

WRITING YOUR COVER LETTER

BUSINESS LETTERS IN GENERAL Because business letters come under the general heading of formal writing, there are a few rules to follow in determining their construction and content. The general letter format shown on the next page is a simple block format that is appropriate for most business letters.

The writing style should be formal, so contractions are rarely used, but don't make it so formal that it sounds stilted or unnatural. Resist the temptation to shift into "business-ese" with phrases like "Your kind attention to this matter is appreciated." Keep it simple, clear and concise.

Know what you want to happen as a result of your letter, and be sure that your point is clearly made. Do you want an interview? Ask for it. Are you going to do something (make a phone call, for example) to make it happen? Say what you'll do and when you'll do it. Be sure that both you and the reader know what is to happen next.

COVER LETTERS Cover letters are used to catch a prospective employer's attention, to set the reader up for the enclosed resume. They usually convey three basic points:

- What you want
- What you have to offer in return
- What you're going to do about it

In the first paragraph, state the position or kind of work you're interested in, either by job title or in descriptive functional terms. Examples: market research and analysis; applications programming; student activities and development. Present yourself as an interested, motivated applicant.

In the second paragraph, summarize the benefits and abilities you have to offer. Here you'll rely on your research and knowledge of the organization and the work for which you're applying, and present a persuasive body of information that shows you to be a well-qualified applicant. Think in terms of the employer's needs, and show that you have the education, experience and/or skills to help meet those needs. Refer to your enclosed resume, and point out that it shows more than one kind of preparation or qualification: "In addition to my studies in mathematics and statistics, I have taken courses in business and marketing, and have completed an internship in market research in a pharmaceutical firm."

In some cases, this section of the letter may be two paragraphs, presenting for example your technical preparation on one hand, and your motivation or philosophical position on the other hand. Teacher candidates often use this format. You may also want to include a bulleted list of three or four outstanding qualities or features of your qualifications; placed in the center of the page, this can draw the reader's attention to your strongest assets.

In the final paragraph, state the appropriate action that you will take to move your application along. Example: "I would welcome the opportunity to talk with you about a career position in market research, and I will telephone your office early next week to request an interview." If possible, specify the area of the firm or its operations that you're particularly interested in. If you're applying for a position in a distant city, you might say when you'll be in the area, and that you'll telephone at that time to request an interview. This is not the time to be comfortably passive, as in, "You may telephone me at the number on my resume to arrange an interview." Even though it may be uncomfortable to do, bring the action to the employer by making the first contact. If you can't get past the secretary, at least be sure that the recipient of the letter knows that you've called, as you said you would.

Because cover letters are tailored to the needs of the employer, they must be written individually rather than mass-produced. Be sure that each letter is addressed to the person with whom you want an interview; call and get the correct name and title if you're not sure.

First impressions last; make yours a good one. Because your letter will likely be the first example of your work that the employer sees, be sure to proofread your letter carefully, or better yet have someone else read it. Use a laser printer if at all possible. Use good bond paper, the same paper for both letter and resume (is the watermark right side up when it's printed?), and see that the envelope matches as well.

General Letter Format

Your street address
City ST Zip
Date

(Four spaces down)

Name
Title
Organization
Address
City ST Zip

Dear Mr. or Ms. Whoever:

WHAT YOU WANT: Come to the point . . .if you're asking for something, here's the place to do it . . . be direct . . .try to avoid starting paragraphs with "I."

WHAT YOU HAVE TO OFFER: Provide information . . . support your request . . . be clear and concise . . .you have about 30 seconds of the reader's attention . . . make it count.

WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN NEXT: Be clear about what is to happen next and who will do it . . . avoid flowery phrasing . . . keep it simple.

Sincerely,

(your signature)

Your name (typed) (four spaces down)

General Letter of Application

711 Easton Road
Glenside, Pennsylvania 19038
February 27, 2004

Ms. Jane Newman
Coordinator of College Relations
Allied Marketing Services
1115 Market Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19210

Dear Ms. Newman:

In May I will graduate from Arcadia University with a major in marketing, and plan to begin a career in market research. I would like to be considered for a position with Allied Marketing Services.

My resume is enclosed. In addition to my studies in marketing at Arcadia University, where I maintained a 3.4 average, I have taken additional courses in computer science, mathematics and statistics. During my junior year, I completed an internship with Philadelphia Electric Company, where I developed a database in Microsoft Access to manage customer service records.

I would welcome the opportunity to speak with you about a career position with Allied Marketing Services, particularly in the Client Services department, and I will call your office early next week to request an interview.

Sincerely,

Mary J. Smith

Thank-You Letter

456 Wrightstown Road
Granby CT 06035
March 18, 2004

Mr. Harry P. Smith
Manager of Human Resources
Whitney Tool Company
11 Forrest Avenue
Hartford CT 06115

Dear Mr. Smith:

Thank you very much for granting me an interview yesterday. I enjoyed meeting you and the members of the Catalog Sales Division staff, and learning more about Whitney Tool and its products and operations.

I want you to know of my strong interest in a position with Whitney Tool Company. After speaking with Ms. Hardin about the goals of the Catalog Sales Division, I feel that my educational background in communications and my internship experience with The Budd Company have prepared me to make a significant contribution to the operations of the division.

The position we discussed would be an excellent opportunity for me, and I appreciate your giving my application careful consideration. Please call me at 203/653-3989 if you need further information in evaluating my qualifications.

Sincerely,

Beth A. Filler

Note: Write this letter within 24 hours after an interview.

Letter Accepting Offer

456 Wrightstown Road
Granby CT 06035
May 11, 2004

Mr. Harry P. Smith
Manager of Human Resources
Whitney Tool Company
11 Forrest Avenue
Hartford CT 06115

Dear Mr. Smith:

Thank you very much for your letter extending the offer of a position with the Catalog Sales Division of Whitney Tool Company. I am delighted to accept the position.

I understand that I am to report to Human Resources at 9 a.m. on June 9, 2004 for initial processing.

Working in Catalog Sales with Whitney Tool will give me a great opportunity to use my business education and writing skills, and I am eager to begin. I appreciate your consideration and assistance throughout the application and interviewing process.

Sincerely,

Beth A. Filler

Letter Rejecting Offer

456 Wrightstown Road
Granby CT 06035
May 11, 2004

Mr. Harry P. Smith
Manager of Human Resources
Whitney Tool Company
11 Forrest Avenue
Hartford CT 06115

Dear Mr. Smith:

Thank you very much for your letter extending the offer of a position with the Catalog Sales Division of Whitney Tool Company.

After careful consideration, I have decided that the position would not be the best fit for me at this time. I am therefore unable to accept your offer of employment.

I sincerely appreciate the confidence you have shown in me in extending the offer of employment with Whitney Tool, and your assistance throughout the interviewing process.

Sincerely,

Beth A. Filler