

CAREER SEARCH AMERICA

CAREER TRANSITION TOOLBOX WHITEPAPER

THE CAREER-CHANGE COVER LETTER:

WHEN TO USE ONE, AND HOW TO WRITE IT



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INTRODUCTION

A cover letter is an elegant way to introduce yourself. A career change cover letter on the other hand, has to impress and persuade.

It is your chance to explain, in no more than 3-4 paragraphs, why you bring value to the prospective employer.

If a cover letter is a handshake, a career change cover letter is your sales pitch, to stimulate the curiosity of the hiring manager to turn the page to your accompanying resume. It's not what you have done and it's not just all about you. It's more importantly about what you can bring to the table and how. You should devote at least half the cover letter to your transferable skills, and how they will create value to your new employer.

You need a career change cover letter when you want to leave the job you are in behind to move to a new direction. As your letter competes against others already in your new field of choice, your resume cover letter has to be a standout.

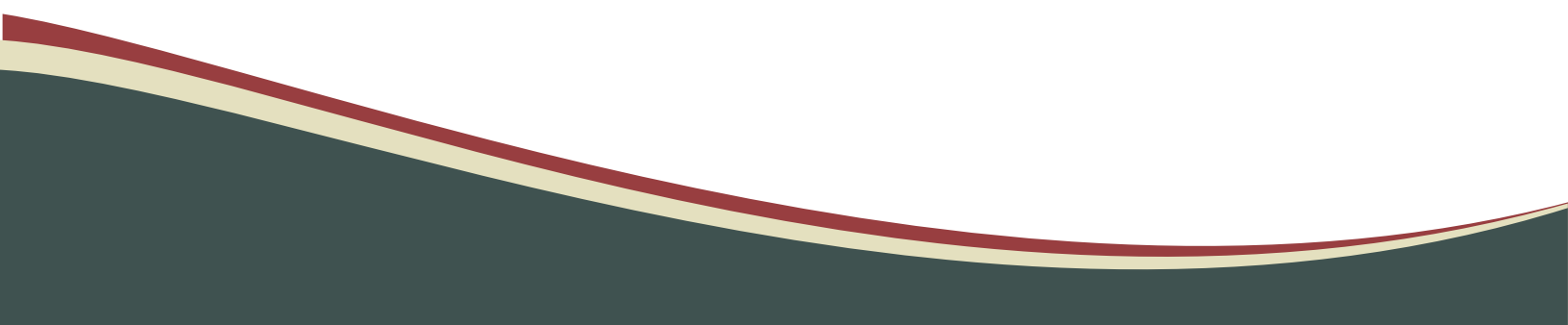
WHEN SHOULD YOU USE A COVER LETTER?

In this day and age when everything is done electronically, a cover letter is still necessary and gives you an edge when written effectively.

Even if you are emailing in your resume and application, you can include the career change cover letter in the text of your email message or preceding your resume in the same attachment.

Of course, you may just make a doubly strong impression and send in a hard copy of your career change cover letter plus your resume and send it in by mail. You get noticed for taking that initiative, and may just double your rate of interviews.

Before we get into what you should do, let's highlight what you should not do:

- Don't be long winded – no more than 3-4 paragraphs. Remember the human resources and hiring personnel are busy people and don't have time to go into your life story.
 - Don't be afraid to state you are a career changer. Change is a way of life nowadays.
 - Don't focus on the past and what you have achieved in your current career. That has little relevance to the person reading the cover letter.
 - Don't overburden with detail. Discussions of salary ranges or geographic requirements don't belong in a career change cover letter.
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CRAFTING THE COVER LETTER: PITCH, PRESENTATION AND A STRONG FINISH

PITCH

Finding the right pitch isn't always easy. Here are the things you can do successfully make your pitch and get your foot in the door.

- Ignite the employer's interest by stating why and how you are a value proposition. This means that you highlight your transferable skills and demonstrate how you can leverage these skills to achieve goals that are meaningful to the new firm. Examples speak volumes, so substantiate your transferable skills by referring to specific past achievements in previous jobs.
- State your case effectively. Be clear with your reasons as to why you are changing careers and what you stand to gain from it. Be ready to articulate what's in it for the new employer; no one wants to feel that you are running away from something you're unhappy with, rather than moving towards a desirable goal.
- Immerse yourself in research about your new career. That way, you can more effectively articulate why you will create value in the new company.
- Create different career change cover letters for different sectors or industries. There's no one size fits all, so tailor the cover letters to each specific company.
- Highlights qualities that don't quite fit in a resume, such as your passion which is motivating you to seek a new career.
- Make sure that your writing is free of typos, bad spelling and incorrect grammar; get a friend with good language skills or a resume writing expert to review your resume cover letter format and writing.
- If possible, show your resume and cover letters to a couple of people already in the field to ensure you get the phrasing and technical language right. The more feedback you can get, the better.

