

GETTING STARTED WITH A COVER LETTER

PURPOSE OF A COVER LETTER

The purpose of a cover letter is to ignite an employer's interest in you as a candidate. This is your opportunity to elaborate on your expertise and experience. An effective letter:

- Introduces the resume; gets the reader excited to learn more about you.
- Is tailored to each position and employer; no two cover letters should look the same!
- Allows you to convey passion, enthusiasm and personality (balance warmth with professionalism). The tone should mirror the culture of your field.
- Serves as a writing sample.

IMPORTANT: Analyze the position description carefully, pick out key phrases and infuse them into your document. Try to match your letter point by point to the requirements by emphasizing key parts of your resume.

TIPS FOR CREATING A WINNING COVER LETTER

- **Keep It Short.** The ideal cover letter is roughly a half-page to a page in length. A concise letter demonstrates that you are focused and have strong communication skills.
- **State The Position and Your Source.** The recruiter who reads your letter may be hiring for several positions. Clearly state the job title in the first paragraph of the letter, preferably in the first sentence, and how you learned of the position.
- **Personalize Each Letter and Explain Why You Want The Job.** Always answer, "Why do I want to do this work?" and "Why do I want to work for this organization?" Clearly state how the position fits into your overall career plans and what you find exciting about the particular position or company. Take the time to research each organization and personalize each letter. This approach is much more effective than sending out hundreds of identical form letters.
- **Clearly Describe Ways You Will Contribute – Not How You Expect To Benefit.** After carefully reading the job description, write a paragraph outlining one or two specific examples of how your skills and experiences fit the company's needs.
- **Match, But Don't Reiterate, Your Resume.** Never claim experience in your cover letter that isn't reflected on your resume. At the same time, your cover letter shouldn't simply restate your resume. When you explain how you will contribute, refer to an experience or skill on your resume to show how you will add value to the company.
- **Focus on Your Strengths, Not Your Weaknesses.** Even if you think the position is out of reach, your job is to convince the recruiter you are qualified. Keep the letter positive by focusing on your transferable skills and unique accomplishments.
- **Minimize The Use Of "I"s.** Don't overuse "I"s in your document. Vary your sentence structure to keep the reader engaged.

- **State How/When You Plan To Follow-up.** Too many job seekers never follow up after sending a resume. Clearly explain in your letter the manner in which you will follow up and when you will do so. If the job listing includes a phone number, indicate that you will call within a specified time to discuss the possibility of an interview. If not, consider calling anyway, unless the ad specifically requests "no calls." You may also consider a follow-up e-mail if you sent your resume electronically.
- **Proofread.** Using a spell check is not enough. Many recruiters will dismiss even the most qualified candidate if there is one typo. Reread your letter two or three times, then give it to someone else for their review. Even if your letter is free of typos, poor grammar also makes a bad impression.
- **Read Samples and Personalize.** Read as many cover letters as possible and find ideas and wording that you like for your own letters.

Never underestimate the power of correspondence in your job search. Your cover letter, in particular, is an important marketing tool which highlights your most attractive qualifications as a potential employee and, if well written, will often lead the employer to your resume.

Business Letter Format

Your cover letter should be prepared on a computer and printed with a quality printer. Use standard business letter format.

Your Street Address
City, State, Zip

Date of Writing

Ms. Jane Doe
Title
Company
Street Address
City, State, Zip

Dear Ms. Doe: (If unknown, write "Dear Hiring Manager")

First paragraph: Explain why you are writing; identify the position and how you became aware of it. Explain why you are interested in the organization. Indicate in summary form your strongest qualifications for the position. If someone such as a professor, former employer, or family member referred you to the employer, this is also the best place to mention that person's name and to note that he or she suggested you write.

Second (and possibly third) paragraph: Refer to your enclosed resume. Outline your strongest qualifications in more detail and show how they match the position requirements. As much as possible, provide evidence of your related work, extra-curricular, and academic experiences and accomplishments that are relevant to the position and/or potential employer. You may need an additional paragraph for this purpose, but keep your letter as brief as possible. It should not be more than one page long.

Closing paragraph: Request an interview and indicate how and when you can be contacted. Suggest that you will call to discuss interview possibilities. Thank the reader for his/her consideration.

Sincerely,

(Handwritten signature if mailed)
Your Name Typed