

BREAKING THE RULES WITH YOUR COVER LETTER

When I was an office manager, way back when Huey Lewis and the News was still topping the charts, the veep of human resources took me under his wing. We would sit in his office with a stack of resumes, and anything on colored paper, or with a photo or lollipop attached, or which deviated in any way from the strict rules of traditional resumes or cover letters, ended up in the "round file," headed to our special "landfill storage facility."



Recently a friend of mine sent me the following cover letter, which he wrote and actually used

recently. Here it is in full:

Dear Sir or Madam, The "Freelance Proofreader" position that [company redacted] posted on [job site redacted] caught my attention, and I would like to apply for the job. Please find my resume with salary history attached to this email. I'm a professional proofreader and copywriter with over five years of experience writing, editing, and proofreading both web and print media (catalogs, brochures, product descriptions, etc.). I began my career in children's entertainment as a copywriter for MGA Entertainment where I wrote and proofed instruction manuals for children's toys and games. I am well-acquainted... OK, enough with this dull cover letter. You've probably read 50 of these smarmy, cookie cutter things already today and your eyes are glazed over. I'm going to go out on a limb and just be real for a change. I am not just a proofreader. I am THE proofreader. I see the typos, misspellings and style inconsistencies that most people don't notice - even on bumper stickers. I routinely re-write product descriptions I see while shopping online, then send my suggestions in to the company - just for fun. When a co-worker can't spell a word or identify a font, he or she knows who can - me. I love that your company is producing materials that will make a positive impact on today's youth, who are going to be tomorrow's leaders whether we like it or not. Don't get me wrong, I loved writing copy for the Bratz fan club, but telling 9-year olds how to apply make-up and pick out color schemes isn't going change the world a whole lot. Your product is. I want to be a part of that. I'm good at what I do because I love my job, and my 5+ years of professional copywriting, copyediting and proofreading experience highlight this success. I'm presently seeking a permanent, full-time position with an employer who will appreciate the enthusiastic attitude I bring to work each day, my dazzling leadership abilities, and the way I can proofread a booklet, brochure, catalog... like the pro that I am. Print out my resume, take a look at it - I'm exactly what you're looking for, trust me. Feel free to call me at your earliest convenience, or better yet, call me right now so we can schedule an interview where I will absolutely wow you, especially after I take the proofreading test. Thank you for your time and consideration and I look forward to hearing from you soon!
Sincere Regards, [name redacted]

Now on the one hand, I would say *never* send a cover letter like this. Human resources people are allergic to "creativity" and "cleverness." On the other hand -- I love this letter. Cover letters are supposed to provide a quick glance at who the applicant is, and why he or she should be brought in for an interview. And this letter does that. It could be argued that the content in this letter, the attitude and the sales pitch, are more appropriate for the interview itself than the cover letter. That's true. But in this economy, perhaps going outside the bounds is the only way to get noticed. What do you think -- showy creativity or professional restraint? Let us know in the comments!