

# THEORY AND TECHNIQUES OF THE INTERVIEW

## 1. THE COVER LETTER & RESUME'

### 1.1. The Importance of the Cover Letter

The cover letter is your first and possibly, only opportunity to engage a prospective employer. It is a key marketing tool to convince the employer to take the time to look at your resume'. Think of it as bait that you are using to hook the reader. Recruiting coordinators are searching for a reason to dismiss your application. Don't give it to them by writing a cover letter that is rambling and poorly written, or that contains typos or grammatical errors. The primary purpose of your cover letter, when combined with your resume', is to get an interview. The second purpose is to communicate the intangibles not readily apparent from the factual content of your resume'. It should be written in a tone that is direct, unassuming, and conveys enthusiasm. The difference between your resume and cover letter is that your resume should provide the reader with a better understanding of who you are. Your cover letter should connect the dots for the reader and show how your previous experiences apply to the job for which you are applying. With job applications and interviews we all know that first impressions count. In many cases the cover letter really is the first impression, as it is the first thing an employer will read from an applicant even before the resume' or curriculum vitae (CV). It is important to write a cover letter specifically for every job application. This is your chance to attract the reader's attention, leaving them keen to start reading your CV.

There are cover letter rules to keep in mind. The following tips are provided below;

**1. Put Yourself in the Employer's Shoes** - Never forget who your audience is and why you are writing this letter. It should be employer focused. In your first paragraph, you need to quickly and clearly answer the employer's unspoken questions:

- "Who are you?"
- "Why have you contacted me?"
- "Why should I be interested in meeting you?"

To answer the last question, you need to do some research on the firm.

**2. Don't Re-State Your Resume'** - Your cover letter should not rehash your resume'. The cover letter is an opportunity to make explicit how the skills you developed previously will be beneficial to this particular employer. The second paragraph of your letter should articulate specifically where your characteristics and experiences meet their needs.

**3. Style** - A successful cover letter is concise, quickly absorbed, sounds genuine and rings sincere. Don't write complex, convoluted sentences, or use obscure words in an effort to sound sophisticated and highly educated. Instead, you will come across as pompous and insincere, and your letter will be discarded before the reader gets to the signature line. Confidence and competence will be best conveyed through simple, straightforward language. Don't use outrageous superlatives. Remember that you are a possible applicant attempting to get your foot in the door. Avoid phrases such as "I'm the perfect candidate for this position because..." or "I am confident I will exceed your expectations in every way." Statements like these ring hollow.

**4. Lying – DON'T!** - Don't manufacture a story, or embellish an experience or credential to impress a prospective employer. One lie begets another and, typically, you get caught somewhere along the way and the results will be devastating. Integrity is critical in any profession. You want to begin developing a reputation for being trustworthy and honest now.

**5. Avoid Typos and Grammatical Errors** - Proofread your work, and then have a friend do it again! Your sentence structure, punctuation and spelling should be flawless. Don't give the employer a reason to toss your application in the reject pile. Does the inside address match the salutation? Always address your letter to the person responsible for legal hiring.

## **1.2. Recommended Cover Letter Outline**

When writing your cover letter, use proper business letter format and make sure your address, phone number and e-mail appear at the top of the page. Use good quality bond paper. First, the introductory paragraph should answer initial questions. Your background and keen interest in the company should be conveyed. If you don't have a mutual acquaintance or referral, try to draw on something you learned from your research to explain why you are writing to this particular company. Next, the body of the letter will comprise paragraph two. This section of the letter is where you wheel in your big guns. Describe specific

training, achievements or experiences that highlight your strengths and abilities and demonstrate the value you can bring to this particular employer. Remember: don't simply repeat the information in your resume'. Highlight items of particular relevance to this employer in this paragraph. Keep in mind you are answering the employer's unspoken question: Why should I meet you? The final paragraph will be the third part of the cover letter. State your action plan! This is where you tell the employer what you will do in terms of follow up. Tell him/her you will follow up within 10 days to see if an interview or meeting can be arranged. Thank the addressee for his/her time and consideration.

