

The ABCs of Great Cover Letters...

Simple Steps to Increase Impact and Effectiveness

A Special Report prepared by Louise Kursmark

Don't let cover letters be a roadblock preventing your search from moving forward. These easy A-B-C-D-E steps will lead you through the process of writing good cover letters quickly.

A. Address Your Audience. Different audiences dictate different introductions.

Consider these guidelines:

- Whenever possible, write to an individual by name. This creates a better impression and gives you a better opportunity for follow-up. Don't be afraid to call a company and ask who your letter should go to. (Just be prepared with your professional introduction, in case you get that person on the line!)
- When responding to an online posting or ad, where you are likely one of dozens if not hundreds of applicants, don't worry so much about writing to an individual. In these cases, it's perfectly okay to omit the salutation—especially the outdated openings “Dear Sir or Madam” or “To Whom It May Concern”—and simply use a clear, concise subject line (“Re: VP Marketing”) as your opening.



B. Be Clear. While most readers enjoy a snappy, interesting opening more than the standard, “I'm writing in response to your posting,” never sacrifice clarity for cleverness. Be sure that the opening of your letter clearly communicates why you are writing and why the reader should care. For example:

- “Your need for a VP of Marketing is a close fit for my experience at Megacorp and my proven ability to drive up revenues, successfully launch new products, and steer growth in strategic channels.”

C. Communicate Value. The body of your cover letter should tell the reader what they care about—namely, what you can do for them. You can best communicate your value through specific accomplishments rather than vague statements. A bullet-point format is extremely useful for highlighting three or four relevant points, and this format forces you to keep your letter to a concise, readable length.

You can easily tailor this section of your letter to the specific needs of your audience—whether described in a job posting, related to you by a networking source, or learned through research. Use your accomplishments as evidence of your ability to assist them with precisely the challenges they are facing.

Consider these three value-packed bullet points that make up the body of an executive's cover letter:

- *Revenue Expansion:* During my tenure as VP Marketing/Sales, we averaged 24% annual revenue growth during a time of industry contraction. Our strong brand and benefit-focused product development were pivotal to our ability to steal market share from competitors.
- *Successful Product Introduction:* Launched the same year as two key competitors, MegaSystem grew to 43% market share within two years; MegaAddon penetrated 78% of existing product users; and the entire MegaMini line was recognized as Product of the Year by the NAITP.
- *Strategic Growth:* Our MegaMini launches met the corporate goal of successfully penetrating the consumer market, which now represents 27% of company revenues.

D. **Don't Overdo It.** After delivering your value message, provide just enough information to give your audience a sense for your scope of experience and key selling points. Don't overwhelm readers with too much detail; don't retell your entire career history; don't feel you must respond to every requirement listed in an ad; and don't go overboard relating your personal attributes. In fact, if your letter is too long, your paragraphs too dense and wordy, your audience may give up before finishing. Your goal is simply to entice them to read your resume and want to know more about you, inviting a call for an interview.

Here's an example of a semifinal paragraph:

- "In brief, I am an accomplished marketing executive with experience developing and executing global marketing strategies for Fortune 500 companies. My deepest expertise is in technology products (business and consumer), and I have a solid background in classical marketing methodologies for the CPG industry. My strengths in vision, strategy, and execution are complemented by a talent for building high-performing, highly motivated teams... we work hard, smart, and aggressively to achieve our goals and outdo the competition."

E. **Exit Gracefully.** You've said your piece, given your readers the initial information they need to evaluate your candidacy. End your letter on a positive note, expressing your interest in a meeting. Again, it's more important to be clear than to be clever, but try keep your language fresh by avoiding language that is overused.

Here's an example of a brief, positive closing paragraph:

- "May we schedule a time to meet? I'd like to learn more about this interesting opportunity and explore the fit between my background and your needs. I will call within a few days to answer any questions you might have and to discuss the next steps."

If you are not writing to an individual, you cannot state that you will call to follow up. Otherwise, you should take the initiative to make contact a few days after sending your letter—just as you would with any important business correspondence.

There you have it! Each time you write a cover letter, save it to use as a template for the next letter. Soon you'll have a library of good letters filled with apt phrases, strong accomplishment statements, and graceful opening and closing paragraphs that you can use repeatedly to keep your search moving forward quickly and smoothly.

Louise Kursmark is an award-winning resume writer, president of Best Impression Career Services (www.yourbestimpression.com), and one of the most widely published authors in the careers field. Her 18 resume and career books can be purchased at online and traditional booksellers and directly from the author via this web page—<http://www.yourbestimpression.com/books.html>.

