Writing a Cover Letter and Doing It Well

A well-written cover letter gives you an opportunity to clearly demonstrate your suitability for the desired position. Here are some tips to help you land an interview.

**Proofread, Proofread, Proofread**
Do more than just run spellcheck. Read through your cover letter several times. Ask a trusted friend or colleague to do the same. If the cover letter needs to demonstrate your effectiveness as a professional communicator, make sure that it is free of spelling and grammar errors.

**Don’t Play Coy**
Be very clear in the opening paragraph—if not in the first sentence—about why you are applying. Identify the open position and, if applicable, the person who recommended that you apply. It is helpful for an employer to understand that someone they know and/or work with has suggested you apply for the vacancy.

**Expand, Don’t Repeat**
Do not repeat or list information from your résumé, such as specific educational or previous employment details. Use the cover letter to expand on a project that you’ve worked on, or to link skills you’ve acquired with those listed in the job description or posting. You want to show how the work you have done helps a future employer meet a current challenge.

**Make It Personal**
Whenever possible, identify a specific person to whom you can address your letter, such as the department director or the human resources professional handling the application process. Mirror the company’s tone by reading its website, its LinkedIn profile and other information. Show that you understand the company’s culture and how you can complement and add to the team.

**It’s Not About You**
How frequently do you count the word “I”? You are writing to show the employer how you can help them and why you want to work with them.

**Close As Clearly As You Opened**
Rather than say, “I look forward to hearing from you,” conclude with a more proactive statement. Close with a clear statement about when you will follow up with the employer, typically one week if you are applying to a posted vacancy or up to two weeks if you are proposing yourself for a position that was not explicitly posted.

**Don’t Get Carried Away**
Your cover letter should not be longer than a page. Period.

**Resources**
*Getting From College to Career*, Lindsey Pollak (Harper Business, 2012)
*“Job and Internship Guide,”* UC Berkeley Career Center, 2012–2013