

THE COVER LETTER: A TEASER AD FOR YOUR RESUME

Brad: I know exactly what your cover letter says, yet I can assure you I'm not a mind reader. How do I know this?

Brad: Let me guess. It's full-page, single-spaced block type, four paragraphs, arranged exactly like this: Paragraph one – how I heard about the job. Paragraph two – why I want the job. Paragraph three – why I'd be great at the job. And, paragraph four – how I'm going to follow up about the job. In addition, you've taken what's already on your resume, and simply rewritten it in paragraph form. Virtually every college student writes the exact same cover letter. Recruiting directors are flooded with resumes, and they only spend about 15 seconds looking at each one. Now try tacking on a full page, extremely boring document that basically says what's already on the resume. How many cover letters do you think actually get read? None. That being said, you still need to create one to show that you're truly interested in the job. But here's the trick – make that cover letter different. Think about your cover letter as a teaser ad for you resume. Make it short. Keep some of the sentences just a few words long, make some of the paragraphs just one sentence long. Make it personal and be conversational. But, beware, there's a fine line between clever and stupid. Let's take a look:

Student: *(reading)* Dear Ms. Marhula. Baby Food. Yes, baby food got me interested in advertising. I was taking my first advertising class in college, and we were comparing Gerber and Beech Nut. I was fascinated by the power of advertising to affect attitudes and behavior, especially in such a creative way.

Brad: How can you read that first paragraph and not want to read a little bit more? Now, this certainly isn't the perfect cover letter for everyone, but it does give you a sense of what you want to do. Some other great topics could be a unique opportunity or great experience you had, a strong passion for the job responsibilities, or even a referral that you have to the company or in the industry. Your career center will definitely have some other great ideas. But the key is to tell a story, your story, and not just repeat what is on the resume. Good luck.