

Cover Letter

Purpose and Content

PURPOSE

- Highlight Experience:** A cover letter accompanies a résumé being sent for a specific position. It highlights selective aspects of your background which best suit the employer's needs. It bridges the gap between your skills and experience and the qualifications of the position.
- Capture Attention:** A well written cover letter commands the reader's attention, and stimulates the employer's interest in you as a potential candidate.
- Demonstrate Interest:** It reflects your interest in the specific job opportunity or the organization as a whole.
- Secure an Interview:** The opportunity to interview is the ultimate goal of your cover letter and résumé.

CONTENT

A cover letter usually includes a minimum of three paragraphs. Each paragraph has a different goal.

First Paragraph: This opening paragraph explains why you are writing the letter. State your purpose; identify the position for which you are applying and how you learned about the opening.

- "Your advertisement in the *Maine Sunday Telegram* dated Sunday, May 5, indicated your need for ..."
- "Margaret Hamilton suggested I contact you regarding ..."
- "Please accept my resume as application for the ..."
- "I am writing to inquire about the position that was posted on *JobsinME.com* ..."

Second Paragraph: It is within this paragraph that you tailor your résumé to a particular job. Tell the employer why you are a strong candidate for this position. Highlight relevant achievements, skills, and/or experience, mentioning the most interesting points on your résumé. Explain how you intend to help the employer and contribute to the organization.

- "The position of _____ would allow me to ..."
- "My qualifications and experience include ..."
- "The experience I have gained in the accounting field ..."
- "Your company interests me because ..."
- "Your company's efforts to _____ attracted me because ..."

Third Paragraph (optional): This paragraph is not always needed, but can be included if there is additional information which hasn't been mentioned on your résumé or needs to be described in more detail (*for example*: internship experience, professional portfolio or gaps in your employment history).

Closing Paragraph: This paragraph should be action-oriented. Express your interest in connecting with the employer to further discuss the position and/or your skills. Also, be sure to state how and when they may contact you. Do not assume an employer will contact you once you have sent your cover letter and résumé. It is your responsibility to follow up. Finally, thank the individual and mention that you are looking forward to meeting him or her.

- I look forward to discussing my experience and qualifications with you ...
- I will be in Caribou during the week of ...
- I will be contacting you ...



USM Student Success Center
Gorham: 119 Bailey Hall • (207) 780-5652
Lewiston: 119 LAC • (207) 753-6536
Portland: 119 Payson Smith • (207) 780-4040
www.usm.maine.edu/success • studentsuccess@usm.maine.edu • TTY (207) 780-5646

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Tips

- Use active, not passive, verbs. For example, use “arranged...,” “devised...,” “evaluated...,” instead of “was responsible for arranging...,” “...devising...,” “...evaluating...”
- Don’t overuse the word “I.” Starting every sentence with “I” can give the wrong impression, and you may come across as self-centered. Rather than starting with “I,” turn some of your sentences around. It’s better to give examples of how you did something than to say, “I did...” this or that.
- Your letter will be more effective when you address the letter to a specific person within the organization. If you don’t know the person’s name, title, or gender, call the organization and ask for the correct information. If you are unable to get a specific name, then using “Dear Search Committee” or “Dear Human Resources Department” are acceptable alternatives.
- Research the organization before you write the cover letter. Ideally, each cover letter is unique and targeted to a specific position. Use the information obtained through research to demonstrate that you know something about the company. Each time you submit a résumé for a specific position it should be accompanied by an original cover letter.
- A cover letter should communicate your ambition and enthusiasm. Stress your accomplishments by explaining how you have met specific employer needs. Show how previous accomplishments relate to the position for which you are applying. Also, the reader may judge you on how well you write; do your best to make the words come alive!
- Never express dissatisfaction with a present or former job or employer. Be sure to avoid discussing any negative reasons for leaving your last job.
- Be sure to use an acceptable business format (*see sample*). Send the original, and be sure you keep a copy of each letter for your records.
- Make sure you follow the employer’s instructions for submitting your application materials. If submitting your materials electronically, save the documents into PDF format before sending in order to ensure they will appear as you intended.
- Keep in mind that the professional image you want to give to the prospective employer includes a neatly typed, grammatically correct and accurate letter. NO TYPOS!



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Sample Cover Letter

RETURN
ADDRESS:

77 Sunset Strip
Portland, Maine 04103
LesterW@gmail.com

Use the same header as you use for your résumé.

October 14, 2009

If you absolutely cannot find a name use Dear Hiring Manager: or Dear Selection Committee:, not

INSIDE
ADDRESS:

Mr. John Hancock, President
WindPower Environmental Corporation
618 Snowy River Road
Caribou, Maine 04002

If you do not know if the contact is a man or a woman use Dear Full

SALUTATION:

Dear Mr. Hancock:

BODY:

Your advertisement in the *Maine Sunday Telegram*, dated October 8, indicated the need for a Director for your Association. This position is an excellent opportunity for me to continue my personal and professional interest in environmental affairs while working for a respectable organization.

The enclosed résumé outlines my two years experience as the Assistant Director of the Maine Audubon Society and my work as a volunteer with the Appalachian Mountain Club for the past five years. My work at the Audubon Society involves managing the day-to-day activities and includes working on fundraising, editing a newsletter and publicity releases focusing on environmental issues and organization membership drives.

In addition to my jobs, I am presently pursuing a bachelor's degree in Business at the University of Southern Maine and plan to graduate in May 2010. I have found that taking courses in management while working in an administrative position provides me with an excellent balance of practical experience and educational training.

I would like very much to put my skills to work for your organization and look forward to a chance to discuss with you, in more detail, my qualifications. I will call you within the next two weeks to discuss the possibility of an interview. You may reach me at (207) 780-5555 during normal business hours. Thank you for your consideration.

CLOSING:

Sincerely yours,

SIGNATURE:

Lester Wilmont

TYPED NAME:

Lester Wilmont

ENCLOSURE:

Enc: Résumé

(Note: Student Success also has books in our Resource Library with many more examples. Stop in to see us!)