### **1.3. The Resume'**

The average employer spends only 10 seconds looking at a resume'. Yet it is the only contact you have with the potential employer. Most employers are actually looking for a reason NOT to interview you. There is no room for anything but a flawless, compelling document that reflects who you are and what you've accomplished in the most beneficial light. In this increasingly competitive job market, you must have a professionally crafted resume' in order to stand out among the hundreds of job seekers applying for the same position as you. It's no longer an option. Is your homemade resume' ready to make the cut? You work hard every day. You've spent years acquiring the skills needed to outperform the competition and make no mistake about it. This is a competition. Don't let a single mistake misrepresent years of hard work. Remember, only 10 seconds can decide your future. Regardless of your professional and educational background, your career will be summed up in the blink of an eye on a single piece of paper. Communicating your qualifications effectively is harder than you think. The purpose of your resume' is to make a good first impression, and if you cannot achieve this goal, then your chances of an interview are virtually impossible.

Even the strongest writers in the world need editors to review their work. A single mistake on a resume' should be caught by either a resume' writer or a potential employer. Which would you prefer? Adept at gauging your qualifications, please understand exactly what employers look for and will describe your accomplishments and skills in the most effective manner. Have you overlooked a duty you performed that might be crucial to obtaining a new job? Please get help from professionals before posting your resume'.

Your resume' is important to showcase your personal brand. They are what companies and individuals see when you apply to jobs. They highlight your skills, tell a story, and explain why your skills are relevant for a particular job. Many times, people create a standard resume' that they use to apply to jobs and, in theory, this document is transferable between different types of jobs. While a standard resume' is good and the exercise of writing down your experiences and skills is helpful, it is always better to customize this to draw out the specific experiences that you have that are applicable to the specific job that you are applying for. Without this, a company may overlook you in favor of others who are more blatantly obvious. When people apply to jobs, they are usually one of a hundred or of a thousand applicants. Because of this, it is critical to make sure that your information is clearly presented. You definitely do not want to rely on the ability of the HR person to guess that you are relevant. Therefore, using a tailored resume' will, in most cases, allow you to bubble to the top of the pile if your skills and experiences are truly relevant. Tailoring a resume' can be as simple as stating the key words that the company is looking for from the job description in your resume' under your experiences, as long as you have these experiences. When you send in your resume', companies evaluate not just your hard skills, but your leadership skills and other soft skills. They want to see that you are a well-rounded person, that you can take initiative, and that you can make the company better for being a part of it. Leadership skills can be gained from leading a group or as well as taking on leadership responsibilities in jobs that you may have worked in (whether or not they are related to the final career choice that you pursue).

Networking abilities are also valued by companies. The more you get involved in the community, the more appealing you could be to the company. Also, important to highlight are internships especially if they are relevant to what you want to do, as well as papers and presentations. Most companies want to see that you have good communication and presentation skills. Typically, if someone has presented numerous times, they have this. As you apply for roles, think about what the reader is evaluating and what they are looking for. Based upon this, tailor your resume to enhance odds of being looked a further. A common mistake is to draft a generic cover letter and use the document for all positions. Those jobs will be never be identical and your introduction to them shouldn't be either. Current research shows that recruiters spend 80% of that six seconds looking at just six things:

**Name**  
**Current title/company**  
**Previous title/company**  
**Previous position, start and end dates**  
**Current position, start and end dates**  
**Education**

It's a useful reminder about how important it is for résumés to be clearly laid out and crisply written. It's usually a mistake to hand your résumé over to someone else to write, especially for steep fee upwards of \$400, who advised never to let someone else write your résumé, because once you get to the interview stage, it will be clear that the résumé language is not yours. As for layout, there are plenty of great samples online, and it's easy enough to copy a clean design from one of those. Career coaches can be helpful, but as coaches and editors, not résumé writers. From my reporting, it's clear that recruiters are using the site more, not less, and that means they are finding a way to scan the information quickly and efficiently. I'd say comparing a LinkedIn profile with a résumé is a red herring. Recruiters and hiring managers will look at both. It would be a mistake to focus on your résumé and ignore your LinkedIn profile. So that is a tip to pursue.

When it comes to keywords, remember to search for job listings online, and then working keywords into your previous job descriptions or mission statement. I do think it's helpful to have a short but specific summary at the top of a résumé, which emphasizes accomplishments, with numbers if possible (e.g., In the second half of 2011, I exceeded monthly sales targets by an average of 40%). The most challenging part of writing a good résumé and LinkedIn profile is making them tell an interesting story about yourself that the reader wants to take in. If you are looking for a job, a recruiter is not your only audience. Most people find jobs not through recruiters but through people they know. When that happens, the résumé reader is already predisposed to want to absorb the information, and will likely spend more than 6.25 seconds reading.