

Guidelines for Writing an Application Letter (with or without an enclosed resume)

DO

1. Put yourself in the shoes of each employer to whom you write a letter, and ask the question: What does this mean to me? If the question cannot be answered in a very affirmative manner, rewrite the letter.
2. Make certain that you have in each letter given facts which back up assertions that you would be an asset in terms of efficiency, profitability, effectiveness, and experience.
3. Gear your experience, as presented in a letter, to be as close as possible to the business needs of the employer to whom you are writing. If you are applying to a parachurch ministry, talk about what you've done in that ministry—not about your work in physics.
4. When responding to an ad, show how you meet the specifications listed. If you do not meet one or more of the specifications, imply that you do, or don't mention those particular items.
5. Describe your expertise and accomplishments in terms of figures and percentages which can quantify your value in a manner the employer can understand.
6. Use action words like *designed, established, directed, managed, implemented, built, supervised, organized, researched, achieved, accomplished, attained, succeeded, produced, constructed, conceived, conducted*, and so on.
7. Pay close attention to what employers *want*. When contacting targeted employers, send a different letter for each situation. Send a separate letter for each business and for each type of job.
8. Send letters which are personalized for the intended reader. If you send form letters which look like form letters, an employer may infer that you couldn't take the time to write a separate communication and that you may not be particularly interested in their specific open position (or that you are just a lazy person).
9. Keep letters to one side of one sheet. Paragraphs should be no more than about eight lines so that important facts and implications do not get hidden in the midst of large paragraphs.
10. Be prepared to cover your tracks. Unless you can back up what you say, or unless it would be impossible for your statements to be disproved, don't say it.
11. Keep track of who is getting your letters. A good way to do this is to keep a copy of the letter with the ad.
12. Proofread.
13. Be direct and avoid run-on sentences:
 - Wrong: It seems to me, particularly in light of the qualifications stated in your advertisement, that my experience and capabilities put me in a unique position to meet your needs.
 - Right: I meet each of your stated qualifications.

14. Edit out all unnecessary words, phrases, clauses, and sentences, such as:
~~It is clear that~~ we should meet to further discuss this matter.
~~I am writing to inform you that~~ your requirements are almost identical to my experience and capabilities.

~~In order to acquaint you with my rather unique capabilities,~~ the following achievements are listed to provide you with evidence of the fact that I meet all of your needs.
15. Avoid flowery adjectives such as *fantastic*, *magnificent*, *spectacular*, *superior*, *superb*.
Also for absolute: *all of*, *every*, *totally*.
16. Avoid repetition of the same words and phrases in a letter.
17. Use active voice as opposed to passive. "I have processed an average of 62 applications per day for the past three years" sounds a lot better than "for the past three years, 62 applications have been processed by me each day."
18. Read your letters out loud, and have someone else read them aloud so you can hear how they sound. Avoid English that sounds contrived, stilted, or downright phony.
19. Rewrite until your letters are perfect.
20. Use proper English, correct spelling, and correct punctuation.

DON'T

1. Be shy. If you don't blow your horn, no one will do it for you. Learn to describe your accomplishments in glowing terms which will impress prospective employers.
2. Volunteer any information that will hurt your chances. Leave out salary, periods of unemployment, job titles of a more lofty nature than the job you are after, and even the year you graduated from college or high school. Employers will work backwards from the graduation year, calculate your age, and try to estimate your probable salary needs. Your letter, however impressive, may reach the circular file should the employer think that you're too old or too young.
If you have worked in your field for five to 10 years, it won't hurt to say so unless you know, with certainty, that the employer wants someone with much less or much more experience. If you are concerned about giving a specific number of years of experience, don't. Concentrate entirely on showing how good you are.
3. Give your age.
4. Identify present or former employers by name unless you can do so without jeopardizing your current job and unless you are positive of what those employers would say if contacted. Without your knowing it, prospective bosses will check on you.
5. Give references in a letter.
6. Present yourself as a jack-of-all-trades unless you are applying to an organization who is seeking such an employee. Assume that prospective employers want specialists.
7. Plead for an interview, list personal problems, or discuss philosophical differences with your current boss.
8. Describe your accomplishments in such a way that it could be inferred that they happened a long time ago.
9. Use cumbersome words or terms like *insofar as* or *inasmuch as*.
10. Say nasty things about current or past employers, or divulge company secrets.

11. Underqualify yourself. Stress accomplishments and expertise instead of age or duration of experience.
12. Apply to a company for more than one job at one time.
13. Appear anxious.
14. Forget that your letters must impress employers.
15. Keep on using the same letters unless you're getting results. If you have contact information, call the people you have written after a couple of weeks; you have nothing to lose.
16. Mention an achievement unless it is one which will impress employers.
17. Send pictures.
18. Abbreviate. Spell out words.
19. Bury your reader in a sea of "I did this, I did that, I, I, I."
20. Send out handwritten letters.
21. Send letters which look like form letters.
22. Be shy about following up on your application. Call the employer and ask whether your application has been received. If the answer is yes, ask if they have made any determination as to whether you are still under consideration.