

The 20-Minute

# Cover Letter

# Fixer

5 Tricks to  
Adding  
“Wow Factor”  
to Your  
Cover Letters



**DON'T SEND  
ANOTHER  
COVER LETTER  
UNTIL  
YOU READ THIS  
BOOK**

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and Cracking the Code to Pharmaceutical Sales*

For years, job seekers have experienced difficulty expressing their work experience, skill set, and intentions within a cover letter. It's challenging; probably not one job seeker will argue this point. Cover letters written with nervousness and haste have hiring managers seeing some of the worst writing, layout, and presentation errors imaginable. Hiring managers are less than impressed when reading substandard career-marketing material from individuals. If a job seeker submits a second-rate cover letter for something so critical, will that person produce the same quality of work while on the job?

The object is to create a cover letter that pulls and highlights key points relevant to the position, making the cover letter an extension of the resume. A cover letter serves as a "middleman" or connector between the resume and a job, along with being an introducer, a question answerer, and a speaker for your candidacy. The letter shouldn't regurgitate the same wordage included in your resume; however, it should refine it.

Let's say, for example, that you're applying for a planning position. You possess the necessary credentials for the position, yet that information can only be found within the middle or lower half of your resume. Plan to retool your resume to highlight the scope of your planning history, and weave specifics into your cover letter as well. A person can never be too diligent when it comes to relaying relevant work history.

Other uses for a cover letter include:

- Relocation choices or willingness to travel
- Salary requirement, if requested by company
- Schedule restrictions: part time, telecommute, contract
- Alternate form of contact or availability for interview
- Answers to questions posed by the company
- Reflect work experience that replaces an education requirement
- Explain employment gaps or other career blemishes
- Highlight key points that match the hiring company's requirements

To benefit your candidacy, stay away from generic documents that resemble those used by other candidates. How do you know whether your letter is unique? Generic letters are easily noticeable; and oftentimes, you already have a gut feeling that something "just isn't right." Stay away from a traditional letter and completely ditch outdated advice.

The next five tips aren't revolutionary, but will certainly add flair to what can be typically boring correspondence.

## **1. Uniqueness will shed light your way**

The probable reason why cover letters aren't read is likely from blandness. Have you seen letters that start out, "Please accept my resume and cover in response to ..."? Starting your letter this way isn't the best approach to setting yourself apart because countless other candidates begin their letters the same way. Of course, there are formalities when creating a cover letter; however there are some innovative ways to draw the attention of more readers.

Have you heard of a hook? Individuals who write professionally (e.g., writers for press releases and sales letters) will be the first to tell you that your material needs a hook. The complicated part of the process is that no one can tell you what the hook is because it's different for each jobseeker, and therefore, different for each hiring manager. A hook is something that draws readers in from the start, and entices them to continue reading.

Since every cover letter will require a different hook, researching businesses will definitely be very advantageous for you. Your ultimate goal is to input uniqueness into each of your cover letters that others will overlook, or not spend the time to address.

### **Mention specifics about the company recently announced in the media**

Do you keep up on current company events? If you're not reading the local newspaper at least twice a week, you're missing critical information that can make a huge impact on your job search. Articles are continuously written on company happenings; and without knowing this information, you're somewhat in the dark. Get into the habit of reading about businesses that catch your eye.

In addition to reading newspapers, subscribe to a business journal. Nearly every city possesses a business publication, so visit your local library and review a copy. Business journals offer a niche over local newspapers because these publications talk exclusively about the happenings of local businesses. Topics covered include mergers, new contracts, and expansions. A sample sentence for your cover letter might resemble:

"Restructuring is a necessary part of doing business, in my opinion. Countless companies over recent years have had to audit and appropriately reshape their existing operation. Thankfully, KSZX-TV did a great job of positively speaking about your upcoming changes. Your story peaked my interest, since I'm a consultant for businesses going through change, which requires realignment of staff, adjusting inventory levels, and streamlining internal procedures."