Louise works with executive job seekers to develop powerful resumes and related marketing documents and to craft efficient and effective job search strategies. She can be reached at 888-792-0030 or by email at LK@yourbestimpression.com.

The 24-Step Modern Resume (Meets Technology)

Resume Checklist: Follow these best practices to ensure your resume gets through the spam filter, applicant tracking system, and to the recruiters and hiring managers.

September 6, 2010 By Lisa Vaas

What's the difference between a computerized ATS (Applicant Tracking System) and a black hole?

Not much, if you don't know which aspects of your resume give you a good ranking vs. what makes these software programs choke.

The people who work with these tools say it best: "[They're] a wonderful tool (if utilized correctly) for recruiters and hiring managers; however, they can be a black hole for the applicant if their resume is not accurately targeted to the open position with appropriate keywords and/or highlighted experience," according to Laurie M. Winslow, principal at Talent Innovations Group Inc. Winslow has worked with a slew of vendors' ATSes over her 20-plus years in human resources, as an executive search consultant, an in-house corporate recruiter and as a career coach and professional resume writer.

TheLadders spoke to ATS vendors and people like Winslow — the professionals who use this technology — to unlock these mysterious black boxes to figure out how they handle your resume. We also spent time with these pros to figure out how your resume gets handled by other computer systems, including e-mail security screening.

Use this list to ensure your resume gets where it needs to go and that it receives as high a ranking as possible, optimizing your chances of getting an interview.

Checklist

1. Do not apply to a company multiple times if the positions do not match your experience and skills. Recruiters notice multiple submissions, and it reflects poorly on a candidate if he or she applies for jobs that aren't a good fit.
2. Don't send your resume as an attachment. To avoid getting caught by security scans, paste it into the body of the e-mail.
3. When e-mailing a resume, keep exclamation marks out of the subject line and body of the text.
4. When e-mailing a resume, don't use words in the document or headline that could be misinterpreted by spam filters. For example, use "graduated with high honors" instead of "graduated cum laude."
5. Include a professional or executive summary at the resume top, followed by a list of bulleted qualifications and/or achievements.
6. Customize the professional/executive summary and bulleted list(s) with keywords that match a given job.
7. Make sure the keywords in the executive summary and bulleted qualifications and achievements replicate those in the job posting.
8. Keywords alone aren't enough. State-of-the-art ATS technology relies on contextualization as well. Frame keywords with descriptive material that demonstrates experience and familiarity with the subject.
9. Do not use abbreviations such as "Mgr" instead of "Manager." It is unlikely that the ATS has been programmed with a list of abbreviations to stand in for keywords.
10. Avoid misspellings. A misspelled keyword is a keyword that the ATS will miss, lowering your ranking.

11. Use standard capitalization, not all lowercase or full capitals. Improper capitalization annoys recruiters.
12. Fill in all the information requested by an online application process, even if it's listed as optional. Recruiters often sort by optional information to filter out applicants, and filling in all fields will ensure you don't erroneously get caught in a screening filter.
13. Fill in all information requested by an online application process, even if it's included in your resume. This information can be used to filter out applicants before a hiring manager comes to the point of opening the resume itself.
14. If you're being referred by an employee, make sure the ATS knows it, because it's smart enough to care and will rate your resume higher.
15. If the ATS offers options, opt for uploading your resume instead of cutting and pasting. This feature often parses information and saves it in the optimal format, ensuring the cleanest presentation.
16. To avoid choking an ATS with a highly formatted resume, make sure your resume is in a clear, concise format, with your contact information located at the top instead of in the header or footer.
17. Do not include graphics or logos on a resume; they can garble the information the ATS processes.
18. Respond within 24 hours after hearing back from a company.
19. Keep an eye on spam folders. Filters are so sensitive today that they can recognize e-mail that's automatically generated — a category which both spam and follow-up e-mail generated from an ATS program can fall into.
20. Adhere to instructions provided in follow-up e-mail. If the follow-up e-mail lacks a phone number but directs you to respond with your availability, respond via e-mail, not by calling. This will likely get you the fastest response.
21. If you receive an automatically generated rejection e-mail, immediately contact the recruitment office of the rejecting organization or a sympathetic administrative assistant — anyone who can advise you as to the best way to replace the resume currently in the ATS with one containing better keywords and phrases.
22. When reapplying after an initial rejection, tweak executive summaries and bulleted lists of key skills and achievements. Don't alter your work history elements.
23. When reapplying, don't try to use a different e-mail address from the one you used on your first try. This isn't enough to avoid a duplicate record in advanced systems such as Taleo, which use multiple candidate identifiers, so make sure to follow Step #21.
24. Once your customized resume has been resubmitted, contact the appropriate recruiter (or sympathetic administrative assistant) and request that your updated resume be reviewed for the open position.

