



How to prepare before writing your cover letter

By The N.M. Department of Workforce Solutions

For the Journal

Your cover letter is the first thing a prospective employer reads before scanning your resume or reviewing your job application. Take advantage of the opportunity to provide a professional, well-written first impression when you apply for each job. Investing the time and attention to detail in your letters will help you move to the top of the employer's candidate list. There are several things you can do before you begin to write.

Cover letters serve as both a chance to market yourself as a potential employee and as an introduction to your resume. Before you focus on your letter, work on creating or updating your resume. You will not simply restate your resume in your cover letter, but you want to ensure that you have consistent information in both documents. Check and verify your job titles, names of companies, contact information, and dates of employment. Keep a copy of your resume handy as you work on your cover letter.

A cover letter should accompany your resume but should be more than just a summary of your resume. It is a chance to grab the interest of the hiring manager or interviewer, and explain or expand on your top qualifications and achievements as related to the potential job. It may be overwhelming at first to think about what you should include in your letter. Before you begin to write, make a list of your top strengths, talents, skills, and experience based on your resume and from examples during your career. This may include your accomplishments at a previous job or situations where you exhibited strong leadership or teamwork skills. Brainstorm all the things that you believe make you an excellent potential employee.

Once you have the top things you would like to highlight about yourself in your letter, you will need to relate this information to the job, company and industry. Review the job posting and write down the key job requirements and qualifications. Put yourself in the employer's shoes and think about what you would be looking for if you were screening job applicants.

Also research basic information about the company, including the history, culture, products or services, and location or headquarter information. Know the basics about the industry or field where you are applying. With all of this information, you will be able to cross-match your top skills, qualifications and experience with how it directly relates to this job.

If you have never written a cover letter before, look at examples online before you begin to draft your own. You may even be able to find a cover letter template for the specific industry or career field. Look at examples only to help you get started, do not copy an example letter or template word for word.

If you need additional help writing your cover letter, see if your local Workforce Connection Center offers any cover letter and resume workshops. A link to all the centers around the state can be found at www.dws.state.nm.us.

All of this preparation will not only help you to successfully compose an introduction to your qualifications and resume, it also prepares you for future interviews. Being knowledgeable, confident, and professional in your cover letter will carry throughout your job hunt and will make you stand out as a strong candidate for the job.

This is a regular column written by the N.M. Department of Workforce Solutions. For more information, go to www.dws.state.nm.us.

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