

A cover letter is a marketing tool that accompanies every resume. It is an opportunity to highlight strengths, show how you can meet the employer's needs, and convey your enthusiasm, motivation, and sincere interest in the job. It should be concise, attractive, well written and focused to the individual position.

## TIPS FOR WRITING EFFECTIVE COVER LETTERS

### Be brief

- Select your major selling points and keep your sentences concise and to the point.
- Keep it to one page. Typically, three or four paragraphs are ideal.

### Open with a strong sentence

- Create a unique opener so they want to read on. Think about what's important to the interviewer.
- Show enthusiasm and passion. Let the employer know how excited you are about the opportunity.

### Don't restate your entire resume in sentence form

- Highlight experiences that relate to job requirements.
- Make **CONNECTIONS**. Have the employer understand why you'd be the best fit for the position, based on what you've done and what you can bring to the organization.
- Describe what qualities and skills make you unique to help the reader form a favorable impression.
- Avoid starting all sentences with "I". Instead, use words such as "*Because I have done...*" or "*Having worked at...*".

### Be focused and avoid "form" letters

- Tailor each cover letter to the position for which you are applying instead of using the same letter each time.
- Address employer's needs by linking your strengths/talents with the benefits you bring to the position.
- Create the impression that the letter was written for a specific reason, or just for that particular employer, even if you are using much of the same information.

### Be honest and tell them what they need to know

- Let the employer know *why* they should consider interviewing you.
- Show strengths, achievements and career goals. Whenever possible, quantify experiences.
- Don't lie or exaggerate. Let strengths and achievements speak for themselves.

### Avoid sounding self-serving

- Concentrate on the employer's needs. State what **you can do for them**, not what they can do for you.
- Explain your accomplishments and what you can offer, not what you hope to gain from the job.

### Be realistic

- Focus in on what employers are looking for within your letter, such as skills, education and ability to be trained.
- Realize employers do not expect applicants to meet every qualification in the job description. Highlight those that are most relevant and most important, as well as skills you're willing to develop.

### Make sure it is professional

- Proofread every letter. Have others read them as well.
- Never rely on the computer's spellchecker. Spelling and grammatical errors can cost you the job!
- Don't be "conversational" or "cute", even if you know the employer. Keep it strictly professional.
- Use high-quality paper (preferably the same as your resume) and appropriate business letter format.
- Sign the cover letter and place it on top of your resume to be sent to each employer. **DO NOT STAPLE.**

## SAMPLE COVER LETTER FORMAT

Your Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code  
Date

Contact Person's Name  
Title (if available)  
Company, School, Organization  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms.\_\_\_\_(Add Last Name Only Here)\_\_\_\_\_:

**First Section:** State the position or general area of work that interests you. Mention how you learned about the job opening and why you are interested in it. Also, mention any contacts that might be relevant.  
*(generally 2-3 sentences)*

**Second Section:** Indicate why you should be considered a candidate, focusing on how your skills can fulfill the needs of the company or school. Relate your experiences to their needs and mention results and achievements. Refer to your enclosed resume, but do not just restate what is on it. Tailor the letter to the specific position, demonstrate your knowledge of the firm, and convey your interest in the industry. This may be more than one paragraph.  
*(generally 4-5 sentences each paragraph)*

**Third Section:** Close by making a specific request for an interview. Be assertive! Give a time frame within which you will be available and say that you will follow up with a phone call to arrange a mutually convenient interview time. (Research shows that the most effective period of time to follow-up is within 36 hours after you expect the employer has received your letter.) Offer to provide any additional information, which may be needed. Thank the employer for his/her time and consideration. Be sure to include your phone number.  
*(generally 3-4 sentences)*

Sincerely,

*Sign Your Name*

Type Your Name

Enclosure