

John and Maria applied for the same job. They are equally qualified and each submitted an excellent resume that emphasizes accomplishments, training, positive work ethic and dedication.

John included a general cover letter that outlined his career history and aspirations. To save time, he used the same letter to apply for every job opening he looked at. Maria put more effort into her letter. She found out the hiring manager's name and addressed him directly. She researched the company, and learned about its mission, past performance, goals and corporate culture. She also studied the job description and clearly spelled out how she is an excellent match for that particular opening.

Although the candidates are equally qualified, Maria's extra effort landed her a job interview. John is still waiting for the phone to ring.

### HERE'S HOW TO GENERATE MORE CALLS FOR JOB INTERVIEWS...

#### Research Before You Write

The more you know about the employer's needs, the more compelling your letter can be. Review company Web sites, brochures, sales flyers and other promotional materials to glean pertinent information. If possible, speak with current employees to get the inside scoop. Search newspaper archives, public libraries and career-center resources. Do a keyword search using the company name and see what turns up.

Here are a few resources to get you started:

- Sonoma County employers at [www.socojoblink.org](http://www.socojoblink.org)
- [Monster Research Companies](http://company.monster.com) at <http://company.monster.com>
- [Hoover's Online](http://www.hoovers.com) at [www.hoovers.com](http://www.hoovers.com)
- [Wetfeet](http://www.wetfeet.com) at [www.wetfeet.com](http://www.wetfeet.com)
- [Jobstar \(regional\)](http://www.jobstar.org) at [www.jobstar.org](http://www.jobstar.org)

#### Determine Your Unique Selling Points

With the knowledge that you have about the employer, how would you help achieve organizational goals? Set yourself apart: If there are 100 other applicants vying for the same position, why should the hiring manager take a chance on you? Write a list of the top five reasons why you're an excellent candidate.

#### Constructing Your Letter

##### Heading/Date/Inside Address

If you are writing a traditional (not email) letter, select a standard business-letter format such as block style. Your letter's design should match your resume (See example below).

##### Salutation

It's best to address your letter to a specific person, especially a hiring manager in the department in which you wish to work (e.g., "Dear Ms. Jones:"). However, address your letter to "Dear Human Resource Manager," if there's no way to find that out. Use "Dear Search Committee:" if the decision will be made by committee. Avoid stale salutations such as "Dear Sir/Madam:" and "To Whom it May Concern:."

##### Opening Paragraph

Hiring managers are busy and do not care to wade through fluff. Your opening paragraph should clearly state the position for which you're applying. Include a reference code if requested and the referral source (e.g., recommendation from a current employee, colleague, etc.). Your opening may also include a synopsis of why you are a top candidate for the position See examples on pages 3 and 4.

## Body

Your letter's body contains the sales pitch. This is your chance to outline the top reasons why you're worthy of an interview. When writing the body text, keep in mind that hiring managers want to know what you can do for them, not learn about your life story. Demonstrate how your credentials, motivation and track record would be a good fit for the specific responsibilities of this position. Review your top five strengths (the ones you jotted down when doing your company research) and weave them into the body, perhaps as a bulleted list.

Back up achievements with specific examples of how your performance benefited current and former employers. Precede this paragraph with a statement such as "Highlights of my credentials include:" or "Key strengths I offer include:."

Keep your letter positive and upbeat, and focus on what you have to offer (not what you will gain). Put yourself in the hiring manager's shoes — would you call yourself in for an interview?

## Closing Paragraph

Your final paragraph should generate a call for action, so express your strong interest in an interview and state that you will call soon to follow up on your application and discuss the possibility of meeting face-to-face.

## Complimentary Close and Your Name

End with a professional close such as "Sincerely." Leave 3-4 spaces between the Sincerely and your name for your signature.

## Common Cover Letter Mistakes

**Not Using Standard Business-Letter Format:** Poor letters scream "unprofessional." Be sure your cover letter uses a standard business letter format. It should include the date, the recipient's mailing address and your address.

**It's Not All About You:** Your cover letter, like your resume, should be about the employer as much as it's about you. Tell the employer about yourself in the context of the employer's needs and the specified job requirements.

**Typos and Grammatical Errors:** Employers tend to view typos and grammatical errors as evidence of your carelessness and inability to write. Proofread every letter you send. Have a friend who knows good writing double-check it for you.

**Unsupported Claims:** Too many cover letters from college students say the applicant has "strong written and verbal communication skills." Employers want evidence! Give some examples for each claim you make.

**Writing a Novel:** A cover letter should be no longer than one page. Employers are deluged with resumes and cover letters. Make sure your cover letter has three or four concise but convincing paragraphs that are easy to read.

**Using the Same Cover Letter for Every Job and Company:** Employers see so many cover letters that it's easy for them to tell when you're using a one-size-fits-all approach. If you haven't addressed their company's specific concerns, they'll conclude you don't care about this particular job. Customize each letter for the specific job and organization.

**Not Sending a Real Cover Letter:** You must include a well-written, neatly formatted cover letter with every resume you send. If you don't, you probably won't be considered for the job.

## Further Resources

SSU Career Services binder: "Winning Resumes and Cover Letters" – in Salazar 1070.

[The Quick Resume and Cover Letter Book](#), Michael Farr.

[Real Resumes for Students](#), Anne McKinney.

UC Berkeley's career website <http://career.berkeley.edu/Tools/Resume.stm>

*Adapted from articles on MonsterTrak.com: "Cover Letters That Sell" and "Avoid These 7 Killer Cover Letter Mistakes"*