

By: Louise Fletcher, Monster Contributing Writer

The Internet was supposed to simplify recruiting. Yet the combination of quick and easy online applications and resulting increase in the number of applicants has led to millions of resumes floating around in cyberspace. So how can you manage the flood?

Should you give up on your job posting? Definitely not. There isn't a better way to quickly and inexpensively attract top talent.

Follow these simple strategies to improve the quality of responses you receive and decrease your time to hire.

Be Specific

A quick job search turns up mostly short job postings with no clear definition of job requirements. If half the people reading the job description can imagine themselves to be qualified, your inbox will be full within hours.

To avoid this, work closely with the hiring manager to understand his specific requirements. If your CFO will only hire CPAs, state that requirement clearly. Don't say you need a human resources assistant who "knows benefits" if you actually need an expert in workers' comp. And if you need an executive assistant who has experience organizing huge corporate conventions, don't write "plans company events," which could mean arranging the annual company picnic.

Writing specific posting requirements takes a little longer, but by helping job seekers understand your needs, you'll reduce the number of applications from unqualified candidates and ultimately save more time than you spend.

Be Clear

Make sure the job requirements and job duties are easy to understand by someone who does not already work for your company. Some job descriptions include so much corporate jargon that it's difficult for job seekers to tell if they are qualified, leading many to simply press a button to submit a resume.

For example, one company is currently advertising for a product manager to "create wireframes, product specification/MRDs/PRDs and scope documentation."

Compare it with this posting for a product manager: "Must have a network of contacts amongst key decision makers within the entertainment industry (particularly film and music)." The second is much easier to understand, more specific and likely to attract fewer unqualified applicants.

If you're not sure whether you have included company-speak, have a friend or fellow HR professional review your posting and give you feedback.

Be Up Front

Dissuade potential job seekers from speculative applications by adding a statement explaining that your requirements are firm. For example: "Please read the qualifications for this position carefully. The successful applicant will have to get up to speed quickly and therefore, we will only consider those who meet all the criteria listed above." This won't stop everyone, but it will help deter people who are unsure whether you're serious about your stated requirements.

Be Demanding

Don't make the application process too easy. Instead of just asking for a resume, include an assignment in your posting.

For example, a company looking for a webmaster could include the following: "When applying, please provide an outline of your approach to web site design. The successful applicant will be asked to completely overhaul the site, so we'd like to know how you would approach that process."

Or a retailer looking for a customer service representative could ask applicants to write a cover letter outlining three challenging customer situations they handled successfully. Qualified candidates will be excited to have the

opportunity to stand out from the crowd, while casual applicants will be less willing to put in that much effort for a long-shot application.

To be successful in your recruitment efforts, you must constantly adapt your strategies to suit the market. You must manage the candidate flow so you can effectively service your organization.

By creating specific, clear job postings and an application process that requires effort on the part of the applicant, you can reduce the number of unqualified candidates and increase your chance of making the right hire quickly.

THE WRITER'S HANDBOOK

WRITING COVER LETTERS

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What is a cover letter?

To be considered for almost any position, you will need to write a letter of application. Such a letter introduces you, explains your purpose for writing, highlights a few of your experiences or skills, and requests an opportunity to meet personally with the potential employer.

Precisely because this letter is your introduction to an employer and because first impressions count, you should take great care to write an impressive and effective letter. Remember that the letter not only tells of your accomplishments but also reveals how effectively you can communicate.

The appropriate content, format, and tone for application letters vary according to the position and the personality of the applicant. Thus you will want to ask several people (if possible) who have had experience in obtaining jobs or in hiring in your field to critique a draft of your letter and to offer suggestions for revision.

Despite the differences in what constitutes a good application letter, the suggestions on these pages apply generally.

