

The cover letter

Every résumé you send or give to an employer should be accompanied by a cover letter. Even if a cover letter is not mentioned in an advertisement, listing or conversation about a job opening, employers expect one. Think of your cover letter as what makes your entrance to an employer a grand one.



While the résumé is a somewhat generic advertisement for yourself, the cover letter allows you to tailor your application to a specific job. Even though your goal is an interview, and ultimately a job offer, the more immediate purpose of your cover letter is to gain an attentive audience for your résumé. A good cover letter

What makes a good cover letter?

- 1. No spelling, typing or grammar errors.** Even one mistake indicates carelessness and may disqualify you.
- 2. Appearance counts.** Invest in nice paper. Choose an easily readable typeface, like Times New Roman, Garamond or Arial. Use a high-quality printer. Use standard-size paper (8 1/2 by 11 inches) or Monarch size (7 by 10 1/2 inches). Send clean originals, never photocopies.
- 3. Address it to the person who hires.** You can usually find this on the company's website or by calling the company. Be sure the spelling of the name and title are correct. In the greeting, address the recipient as "Mr.," "Ms.," "Mrs.," "Miss," "Dr." or "Professor." If you cannot address it to a specific person, it is safer to use a generic title like "Human Resources Manager" or "Dear Sir or Madam."
- 4. Write it in your own words.** A cover letter is an opportunity for an employer to meet the real you — reflecting your personality, enthusiasm and interest in the company.
- 5. Use simple, clear sentences.** Choose your words with care. Constantly ask:
 - Could I say this more clearly?
 - Will they understand my exact meaning?
- 6. Write in active tense.** Active verbs are key. Instead of writing, "My best attributes include being a team player and motivating people," use "I am a dedicated team player who can motivate people."
- 7. Don't overuse "I."** It is OK to refer to yourself, but use "you" more to show you are concerned with an employer's needs more than your own.
- 8. Show you know something about the company and the industry.** Research the employer's interests, needs, values and goals. Start with the company's website. Your cover letter can point out how you would be an asset in areas important to the employer. Use terms and phrases meaningful to the employer. (This is another time networking is helpful.)
- 9. Tailor your letter for the specific opening.** Customize each cover letter to the specific company and opening, addressing how you measure up to the requirements of the specific opening. Highlight your most relevant skills, accomplishments and experiences on your résumé.
- 10. Reference the résumé.** (As shown in the enclosed résumé ...)
- 11. Request specific follow up,** like an interview.

gets to the heart of what you can do for the employer.

Format

Your cover letter should be one-page long in standard business-letter format, using paragraphs — not statements formatted with bullets. Busy people do not want to read long letters from people they do not know. Use a conversational, yet formal, tone. Indentation of paragraphs is optional. Leave wide margins (minimum of one inch), and let the right margin wrap naturally. Write clearly and avoid hyphenated words at the end of a line.

Content

The **first paragraph** is the most important, so make it jump off the page. It should be brief, perhaps two or three sentences, stating the position you are applying for, how you learned about it, any personal contacts you have with the company, and your general qualifications for the job.

Show some enthusiasm. For example, if a friend recommends that you write someone he knows at a company, do not start with “My friend, John Peterson, told me you have a job opening, so I thought I would write.” Instead, try something like: “I was thrilled when my friend, John Peterson, told me there was an opening for an assistant photographer at your company.”

The **body** of your letter should be one to three paragraphs in which you expand upon your qualifications for the position. Pick the most relevant qualifications on your résumé and

discuss them in detail, demonstrating how your background and experience qualify you for the job. Be as specific as possible, and refer the reader to your résumé for additional details. Do not exaggerate your skills or experience. Be completely truthful while still presenting yourself in the best possible light.

Within the body of your cover letter, include a paragraph explaining why you would be a good match with the company. Maybe you have always used the company’s products or you know people who work there.

The **concluding paragraph** should include a request for an interview (or another appropriate response). State where and when you can be reached. Express your eagerness to interview or supply further information. Close by thanking your reader for his or her time and consideration.

remember ...



- Keep a copy of your cover letter. It will be handy when you follow up.
- Sign the cover letter.
- Enclose your résumé.

There are some people who live in a dream world, and there are some who face reality; and then there are those who turn one into the other.

Douglas H. Everett

Sample cover letter

Your Name
Mailing Address
City, State and Zip
Telephone number(s)
e-mail address

Today's date

Addressee's Name
Professional Title
Organization Name
Mailing Address
City, State and Zip

Dear Mr. (or Ms.) Last Name,

I was excited to learn from your company's website about your need for a sales representative for the northeastern area of our state. I am very interested in this position with Acme Production, and believe my sales and marketing education as well as my work experience as a district sales representative of gadgets are appropriate for the position.

While working toward my bachelor's degree, I was employed as a retail sales clerk at a local hardware store. After graduation, I worked for Doodads Wholesalers. I have increased my sales volume and profit margin appreciably while at Doodads, and I would like to repeat this success in your industry. I have a strong academic background in industrial engineering and marketing, and believe I could apply my combination of knowledge and experience to the manufacturing industry.

Enclosed is a copy of my résumé which more fully details my qualifications for the position.

I look forward to talking with you regarding sales opportunities with Acme Production. Within the next week I will contact you to confirm you received my e-mail and résumé and to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Your handwritten signature

Your name (typed)

Enclosure: résumé