

Job Tips for 50+ Workers

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Get Noticed with Your Cover Letter

Most employers read the cover letter first. If it doesn't grab their attention, they may not read your resume. Think of the cover letter as a commercial for yourself. Your goal is to spark employers' interest so they want to know more about you. A well-crafted cover letter shows what you bring to the company and why you are a good match for the job.

Cover letter basics

- Unless the job posting specifically says otherwise, always include a cover letter.
- It should be no more than one page.
- Address it to a specific person, not just a title or department.
- Refer to the exact job you are applying for, including a reference code if there is one.
- Use active, not passive voice. For example, "I won an award," not "I was awarded."
- Spelling and grammar are crucial. Proofread several times and have someone else proofread it as well.

Composing your cover letter

- Divide it into 3 sections: a brief introduction (1-2 sentences); a middle section with several sentences or bullets; and a brief closing.
- In the first paragraph, tell the employer what job you are applying for, and (if applicable) who referred you.
- In the middle section, briefly describe your skills, show how you'd use your experience in this job, and say why you're applying. This is your chance to sell yourself! Describe a major achievement, use concrete details, cite examples.
- Use keywords from the job posting in your cover letter (and in your resume, of course).
- In the last paragraph, thank the employer and say how to contact you.
- Use online tutorials and sample cover letters to get you started. QuintCareers.com www.quintcareers.com/cover_letter_tutorial.html and The Riley Guide www.rileyguide.com/cover.html can help.

Cover letter mistakes

- DON'T send out a generic cover letter regardless of position. Instead, tailor each cover letter (and resume) to the specific job.
- DON'T waste space on phrases like "I am writing to..." "Let me introduce myself," etc. Instead, get to the point or your letter will not be read.
- DON'T just repeat what is in your resume. Instead, get attention by highlighting your special skills and achievements. Find fresh ways to get your message across.
- DON'T call attention to your age by citing your 20, 30 or 40 years of experience. Instead, use words like "extensive" or "significant" to describe your experience.
- DON'T include your salary requirements. Instead, save the salary discussion until you are close to being offered the job.

Selling yourself

- Take time to think about your "personal brand"—the unique skills and strengths that make you attractive to an employer. Convey your brand in your letter.
- If you don't have an elevator speech, try writing one: a pithy 30-second summary of who you are and what you'd like to do professionally. Not only will this make you feel more confident, but you can use elements of your elevator speech in your cover letter.
- Share your cover letter with friends who will give you their frank reactions. Does your letter feel intriguing? Does it make the reader want to know more about you? If not, go back and revise it, pointing up the things that make you the best candidate for *this* job.