Lisa Vaas covers resume writing techniques and the technology behind the job search for TheLadders.

Transferable Skills Sets for Job-Seekers

Marketable job skills can be broken down into five basic categories -- skills sets -- that job-seekers can use in showing applicable skills from one job/career to the next. Below is a list of five broad skill areas, which are divided into more specific job skills:

Communication: the skillful expression, transmission and interpretation of knowledge and ideas.

- Speaking effectively
- Writing concisely
- Listening attentively
- Expressing ideas
- Facilitating group discussion
- Providing appropriate feedback
- Negotiating
- Perceiving nonverbal messages
- Persuading
- Reporting information
- Describing feelings
- Interviewing
- Editing

Research and Planning: the search for specific knowledge and the ability to conceptualize future needs and solutions for meeting those needs.

- Forecasting, predicting
- Creating ideas
- Identifying problems
- Imagining alternatives
- Identifying resources
- Gathering information
- Solving problems
- Setting goals
- Extracting important information
- Defining needs
- Analyzing
- Developing evaluation strategies

Human Relations: the use of interpersonal skills for resolving conflict, relating to and helping people.

- Developing rapport
- Being Sensitive
- Listening
- Conveying feelings
- Providing support for others
- Motivating
- Sharing credit
- Counseling
- Cooperating
- Delegating with respect
- Representing others
- Perceiving feelings, situations
- Asserting

Organization, Management and Leadership: the ability to supervise, direct and guide individuals and groups in the completion of tasks and fulfillment of goals.

- Initiating new ideas
- Handling details
- Coordinating tasks
- Managing groups
- Delegating responsibility
- Teaching
- Coaching
- Counseling
- Promoting change
- Selling ideas or products
- Decision making with others
- Managing conflict

Work Survival: the day-to-day skills that assist in promoting effective production and work satisfaction.

- Implementing decisions
- Cooperating
- Enforcing policies
- Being punctual
- Managing time
- Attending to detail
- Meeting goals
- Enlisting help
- Accepting responsibility
- Setting and meeting deadlines
- Organizing
- Making decisions

[Your Name]
[Street Address]
[City, ST ZIP Code]
October 3, 2011

[Recipient Name]
[Title]
[Company Name]
[Street Address]
[City, ST ZIP Code]

Dear [Recipient Name]:

I am writing in response to your ad in the Elm Street News. The position requirements and my skills are a perfect match.

As you'll see on my enclosed resume, I have the educational background, professional experience, and track record for which you are searching. In addition, I am motivated and enthusiastic, and would appreciate the opportunity to contribute to your firm's success.

I can promise that meeting with me will not be a waste of your time—and I will make myself available at your convenience, during or outside of normal business hours.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

Enclosure

Executive Assistant Sample Resume

This resume is an example of our [Resume Writing Services](#). Learn how we can create a Job-Winning Resume for you.

[Send this page to a friend](#)

PATRICIA CHOPIN

5540 B Street, Bridgeton, Missouri 63044
314.555.1697 • patti@anyisp.com

QUALIFICATIONS SUMMARY

Skilled and dedicated **Executive Assistant** with more than 12 years' experience coordinating, planning, and supporting daily operational and administrative functions.

- Demonstrated capacity to provide comprehensive support for executive-level staff; excel at scheduling meetings, coordinating travel, and managing all essential tasks.
- Proven track record of accurately completing research, reporting, information management, and marketing-support activities within demanding time frames.
- Adept at developing and maintaining administrative processes that reduce redundancy, improve accuracy and efficiency, and achieve organizational objectives.
- Highly focused and results-oriented in supporting complex, deadline-driven operations; able to identify goals and priorities and resolve issues in initial stages.
- Proficient in Microsoft Office Suite (Word, Outlook, Excel, PowerPoint), Visio, QuickBooks; Windows and Mac OS; type 90 wpm with complete accuracy.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

SPTM Systems, Inc., St. Louis, Missouri 12/2006 to Present

Executive Assistant

Provide high-level administrative support to Chief Financial Officer of leading manufacturer of solid-integrating products and solutions with more than \$75 million in annual revenue.

Perform a variety of key investor-relations functions, addressing inquiries of current and potential shareholders, communicating with marketing department regarding investor-relations initiatives, and maintaining investor database. Collaborate with CFO to oversee distribution of financial releases to NASDAQ. Develop spreadsheets to improve and inform quality and risk-assessment initiatives. Prepare meeting agendas and carefully monitor all action items.