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What to include in a cover letter

- Try to limit your letter to a single page. Be succinct.
- Assess the employer's needs and your skills. Then try to match them in the letter in a way that will appeal to the employer's self-interest.
- As much as possible, tailor your letter to each job opportunity. Demonstrate, if possible, some knowledge of the organization to which you are applying.
- Write in a style that is mature but clear; avoid long and intricate sentences and paragraphs; avoid jargon. Use action verbs and the active voice; convey confidence, optimism, and enthusiasm coupled with respect and professionalism.
- Show some personality, but avoid hard-sell, gimmicky, or unorthodox letters. Start fast; attract interest immediately. For more information see [Business Letter Format](#).
- Arrange the points in a logical sequence; organize each paragraph around a main point.

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How to organize a cover letter

Below is one possible way to arrange the content of your cover letter.

Opening Paragraph

State why you are writing.

Establish a point of contact (advertisement in a specific place for a specific position; a particular person's suggestion that you write): give some brief idea of who you are (a Senior engineering student at UW; a recent Ph.D. in History).

Paragraph(s) 2(-3)

Highlight a few of the most salient points from your enclosed resume.

Arouse your reader's curiosity by mentioning points that are likely to be important for the position you are seeking.

Show how your education and experience suit the requirements of the position, and, by elaborating on a few points from your resume, explain what you could contribute to the organization.

(Your letter should complement, not restate, your resume.)

Closing paragraph

Stress action. Politely request an interview at the employer's convenience.

Indicate what supplementary material is being sent under separate cover and offer to provide additional information (a portfolio, a writing sample, a sample publication, a dossier, an audition tape), and explain how it can be obtained.

Thank the reader for his/her consideration and indicate that you are looking forward to hearing from him/her.

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Questions to guide your writing

- Who is my audience?
- What is my objective?
- What are the objectives and needs of my audience?
- How can I best express my objective in relationship to my audience's objectives and needs?
- What specific benefits can I offer to my audience and how can I best express them?
- What opening sentence and paragraph will grab the attention of my audience in a positive manner and invite them to read further?
- How can I maintain and heighten the interest and desire of the reader throughout the letter?
- What evidence can I present of my value to my audience?
- If a resume is enclosed with the letter, how can I best make the letter advertise the resume?
- What closing sentence or paragraph will best assure the reader of my capabilities and persuade him or her to contact me for further information?
- Is the letter my best professional effort?
- Have I spent sufficient time drafting, revising, and proofreading the letter?

*From Ronald L. Kraunich, William J. Bausis. *High Impact Resumes & Letters*.
Virginia Beach, VA: Impact Publications, 1982.

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How to format a cover letter

- Type each letter individually, or use a word processor.
- Use good quality bond paper.
- Whenever possible, address each employer by name and title.
- Each letter should be grammatically correct, properly punctuated, and perfectly spelled. It also should be immaculately clean and free of errors. Proofread carefully!
- Use conventional business correspondence form. If you are not certain of how to do this, ask for help at the Writing Center.

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For further information on cover letters contact the [Career Advising and Planning Services](#) and take a look at our class on [Writing Resumes and Cover Letters](#) (NB: this course not offered during the summer).

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John Doe
Administrative Assistant

Indented Form

5 Hill Street
Madison, Wisconsin 53700

15 March 2005

Ms. Helen Jones
President
Jones, Jones & Jones
123 International Lane
Boston, Massachusetts 01234

Dear Ms. Jones:

Ah, business letter format--there are block formats, and indented formats, and modified block formats . . . and who knows what others. To simplify matters, we're demonstrating the indented format on this page, one of the two most common formats. For authoritative advice about all the variations, we highly recommend *The Gregg Reference Manual*, 9th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001), a great reference tool for workplace communications. There seems to be no consensus about such fine points as whether to skip a line after your return address and before the date: some guidelines suggest that you do; others do not. Let's hope that your business letter succeeds no matter which choice you make!

If you are using the indented form, place your address at the top, with the left edge of the address aligned with the center of the page. Skip a line and type the date so that it lines up underneath your address. Type the inside address and salutation flush left; the salutation should be followed by a colon. For formal letters, avoid abbreviations.

Indent the first line of each paragraph one-half inch. Skip lines between paragraphs.

Instead of placing the closing and signature lines flush left, type them in the center, even with the address and date above, as illustrated here. Now doesn't that look professional?

Sincerely,

John Doe

For further information about letters see [Writing Cover Letters](#).

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