

COVER LETTERS

What is a cover letter? A cover letter, also called an *application letter* or *letter of interest*, is a letter you write in business letter format to an employer that you send along with your resume when applying for a job.

What's the purpose of it? The purpose of both your resume and your cover letter is to get you an interview. More often than not, your cover letter will be read only after they've read your resume and liked what they saw. Therefore, your cover letter should *supplement* the info on your resume. It gives the employer a chance to get a better sense of who you are. It will also be used to assess your communication skills.

An effective letter should convince the employer of 2 things:

1. That you would be good match with what they're looking for and will add value to their organization
2. That you've done your research and really feel like this job and this organization are the right fit for you

It seems like I'm just repeating what's on my resume. What's the point?

Here are the main differences between your resume and your cover letter:

- Your resume just lists qualifications. Your cover letter *explains* how those qualifications have prepared you to do the job you're applying for.
- Your cover letter directly discusses your interest in the job and the company and the research you've done; your resume does not.
- Your cover letter more clearly demonstrates your ability to communicate effectively (or inability to do so!)

Tips for Writing an Effective Letter

TARGET each letter to each specific job and company. NEVER send out a generic cover letter- there is no point since it won't cover any of the above topics. Remember, this is not just a formality; **you are writing a letter to a person**. Think about if you had the opportunity to be face-to-face with the hiring manager, what would you say to explain why you want the job and why they should want you there?

Focus on what YOU can do for THEM, not what they can do for you. You want to say enough about why you're interested in the job to make them convinced that you really will fit and want to stay awhile, but your *main focus* should be on how you will benefit the company.

Address your letter to a person; only use "To Whom It May Concern" as a last resort. It may not be obvious who the hiring manager is, so do some research to find out. Call and ask, talk to current employees, look for a directory on their website or other info about who is in charge of different departments, or use LinkedIn (see Job Search handout). It doesn't have to be addressed to the first person to read it, but it should be someone logical, like the head of the department this particular position is under.

Use a standard font (Times New Roman or Arial). Especially if you're sending your letter electronically, this helps to ensure that your letter will open properly on the employer's computer.

Keep it to 1 page, between 10 and 12pt font size. In most cases, especially for entry-level positions, employers won't want to read a letter that is longer than one page.

It must be error-free! Errors in your letter make the employer think you will be careless at work, and having one error can be the *only* reason they need to rule you out. Always proofread carefully, and then have another detail-oriented person check it for errors. It's often hard to proofread your own writing!

Drop names. If someone the employer knows (and likes) referred you to that company or suggested you apply for that job, say that in your letter.

Write professionally and intelligently, but don't overdo it! An employer will be able to tell if you're trying to write in a way that is very different than how you would ever speak, like if you use too many big words! (You also don't want to disappoint them when you get to the interview!) DO make sure your letter is well written and well thought-out, because the employer WILL use it as a sample of your writing abilities!

COVER LETTER WALK-THROUGH

**This page will walk you through the standard business letter format, and what to include in your letter. You don't have to organize your paragraphs exactly as described below, but the format below is the most standard format, and is easy to follow for beginners!*

Your Street Address

Your City, State, Zip Code (You have the option to use your resume header instead of this section)

Current Date (write out the name of the month)

Employer's Name, Title

Department or Division

Company/Organization Name

Street Address

City, State, Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr./Individual's Name OR To Whom It May Concern:

Paragraph 1 (Introduction): Concisely state your purpose for writing the letter. This paragraph is usually only a couple sentences long. Here, you will specify the position you want to be considered for. You can include how you learned about the opening, but this is really the most helpful if you heard of the opening from someone the employer knows, such as a current employee or a contact of the employer. *(A note about name-dropping: This is helpful only if the employer has a positive relationship with the person whose name you drop. So be careful, especially since it is usually impossible to know for sure if the employer likes the person! Also, dropping the name of someone in a higher position than the hiring manager can be seen as threatening, and can hurt your chances.)* You can also include a brief introduction to why you're interested in the position and/or company, or why you're qualified for the position. Just like you would in an essay, you are introducing the ideas you will talk about in the rest of your letter.