Other ideas could derive from commercials (e.g., company sponsoring an upcoming function), a documentary on the owner or his/her invention, or about a community/networking event. For example, mentioning, "Mr. Franks, I heard your logistics manager speak at a conference last fall. With my recent employer, I've successfully implemented many of the suggestions that Mr. Franks outlined in his seminar. Could we get together to discuss the logistics planning position currently open with your company?"

### **Congratulations on a new contract or expansion plan**

Everyone likes a pat on the back. Weaving a sentence or two into an introductory cover letter with congrats of a recent announcement can provide you with a great opportunity. A sample sentence might resemble:

"Reading *Construction Management Essential* yesterday, I learned your business will undergo a 150,000 square foot expansion over the next six months. That's fantastic because the Indianapolis area needs strong —and growing— businesses like yours."

### **Highlight a recent article in a trade or industry publication**

Publications can offer you insight into your target industry, help you stay abreast of new technologies, and enable you to splash uniqueness into the content of your letter. Noting specifics from a recent publication can also offer “freshness” to the body. Remember, noting particulars that your competitors will overlook will be key to setting your letter apart.

Get into the habit of clipping articles from magazines, printing columns from e-newsletters, and jotting notations to use later. Center your attention on items that interest each reader.

“Target your job search so the letters  
you send focus on quality positions,  
instead of quantity positions.”

Maintain a folder of clippings so you don’t go crazy searching through countless magazines or newspapers for that perfect mentionable.

Not familiar with publications pertaining to your industry or position? Conduct a search for organizations covering your field and scour their websites for recommended resources. Another way to find print or online media is by placing specific keywords or key phrases into a search engine. For example, sales+magazine or finance+newsletter should return useful results.

### **Comment on a recent management change**

While reading a newspaper or magazine, take special interest to articles about a company’s upcoming or recent change in management. One facet that is constant about business is employee turnover. Noting a recent management change tells readers that you are attentive to changes with the company. It may not catapult you onto the company’s payroll, but will offer a unique content slant to your cover letter.

If you’re extremely fortunate, the recent management change involves someone you’ve worked with in the past — and have a good history with that person. Listing the person’s name within your letter, along with noting specifics about that person’s management style or by including a compliment about this person, can serve as “eye candy” for anyone skimming your letter. Listing the name strategically within the starting sentence, or prominently at the beginning of a paragraph, can get your letter the attention it deserves.

In addition to beefing up your letter, clip the article from the newspaper, have it laminated, and include it in the envelope with your cover letter and resume. Individuals who track their public relations activities would enjoy a laminated copy of the article. The gesture is minute, but can make a huge difference.

### **Outline a competitor’s actions**

Much as you think about jobseekers vying for your perfect job, businesses eye the competition as well. Mentioning specifics about a business’s competitor can unquestionably grab attention. Learn about companies through the media, from news stories and corporate communications to trade publications and newspapers. Imagine mentioning the competitor’s name within your letter. If you were on the hiring end of the process, would that catch your eye?

Spin the information into a positive for you. Let's say the competitor is working with a new technology. Your response could be to outline your experience with the new tool/method, the depth of your skill level, and how you will apply it to help your target company remain competitive. The company may be trying to catch up to integrate the new technology, so your letter could arrive at a pivotal time for you.

**Provide details about product lines, and how you plan to expand market share**

Positions that have a direct impact on a company's market share include business development professionals, account executives, marketers, inside/outside sales teams, and customer service representatives. Cultivate specifics about product lines, obtain knowledge of the company including present markets and territories, and take that information and determine how to affect the bottom line.

The best way to learn about products, internal challenges, and untapped territories (among other specifics), in my opinion, is by befriending a person on the inside. To arm yourself with a full scope of the company, find an ally willing to answer your questions and one who will educate you with specifics. Don't feel that you're seeking a modern-day Benedict Arnold, because much of the information you're seeking goes home everyday with the company's employees. Since you're not tapped into that continuous information stream, expand your network to include someone who is.

Attending networking events that cater to your industry (or target industry) can also offer a much-needed platform for talking with individuals about a particular company. Your primary goal is to be given the information to penetrate the company for use to benefit the company.

