e-Mail can shorten the time spent looking for a job, but it has its own etiquette and offers plenty of opportunities for potentially expensive mistakes. Just as it's generally advisable to dress professionally for a job interview, try to make your e-mail as businesslike as possible. "First impressions are made not with a handshake but with words on a computer screen," says Jared Flesher on the Wall Street Journal's Executive Career Site (http://www.WSJ.com). He offers tips on how your e-mailed cover letter is more likely to lead to an interview.

1) Forget what Instant Messenger has taught you. When instant messaging friends, abbreviations, all lowercase letters, and no punctuation may be the rule. In business, however, "stick to the rules your English teacher taught you." Use spell check and grammar check functions, print out your cover letter and resume, proofread carefully, and ask someone else to proofread them too.

2) Don't be cute. Use an undecorated white background with black Times New Roman or Arial 12-point font for both cover letter and resume. If your cell phone is your contact number, ensure that your voice mail is appropriate. That means no music. You may need to change your e-mail address, too. Messages from "Slackerboy@" or "Domesticgoddess@" almost certainly won't impress. Address the recipient as "Dear Ms. Chan" or "Dear Mr. Park." Do not ever begin with "Hi" or "Hiya."

3) Customize your cover letter to the job. Don't just cut and paste the same letter to every enterprise with an opening. Show that you know something about the company and/or position you are applying for.

4) Don't ramble. Remember, personnel officers have only seconds to read each message. They want to see the titles of the most recent couple of positions, names of enterprises worked for, and educational background. Two paragraphs should do it.

5) If attaching the cover letter, write a brief note in your e-mail. Write a short (four sentences maximum) message in the text box indicating why you're interested in working for the company. Don't be creative in the subject line. "Candidate seeking the position of [name of position]" is recommended.