

Cover Letter Dos and Don'ts

Adapted from *Randall S. Hansen, Ph.D., and Katharine Hansen, Ph.D.*

- **Don't** ever apply for a job without a cover letter
- **Do** address your letter to a named individual when possible
- **Don't** use a sexist salutation, such as "Gentlemen" when answering a blind ad
- **Don't** waste your first paragraph by writing a boring introduction. Use the first paragraph to grab the employer's attention; give the employer the reasons you are qualified for the position.
- **Do** send an original letter to each employer.
- **Don't** use cliches, such as, "Enclosed, please find my resume." Employers can see that your resume is enclosed; they don't need you to tell them.
- **Don't** send a cover letter that contains any typos, misspellings, incorrect grammar or punctuation, smudges, or grease from yesterday's lunch.
- **Do** use simple language and uncomplicated sentence structure. Eliminate all unnecessary words.
- **Do** write cover letters that are unique and specific to you.
- **Do** speak to the requirements of the job, especially when responding to an ad.
- **Do** keep your letter brief. It should never be longer than one page, and it's best to keep it well under a full page. Each paragraph should have no more than one to three sentences.
- **Do** tell the employer how you can meet his or her needs and contribute to the company.
- **Do** distinguish your cover letter from those of other job-seekers by quantifying and giving examples that amplify and prove the claims you make in your letter.
- **Do** try to answer the question that the employer will be asking while reading your letter: "Why should I hire this person?"
- **Don't** rehash your resume. You can use your cover letter to highlight the aspects of your resume that are relevant to the position, but you're wasting precious space – and the potential employer's time – if you simply repeat your resume.
- **Do** avoid negativity. Negativity never has a place in a cover letter.
- **Do** be sure the potential employer can reach you.
- **Do** use power verbs
- **Don't** forget to personally sign the letter, preferably in blue ink.