## 2. Use the same header, margins, font, and pica as the resume

A common error jobseekers make is designing the cover letter, resume, reference sheet, and envelope separately, without giving much thought to the overall presentation. Since many of these documents are sent together (or presented within a short timeframe of the others), visual consistency offers a professional appearance. The added details given to the design details can have a huge affect to everyone examining you for employment.

Using the same features will make all your career documents look “related.” The next time you find yourself in an accounting office, for example, review the business’s material, such as letterhead, envelope, invoice, brochure, and business cards. Make note of how the company’s logo is reflected on all documents — the same font and color schemes are used throughout. Extending extra attention to correlating items adds professionalism to the material the business uses to represent it, so take the same approach when preparing you’re your career materials.

Elements that should be identical from one document to the next:

- Font
- Pica
- Margins
- Header/Footer
- Indentations
- Bullet Points
- Line Spacing
- Font Spacing
- Text Justification

Headers can make a cover letter attractive and eye-catching. Spend extra time creating something original thus giving your materials a unique flair; yet don’t cross the line to gaudy or inappropriate. A cover letter is a piece of career-marketing material, so go for something different but remains professional in appearance.

### Sample headers:

Michael McDonald

123 Any Street, City, State Zip  
Home: 123.456.7890 | Cell: 234.567.8901

*(Font: Charlesworth; Pica: 22; left justified)*

———— Michael McDonald ————

123 Any Street, City, State Zip  
Home: 123.456.7890 | Cell: 234.567.8901

(Font: Verdana; Pica: 18; center justified)

# Michael McDonald

123 Any Street, City, State Zip  
Home: 123.456.7890 | Cell: 234.567.8901

(Font: Tahoma; Pica: 22; left justified)

## Michael McDonald

123 Any Street, City, State Zip  
Home: 123.456.7890 | Cell: 234.567.8901

(Font: Charlesworth; Pica: 20; center justified)

## Michael McDonald

123 Any Street, City, State Zip  
Home: 123.456.7890 | Cell: 234.567.8901

(Font: Monotype Corsiva; Pica: 24; left justified)

## Michael McDonald

123 Any Street, City, State Zip  
Home: 123.456.7890 | Cell: 234.567.8901

(Font: Verdana; Pica: 14; .5" indent)

# Michael McDonald

123 Any Street, City, State Zip  
Home: 123.456.7890 | Cell: 234.567.8901

(Font: Vivaldi; Pica: 26; left justified)

## Michael McDonald

123 Any Street, City, State Zip  
Home: (123) 456-7890 | Cell: (234) 567-8901

(Font: Tunga; Pica: 20; centered)

## Michael McDonald

123 Any Street, City, State Zip  
Home: 123.456.7890 | Cell: 234.567.8901

(Font: Verdana; Pica: 16; italicized with black backing with white font)

Fonts appropriate for cover letters include Arial, Century Gothic, Latha, Tahoma, Times New Roman, and Verdana.

### 3. Add comments from superiors or clients

How many letters have you received over the last few years from superiors or customers? The comments contained in these letters can be priceless nuggets, by serving as votes to your candidacy. Comments from individuals who've worked with you offer a "live voice" to your abilities and capabilities. Integrating a carefully selected sentence or phrase into your cover letter makes a standard string of words come alive.

Without an available letter, or material from the last year or so, consider soliciting one from a current/past employer and another from a client (if the position you're focusing on requires extensive customer interaction). Managers are oftentimes approached for these purposes; so don't be surprised if your boss asks you to write the letter for his signature. It's common practice among managers and provides you with great opportunity to author a high-impact recommendation letter (AKA reference letter).

A typical recommendation letter is one page in length with approximately three to five paragraphs. If charged with the task of writing it, take full advantage of the opportunity. Create a letter that contains key points you want new and prospective employers to know about your work history. Insert client names, numbers and percentages, and other specifics, if possible. In addition, hone in on clauses that are relevant to your career focus. A sales person, for example, focuses their daily efforts on a number of business development tasks, including customer retention. Targeting another sales position, the following snippet within a letter would be appropriate:

"John did a fabulous job of retaining one of our largest clients. After a company restructuring, we were certain to lose a five-year contract; and with John's help, we were able to renegotiate and salvage our relationship with the client." Michael Mondri, CEO, AsP Company

To take full advantage of writing your own recommendation letter, stay away from using fragments or sentences that revolve around soft skills. For example, "John has been a hardworking member of our staff for several years." Using statements like these avoid measurable details about your skill set as an employee. In fact, every jobseeker will vouch they are hard-workers (including those who could be coined as lazy). Incorporating soft skills won't be detrimental to your letter, but it will definitely take space that should be reserved for more important details.

