visit [www.powerful-sample-resume-formats.com](http://www.powerful-sample-resume-formats.com). Copyright 2004 Kathi MacNaughton. All rights reserved.