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Cover Letter-General Tips and Techniques

- Personalize the letter as much as possible—do research so you can write to a particular person. Individually type and sign each letter. Use "Sir" or "Madam" as a last resort.
- Standard business-size paper (8 1/2 x 11) should be used; make sure it is good quality bond paper. If you wish to use a color, light beige, ivory, off-white, grey, or light blue are fine. Never use business stationary or "pretty" stationary. (Match paper used for résumé).
- Always type the letter and use conservative typefaces (i.e., don't use fancy type such as Script, Old English, Gothic, and the like). Make your letter look business-like and professional.
- Structure the letter so that it seems to be written directly to one employer for whom you really want to work. Avoid using a form-like format that seems to be mass produced in any way. Again, strive for personalization.
- Keep it concise. The letter should be no more than five paragraphs of three to five sentences each. The entire letter should only be one page or less so that the employer can scan the whole thing, including the signature, at a glance.
- Letters must be grammatically perfect. Proofread carefully to catch any spelling and/or punctuation errors, and have another person read and check it. Use a writing style that is comfortable to you and avoid flowery or stilted phrases and clichés. Because you must be concise and thorough, write and re-write until it says just what you wish and conveys the impression you would like to create—make every word count.
- Utilize contacts to your advantage by mentioning them in a cover letter if they were in any way involved in suggesting a particular employer which you subsequently contact. Get advice from others about the form and content of your letter. Many people can be helpful, namely friends, professors, business people, and career services office personnel.
- Make sure your name, address, and phone number are on the cover letter and on the resume. It should be easy for the employer to find the information to contact you at a moment's notice—don't make the employer search for the needed information or she/he may decide not to make the effort. Also, it often happens that cover letters and resumes become separated once they reach an office, so make sure this vital information is clearly available.
- Important—be brief and end by requesting an interview, not a job.
- In the FIRST paragraph, introduce yourself, explain your purpose or reason for writing, and a brief statement of why this job fits you. In the SECOND paragraph(s), tell why you are interested in the position and how you are qualified. (*Hint: Use terminology from job ad*). In the FINAL paragraph, identify your next move, express your thanks, and state how you can be contacted.