Mentioning keywords, such as restructuring, five-year contract and renegotiate, offers more value because it provides an example of John's history, instead of being somewhat vague like the second sentence.

Additional details to consider when writing your letter:

- Letter can have contact information for a predetermined recipient, or be written for an unknown audience noting "To Whom It May Concern" — the latter is best
- Your name (either first only or first and last names) should be mentioned two or three times throughout the letter, offering a more personable feel for readers
- Mention term of employment, along with details pertaining to promotions

*Sample reference letter:*



# AsP Company

191 Circle Street, Suite 245  
Shelbyville, KY 40065  
Office: (502) 632-5587 Fax: (502) 632-5588

February 5, 2005

Anthony McKnight, General Manager  
Celentra Manufacturing  
14821 Celentra Ave.  
Salvisa, KY 40372

**RE: Recommendation for John Matty**

Dear Mr. McKnight:

Starting in the customer service department, John began his tenure with our company on September 17, 1996. He remained in the CSR department for nearly 2 years, at which time, he was selected to join the outside sales department as an entry-level sales representative.

Since 1999, John has been an intricate part of our company. Stepping into the position with virtually no prior sales experience, he immediately showed signs of success by generating a number of great leads. In a short time, he closed three clients that generated revenue of nearly \$150,000. In addition, John did a fabulous job of retaining Jasta Industries, one of our largest clients. After a company restructuring, we were certain that we would lose our five-year contract; and with John's help, we were able to renegotiate and salvage our relationship.

John has shown the ability to take on a management position. I recommend him for the director of sales position open with your company. We'd gladly keep John on staff, but unfortunately, there isn't an advancement position for him at this point.

To discuss John's background with our company further, contact me at (502) 631-7890.

Regards,

Michael Mondì  
Chief Executive Officer

#### **4. Get rid of “dead weight” content**

“Dead weight” content is nothing more than excess wordage. When removed, it doesn’t alter the theme or meaning of a sentence or paragraph. Found in business writing, online content, and nearly everywhere words are present; too much wordage within a cover letter makes the visual appearance heavy. The visual presentation shouldn’t go beyond what is necessary, so proceed cautiously.

Once finished with your letter, focus on tightening the “content belt.” Read, reread, and fine-tune your letter before arriving at a final. Examine and analyze every sentence. Is the content too wordy? Can it be but back to make the message clearer and more concise?

Review these before and after examples. Both paragraphs say exactly the same thing, and the content maintains the overall theme and message, but the after examples have had the extra wording eliminated and some slight retooling, to add white space.

##### **Before**

I have generated large sales increases over the last 5+ years. I contribute these inclines to aggressive sales strategies and tactics proving crucial to increasing a client base. The importance of building relationships with the decision makers at each business is critical to short- and long-term success with the company. The initial sale is made through trust, and subsequent sales are generated based on on-going need and established relationship.

##### **After**

Sales increases I’ve generated for the last 5 years are the result of me applying aggressive sales strategies and tactics to leads in my territory. Building relationships with the decision makers at each business has been critical to my short- and long-term success.

##### **Before**

Working individually or as part of a team, I’ve troubleshot, implemented, and maintained support strategies associated with the technical aspects of each project’s life cycle. I interface with management teams and the company’s support professionals to apply all necessary applications.

##### **After**

Individually or as part of a team, I’ve troubleshot, implemented, and maintained support strategies through the lifecycle of each project. I work with management teams and support professionals to apply all necessary applications.

Once you make room, consider replacing the dead weight for more valued information such as numbers and percentages. Adding dollar amounts, for example, seems to authenticate a claim of accomplishment. Incorporating numbers also provides visual breaks for the reader — and serves as attention grabbers.

