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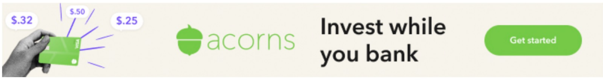
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EARNING

'Do I really need to write a cover letter?' 3 common job-search questions answered by experts

"Your resume should be exactly long enough to concisely convey your experience."

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Lauren Hans
@LAUHANS

Twenty/20

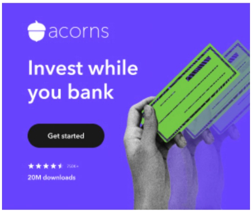
The current job market is one for the record books: As of the last day of June 2021, the U.S. had more than 10 million job openings, according to the Labor Department. That's the highest number ever recorded.

At the same time, in recent months, millions of Americans have quit their jobs in search of better work in what is being dubbed the "Great Resignation." In June, another 3.9 million workers quit, just shy of the record high set in April.

All the work of a job search, including formatting resumes and writing cover letters, can lead to a lot of stress — and a lot of uncertainty. Here are answers to three common questions, according to career experts who participated in a recent Grow Twitter chat.

'Do I really need to write a cover letter?'

Experts agree: A cover letter is essential to a successful application. Hannah Morgan, a job search strategist at Career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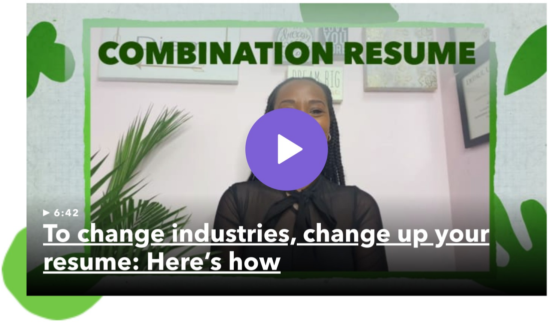
Sherpa, said that your cover letter's purpose is to explain two things: Why you are interested in the job/company, and what makes you uniquely qualified for the role. "Why would you NOT take the time to let a potential employer know this? Consider it a pre interview!" she tweeted.

"This is your chance to add details that don't make sense on a resume, but could help your case to land an interview," added Amanda Augustine, career expert at TopResume.



Video by Courtney Stith

Don't send the same letter with every application, though. It's important to make sure your cover letter is unique to the employer and job description, said Angelina Darrisaw, the founder and CEO of C-Suite Coach. "If you are applying for many jobs at once, really make sure to personalize it and use the correct hiring manager name, position, and company," she tweeted.

While you're drafting your cover letter, you might wonder: Does anyone actually read these things? Yes, said Tega Edwin, founder of Her Career Doctor. "I recently surveyed some recruiters in my network and 64% of them said they read cover letters." she tweeted. "Obviously, that sample size isn't generalizable, but cover letters are a great way to tell your career story."

'Should my resume be one page or two?'

There's room for debate as to the ideal length of a CV, experts say. While the conventional wisdom is often to stick to one page, some experts say a two-page resume can be fine, or even preferred. "A ResumeGo study found that recruiters are 2.3 times as likely to prefer 2-pg resumes over 1-pg resumes, regardless of a candidate's years of experience," tweeted Augustine.

That said, it matters how much experience you're summing up: "My rule of thumb is less than 5 years of experience – stick to one page," tweeted Edwin. "Two can be OK if the experience calls for it but remember that most recruiters skim your resume in just 6 seconds before deciding if they'll spend more time reviewing it."

Ignore arbitrary rules about length altogether, suggested Angelique Rewers, founder of BoldHaus, a consulting firm that helps small businesses land corporate clients. "Your resume should be exactly long enough to *concisely* convey your experience and value to employers, and not any longer," she tweeted.

▶ 9:44
How to write a resume hiring managers will notice

Video by Mariam Abdallah

'How do I explain a gap in my resume?'

That depends on the length and nature of the gap. "Cover letters are the ideal place to address multi-year gaps," said Rewers. "Gaps less than 2 years, address in the interview. Remember: The goal of the resume is to get to the interview. From there, you can address on a 1:1 level. Employers get that life happens."

Have a prepared answer for the interview, focusing on how the time helped you improve, Darrisaw said. "Did you use that time off to do any volunteer work or training? Were you job searching? Taking care of family? Share that," she tweeted. If the time off was used for something specific, "some even recommend adding the time off as a position on your resume," she added.

Keep your answer "short and upbeat," Augustine recommended. "Your goal: Explain how the experience helped you build skills and/or discover what you're looking for in your next job/employer."

The good news, she said, is that "a TopResume survey found that employers [are] NOT as concerned about lengthy employment gaps now than before #COVID19."

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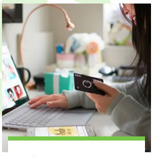

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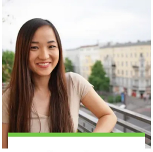

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