- Reduced company travel expenses by \$47,000 within first three months of tenure by identifying cost-effective travel agencies and negotiating vendor contracts.
- Successfully coordinated and hosted numerous client seminars, creating invitations and promotional materials, booking venues, and selecting guest speakers.

SMITH, INC. St. Louis, Missouri

10/2002 to 11/2006

Administrative Assistant

Served as Administrative Assistant for three partners and one principal of financial-services firm with more than 75 locations nationwide.

Directed all administrative and project-support efforts. Conducted in-depth business-development research and compiled results for review by proposal team. Created presentations and scheduled all executive-level meetings and travel. Prepared biweekly time, expense, and travel reports. Managed invoicing and billing processes.

- Proactively developed vital competitive analysis process to facilitate implementation of aggressive company marketing strategy.
- Effectively managed license renewal process for all financial service representatives.

continued...

PATRICIA CHOPIN

- Page Two -

CONSOA, LTD., Bridgeton, Missouri

3/1998 to 10/2002

Regional Assistant

Provide administrative support for five regional medical directors for successful healthcare organization.

Oversaw a wide variety of administrative functions, in support of all director-level projects and information-management processes. Compiled and analyzed data from monthly reports to prepare directors' presentations to executive management. Developed internal correspondence that facilitated effective communication and transfer of information between five regional offices.

- Played key role in design of Intraoffice intranet, collaborating with Web developers to identify and define essential components of site functionality.
- Significantly reduced time required to prepare and distribute quarterly financial reports by initiating implementation of electronic reporting procedures.

ROBERT & ASSOCIATES, Bridgeton, Missouri

2/1996 to 2/1998

Office Manager

Directed day-to-day office operations, providing fundamental support to company President and team of consultants.

Managed accounts payable, receivable, and payroll. Oversaw administrative budget; prepared expense reports and bank reconciliations. Purchased hardware and software, performed application upgrades, and trained staff.

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

LAWSON TECHNICAL COLLEGE, St. Louis, Missouri
Associate of Arts in Administrative Services, 1996

© Copyright 2006 - 2010 CareerPerfect.com

This resume was prepared by our [Resume Writing Services](#). Learn how we can create a Job-Winning Resume for you.



Rebecca Laszlo

15 Main St. Somewhere, NY 55555
Home: 718-555-5555 • Cell: 917-555-5556
someone@example.com

Entry-Level Administrative Assistant

Profile

Administrative support professional offering versatile office management skills and proficiency in Microsoft Office programs. Strong planner and problem solver who readily adapts to change, works independently and exceeds expectations. Able to juggle multiple priorities and meet tight deadlines without compromising quality.

Education

ABC school – Somewhere, NY

Relevant Courses:

- Project Management for Executive Assistants
- MS Office for Professional Staff
- Electronic Presentations for Business Professionals
- Keyboarding and Document Formatting
- Communication Skills for Executive Assistants
- Finance for the Non-Financial Manager
- Professional Office Procedures

Professional Development:

- Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS), 2007
-

Key Skills

<i>Office Skills:</i>	<i>Office Management Records Management Database Administration</i>	<i>Spreadsheets/Reports Event Management Calendaring</i>	<i>Front-Desk Reception Executive Support Travel Coordination</i>
<i>Computer Skills:</i>	<i>MS Word MS Excel MS PowerPoint</i>	<i>MS Outlook MS Access MS Project</i>	<i>MS Publisher FileMaker Pro Windows</i>

Experience

ABC school – Somewhere, NY

Assistant / Practicum, 2007 to 2008

Handled multifaceted clerical tasks (e.g., data entry, filing, records management and billing) as the assistant to the registrar and admissions offices. Coordinated travel arrangements, maintained database and ensured the delivery of premium service to students. Quickly became a trusted assistant known for "can-do" attitude, flexibility and high-quality work.

Highlights:

- Communicated effectively with multiple departments to plan meetings and prepare welcome packages for new students. Established strong relationships to gain support and effectively achieve results.
- Helped coordinate dozens of recruitment events (average of 12 large gatherings per year) that contributed to consistently high enrollment levels.
- Entrusted to manage office in the supervisor's absence. Provided timely, courteous and knowledgeable response to information requests; screened and transferred calls; and prepared official school correspondence.
- Co-developed comprehensive, 60-page training manual that enabled faster ramp-up for newly hired support staff.
- Developed innovative PowerPoint presentation used by the Office of Admissions to market executive support programs to potential students.
- Earned excellent marks on performance reviews, with citations for excellence in areas including work volume, accuracy and quality; ability to learn and master new concepts; positive work ethic; and commitment to providing unsurpassed service.