

The cover letter

A cover letter is a brief letter that you include with your résumé any time you send it to a prospective employer. In most situations, your cover letter will be your first contact with an employer, addressed to a specific individual and closed with your signature. This is your chance to really shine—to let your prospective employer know why you're the best person for the job. Remember, unlike your résumé, your cover letter should be different for each employer. Don't send out a "form letter." A customized letter lets the employer know that you're really interested in *that* job, at *that* company!

Parts of a cover letter

Introduction—Who are you and why are you writing?

Introduce yourself and say why you are writing to the employer. Answer the reader's question: "Why am I reading this letter?" Name the position or field you're interested in, how you learned of the opening or organization, and, if appropriate, who referred you. In a sentence or two, explain what skills make you the best candidate for the position.

Body—How do your skills match the requirements of the position?

In one or two succinct paragraphs, match your background to the experience and skill requirements of the job. It's best to summarize your qualifications and give specific examples. You shouldn't repeat what is stated in your résumé; instead, expand on your experience that relates to the job and the employer. Also, identify any transferable skills, strengths, accomplishments, and results.

Closing—What's next?

This paragraph should be brief. Simply summarize the letter, and indicate that you've enclosed your résumé. End the letter with an active statement, such as an offer to contact the employer within a specific period of time, usually one to two weeks. Always confirm how the employer can reach you. Close the letter by thanking the reader for his or her time, and don't forget to sign.



Tips for writing cover letters

Address your cover letter to a real person. Don't use the phrase To Whom it May Concern. Address your letter to the person in charge of interviewing or hiring. If you're not sure who that is, try to find out before responding to the ad.

Show them you're interested! Let them see that you've done your homework and that you know something about the company.

Include information relevant to the job you're seeking. Show them that you've thought about how your skills and abilities match their needs.

Don't just describe your background—your résumé takes résumé to life by highlighting one or two of your most abilities.

Write in clear, concise sentences. Keep your average 20 words, and keep paragraphs to under five lines. more than four paragraphs.

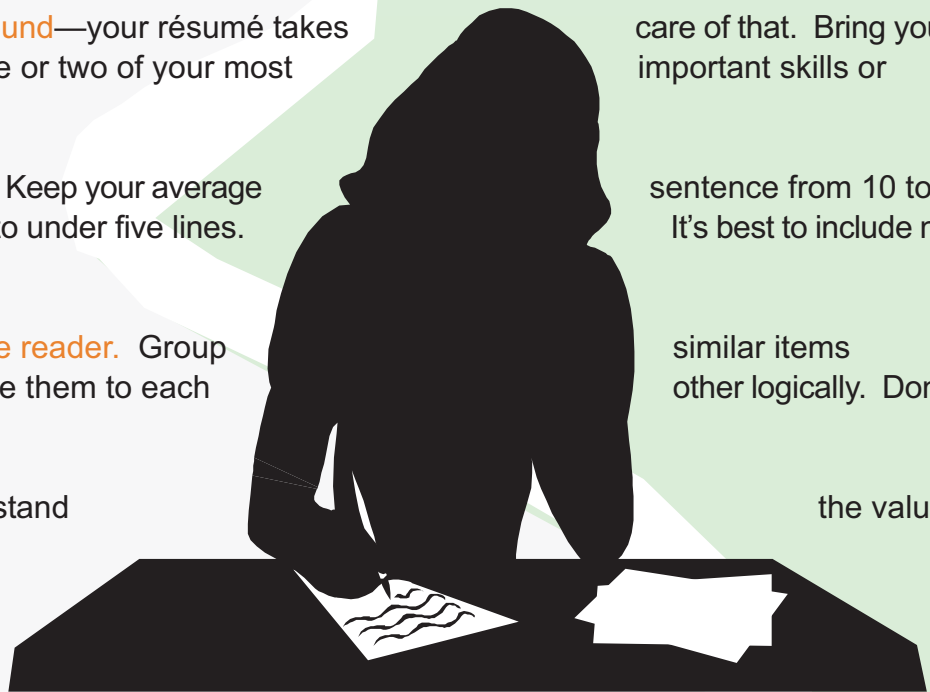
Organize your information for the reader. Group together in paragraphs and relate them to each lump unrelated topics together.

Be brief. This shows you understand of the reader's time.