PRESENTATION

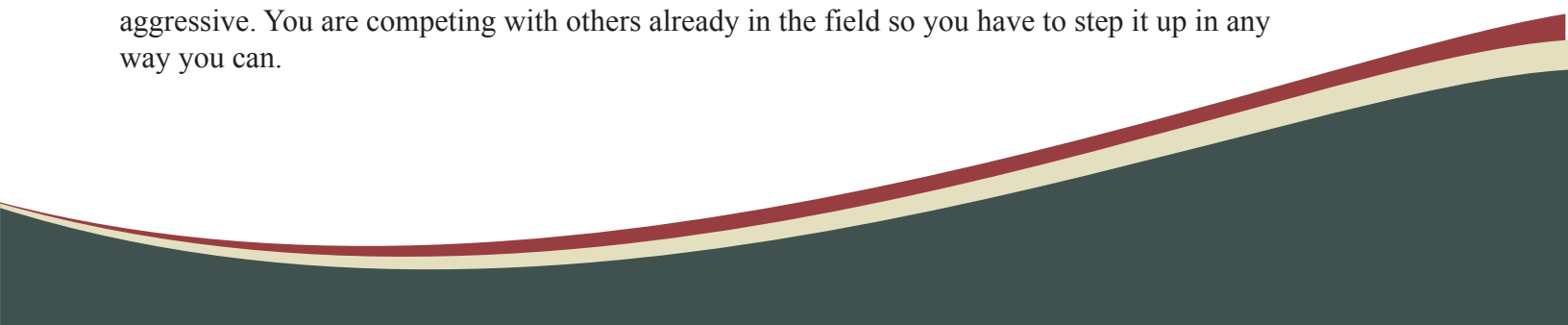
Formatting is an important touch to creating a career change cover letter that wows. Think of formatting as the packaging and the more care you put into it, the more professionally you'll come across and the more concretely you support your pitch.

Being thoughtful with your formatting and presentation suggests that you care and you are committed to doing everything that is necessary to support your new move. After all, all of us appreciate nicely-wrapped presents, so why should your cover letter be any different?

If you are unsure about current styles in formatting, check out career change resume cover letter samples online to find out what acceptable and what isn't.

THE STRONG FINISH

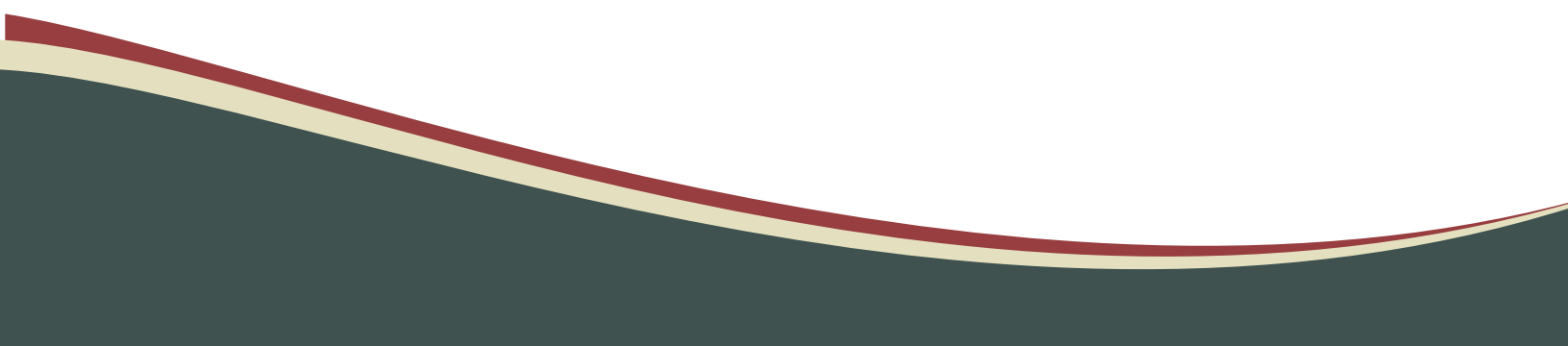
Don't send in an application and hope for the best. Complete your career change cover letter with a strong finish by explaining how you intend to follow up and when. As a career changer, you have to be aggressive. You are competing with others already in the field so you have to step it up in any way you can.



SUMMARY

Hiring managers take any excuse they can to throw a resume in the reject pile to narrow down desirable candidates. Don't give them any cause to do the same to yours. Take care of these details. Your career change cover letter is the thin end of the wedge, and before you know it, the door is wide open.

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

- Always accompany your letter with a cover letter customized for each recipient
 - Get to the point: three to four paragraphs...tops!
 - Be upfront about your career change. It's a modern day fact-of-life
 - Don't focus on the past. Remember: your reader is worried about the future
 - Trim supporting details to only the most important and relevant
 - Include specific examples of your accomplishments that illustrate the value you bring
 - Make sure your letter is effectively formatted and error-free
 - End with a strong finish including how you plan to follow-up
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- A decorative graphic at the bottom of the page consisting of a dark teal background with a wavy, layered border in shades of red and gold.