Take this expanded example, for instance: “Generating \$750,000 in sales, for each of the last years, are the result of me applying aggressive sales strategies and tactics to the existing client base and new prospects within my territory. Building relationships with the decision makers at each business has been critical to our short- and long-term success; i.e., I closed a \$1.5 million account in January 2005 after meeting with the sales director back in 2003.” In addition to providing visual breaks and serving as attention grabbers, weaving numbers into the content also makes the statement appear authentic. Do you agree?

## 5. Ensure most sentences are unique to the employer

Poll hiring managers, human resources personnel, and others within the personnel arena and you'll learn that stock cover letters are highly used with jobseekers. Recipients can typically spot, and subsequently, ignore a cover letter because it's generic, fails to offer specifics to the addressee, or says what all other cover letters do.

Oftentimes, a jobseeker searches for the easiest way out of the grueling process of searching for a job. Cutting corners by taking a letter designed for Company A and using it for Company B seems like a nice shortcut, but can come back to bite you. Using a letter that is basic, possibly designed for a number of recipients, can leave readers with a less than impressed feeling and can hinder your job-search.

Create a template letter, but ensure you build from that point. Use your template as a "staple" and replace scattered sentences within the top, middle, and end to speak directly to each recipient. The reader should feel that the letter was designed for him only — and not for every business within a 50-mile radius.

Stay away from, "Please accept my letter in response to ...". It doesn't pack the punch you want or need, and won't grab readers' attention. Think about a unique starter sentence, e.g. "Congratulations on being interviewed for *XYZ magazine*. I'm sure your superiors and subordinates are proud of the positive exposure you generated for the company."

Mention the addressee's name a couple of times throughout the content. People like to hear and see their names. Offering a personable touch to any correspondence indicates the letter was written with only one recipient in mind, although it may not be so. Place the person's name within a select area of a couple paragraphs, so evenly spaced apart.

Revisit the first point mentioned in this book, "Uniqueness will shed light your way." Splashing your content with specifics will surely draw attention in your direction. Whether including information about a recent expansion, management change, or contract award, list key points that tell the reader you have a full comprehension of company happenings.

Once finished, ask someone (ensure the person helping you is candid) to read and critique the cover letter for clarity, written content, message, and overall "feel." Ask your evaluator select questions:

- Do you feel that key points are noted and addressed?
- Is the letter eye-catching?
- Would you feel inclined to contact me for an interview?

If you receive less than gleaning answers, consider revising your letter. The letter will have only one opportunity to "wow" its intended audience. To avoid squandering your chances, use a letter that is unique, dynamic, and written with only one reader in mind.

## Other Books on the "Shelf"



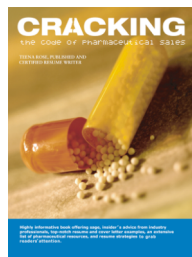
The *ResumeToolBox* explains what resume style to use, how to create "powerful" written copy, experience to eliminate or emphasize upon, including before and after resume examples. The *ResumeToolBox* provides specifics relating to design, whether to polish and enhance an existing resume or to build a new design from scratch. [[Get copy](#)]



*Interviewing: The Gold Standard* written by Laura DeCarlo. If you want to make a positive impact on the interviewer and win job offers, you need to utilize proven strategies to give yourself an edge. Remember, the most qualified applicant rarely gets the job because they don't always make the best impression. It is the best communicator, the most prepared individuals, who gets the offer. [[Get copy](#)]



*Resume Designs & Job-search Strategies for College Grads* takes a complete look at creating a resume for a new graduate — or someone with limited work experience. Faced with the challenge of looking qualified, without appearing "green," entry-level jobseekers can find it difficult to know what a resume should look like, as well as the information that needs inclusion and in what order to place it. [[Get copy](#)]



*Cracking the Code to Pharmaceutical Sales* examines several key areas relevant to job seekers with their sights set on the pharmaceutical industry. The author looked at the industry for longevity, interviewed key pharmaceutical industry experts, and included several resume examples that have landed individuals high-paying positions with pharmaceutical companies. [[Get copy](#)]

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