




Key Elements of a Cover Letter

Whether you submit your resume on paper or electronically, you should always include a cover letter. It should be a one-page document with three strong paragraphs.

 **THE FIRST PARAGRAPH** is a statement about the position for which you are applying, with a line about your certification.

 **THE SECOND PARAGRAPH** is where you want to sell yourself and inspire the employer to read your resume. (**TIP:** Repurpose your teaching philosophy to help write this section. See Page 22.) Highlight an aspect of your professional experience that sets you apart in a positive way, such as student teaching abroad, working with at-risk youth, or moving a class to online learning.

 **THE THIRD PARAGRAPH** clarifies which steps in the district's application process you have completed. It ends with your declaration of interest to interview in the district.

TIP: Guard against **TYPOS** by asking at least two people to read and edit each letter you send. Since most people create a **TEMPLATE** for their letters, make sure that the right cover letter goes to the correct district. It is very important to sign the cover letter **LEGIBLY**, even with an electronic signature, since employers want to know that their teachers have legible handwriting.

How to Make Your Resume Stand Out

Every time you apply for a job, you hope your resume wows the principal enough to win an on-site interview. The truth is, getting in the door is less guesswork and more strategy. Try these pointers to help your resume rise to the top—and land your dream job!

BLAST PAST THE RESUME READERS.

Principals do not always read or even receive all resumes submitted for an open position. Traditionally, employees in the personnel office complete preliminary sorts and may spend only 10 seconds on each resume. If the top half of the page stands out or precisely matches the job description, then they will read further. Follow these steps to help your resume get noticed in 10 seconds or less:

Print out your resume and fold it in half, then look at the top half. Can a reader find your certification or licensure, most recent experience, and words or phrases that match a requirement from the job advertisement? Be sure to include any experience with online programs as well.

Include a professional profile at the top that highlights your unique qualifications. Avoid starting with a general job objective, such as “seeking an elementary school teaching position.”

EXAMPLE

For a job listing seeking fully certified teachers for grades 2–5 who have experience in a Title I school, your professional profile might look like this:

Fully certified (Iowa K–5 license with a reading intervention endorsement), my student teaching included 15 weeks in a Title I school with fourth- and fifth-grade students and 20 hours of online reading intervention with at-risk students.

OUTSMART RESUME ROBOTS.

Most school districts now use matching programs to sort resumes and often cover letters. So how do you write a resume to impress a computer? The answer lies in the keywords that appeared in the job description. The sorting programs look for specialized vocabulary and buzzwords used in the teaching profession. And, since 2020, all employers are seeking teachers with remote or online teaching experience.

EXAMPLE

Sample job description: *Clare County District seeks multiple middle school teachers for language arts, math, and science positions, 6–8. Candidates must have Arizona licensure for middle grade instruction in two areas. Successful candidates should have experience with one or more of the following: remote teaching experience, English language learners (sheltered classes), reading diagnosis and support, Spanish or at-risk students.*

Match your professional profile to the job: *Fully licensed (Arizona middle grade instruction in math and language arts),*



I have a year of experience at Dane County Middle School working with English language learners in sixth- and seventh-grade sheltered math courses, including four weeks of online teaching. Currently completing my reading diagnosis endorsement, I actively seek a position where I can continue to help at-risk students succeed.

An expanded version of the professional profile becomes the first paragraph of a cover letter: A computer finds the words that match; a report is generated to the human resources director; and a principal will read this resume along with the candidate's other materials.

BE A STRONG CLOSER.

A teacher's resume includes education, teaching experience, and other work experiences, especially your all-important technology skills. These should all be written with bullet points, not sentences.

When listing volunteer work, past jobs, or special skills, strive to match to the job advertisement. For example, if the position you seek includes sponsoring the yearbook, and you have experience with publishing, be sure to include that.

EXAMPLE

Other work experience:

- *Summer Job, 2017, 2018, newsletter editor for Camp Wanasee*
- *Assisted the newspaper editor and student photographer, student teaching semester*

Employers also look for experience with similar student populations, standardized testing, and student achievement. And they often seek a candidate who can offer extra skills, such as coaching or leading activities.

Don't bother including basic activities that everyone else does, such as bulletin boards, lunch supervision, or grading papers. Your high school experience is only relevant if it is unique. If you were a team captain of a sports team, that supports a resume for a coach; acting in plays supports a theater teacher position.

KNOW WHAT TODAY'S EMPLOYERS WANT.

Past behavior is the best predictor of future performance, so employers want to see evidence of prior success. For hard skills, include your training in delivering instruction, raising student achievement, teaching with technology, and managing a classroom. For soft skills, include your passion and ability to relate to students and colleagues.

Carefully consider each line, ensuring that you are representing yourself as a highly trained and experienced teacher, ready to do the job. Tailor your resume to the criteria listed. Expand on these skills in your cover letter, and of course, discuss your successes in the interview.

—Dr. Mary C. Clement is a professor of teacher education at Berry College, in Mount Berry, Ga., and a nationally recognized expert on teacher hiring.