Be personable, but professional. Stay away from slang or jargon.

Make sure your cover letter is pleasing to the eye. Be sure that you use the same paper for both your résumé and cover letter. Use high quality paper, and never send a photocopy of a résumé or a cover letter.

Type! Except for your signature, your cover letter must be typed. Don't forget to sign!



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Sample cover letter #1

July 8, 2002

Mr. Ronald R. Young, President
Desktop Publishing, Incorporated
19 East 47th Street
Miami, Florida 53041

Dear Mr. Young,

Cheryl Miller, your Graphic Design Supervisor, recently told me that you will soon have an opening for a Graphic Designer at Desktop Publishing, Inc. I am enclosing my résumé for your consideration.

I will graduate next month from the University of Minnesota with a bachelor's degree in graphic design. My training has primarily focused on Web-based design, which seems to fit quite well with Desktop Publishing's goals for expanding in that area. In addition, I have had extensive practical experience which I think would benefit Desktop Publishing, Inc. During my three years as secretary for Third Presbyterian Church of Minneapolis, and in my volunteer work at the Minneapolis Chapter of Homes for Families, I took it upon myself to create a Web site for both agencies, www.ThirdPresby.org and www.HforFMN.org. These experiences taught me the importance of listening carefully to clients in order to understand their organizations' needs. Since I know that Desktop Publishing, Inc. has a strong customer focus, I think this skill would be an important asset to your company.

I would very much like to meet with you to discuss further how I might contribute to Desktop Publishing. I will call you next week to set up an interview. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Nicholas Freedman

Nicholas Freedman
4428 Main St., Apartment 5
Minneapolis, MN 55655

Sample cover letter #2

September 27, 2002

Dr. Celeste Madden, Senior Project Manager
Fair Housing Cooperative
2453 East Fourth Street
New Orleans, LA 70182

Dear Dr. Madden,

I was pleased to see an opening for a Project Coordinator posted on the Fair Housing Cooperative Web site. I believe my skills and abilities make me a strong candidate for the position. Enclosed is my résumé for your consideration.

My educational background matches quite well with the requirements of the position. I recently graduated from LSU with an M.S. degree in economics. Using both quantitative and qualitative research methods, my master's thesis focused on urban housing projects in inner cities—an issue I know is central to the work of FHC. I used data from the national HUD database, so I am very familiar with this tool and would be eager to apply my expertise at FHC. As is outlined on my résumé, I also have held a number of volunteer positions which have given me insight and experience above and beyond my academic training. Through my work in these positions, I gained many new insights about factors that increase the success of non-profits.

I would be happy to arrange an interview to discuss my qualifications further. Should you have any questions, please contact me at (504) 555-5555. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Lauren Green

Lauren Green 208
South Ashton Street
New Orleans, LA 70182

Internet Ad:

The Fair Housing Cooperative (FHC), a New Orleans-based nonprofit company, is seeking a Project Coordinator to work in its Urban Development Office. Duties will include basic research and neighborhood outreach. Excellent communication skills needed. Experience with quantitative research methods needed, and knowledge of HUD databases helpful. Please send résumé and cover letter to: Dr. Celeste Madden, Senior Project Manager, Fair Housing Cooperative.

Sample cover letter #3

November 12, 2002

Ms. Maya Hinckley, Attorney at Law
Hinckley and Associates Law Firm
256 North River Road
Phoenix, AZ 39468

Dear Ms. Hinckley,

I am writing to apply for the senior paralegal position I saw advertised in the Phoenix Sun Times yesterday. Enclosed is my résumé and transcripts from my paralegal courses, as requested in the advertisement.

I would be very pleased to have the opportunity to work for Hinckley and Associates. I know that your firm specializes in employment law. I have had over two years of experience in employment law, and I am eager to continue working in this area. I have experience with MS Access and WestLaw, and am quick to learn new computer software. My cumulative five years of legal experience has taught me the importance of attention to detail. If given the opportunity to work for your firm, you will find me a reliable, pleasant, and careful worker.

I would be pleased to meet with you at your convenience to discuss my qualifications further. My telephone number is (217) 555-5555, and I can also be reached at Darlenes_email@yahoo.com. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Darlene Mills

Darlene Mills
403 West 3rd Street
Phoenix, Arizona 39468