Paragraph 2 (Body): Tell the employer why you're the best candidate for the job. This is your "qualifications" paragraph. Use the job description (or refer to the Resume handout for what to do if there is no job description) to determine what the employer is looking for. Highlight your strongest selling points, but don't just restate your resume; instead, *explain HOW* your qualifications have prepared you to excel at this job. Consider your education and/or training, experience (paid jobs, internships, fieldwork, volunteer work, extracurricular involvement, etc.), skills and abilities, accomplishments in your field, personal characteristics/strengths, and any other qualifications you may have.

Paragraph 3 (Body): Explain your interest in the position and the company and/or provide supplemental information. *It is important to employers that they are able to see that you've done your research on their company and on the position,* and have solid reasons for feeling like both the company and the job are the right fit for you. So, do all the research you can on the company, looking for things like its mission and values, its products or services, its history and its future goals, its performance and reputation, etc. Demonstrate that you've done your research by mentioning *specific* things about the company in explaining why it fits with your interests, goals, working style, values, etc. (Don't, however, talk about things that are all about you and not the work, like "the pay is good" or "I wouldn't have to move.") This section can also be your chance to provide extra information that will help differentiate your letter from everyone else's letter (or can be done in a separate paragraph as well if it doesn't tie in to the ideas you're already talking about here). In this section, you can be a little more creative and show more of your personality. Consider additional things that could make your letter more engaging and memorable. For example, you could share your philosophy of the type of work you do; ideas you have of what you'd like to accomplish for the company based on their needs, how you developed a passion for this field, or how you would go about doing a particular aspect of your job.

Paragraph 4 (Closing): Very briefly summarize the contents of your letter. Then, express your interest in an interview. Indicate how the employer can reach you. Finally, thank the employer for his or her time and consideration.

Sincerely,

(Don't forget to SIGN your name here!)

Your Name Typed

SAMPLE COVER LETTER – For a Post-Graduation Job

123 Smith Lane
Boise, ID 83706

January 15, 2009

Amy Jones, Director of Marketing
Design Marketing Corporation
555 Marketing Way
Boise, ID 83706

Dear Ms. Jones:

I am writing to express my interest in the Marketing Agent position available with Design Marketing Corporation. I learned of this opening from Mary Smith, a current Marketing Manager with your company, who suggested that I might be a good fit for this position.

While working towards my Bachelors degree in Marketing, which I will be completing this May, I have strived to also gain as much hands-on experience as possible. I currently have over 4 years of related experience in the areas of sales, customer service, and product promotion, which have given me a solid foundation in the different perspectives it is necessary to understand in order to be able to successfully market a product. Currently, I am interning at Smith and Smith Marketing Associates, for which I actively contribute to the design and development of new campaigns, and work one-on-one with existing and potential clients. In this position, I have played a significant role in recruiting new business, and in executing successful ad campaigns. My experience in sales and customer service has helped me to develop strong communication skills, especially in the areas of active listening and needs assessment, which I have found to be invaluable in working with clients. What I feel really differentiates me from others, however, is my natural ability to develop new relationships and build strong ones. As you know, an agency's success is dependent on its Agents' abilities to form solid relationships, and with my skills in this area, I am confident that I could bring in new clients for Design Marketing.

I also feel that my passion for marketing makes me a strong candidate for this position. From an early age, I was fascinated by television commercials. While other children hummed jingles and begged their parents for whatever toy or gadget was being advertised, I found myself thinking about the reasons why certain commercials were so effective in making everyone desperately want something. I came to college knowing that I wanted to earn a marketing degree and pursue a career using my creative abilities to their fullest potential. While in college, I have made an effort to stay current with the work being done by the marketing agencies based in the Treasure Valley area. I have been continuously impressed with Design Marketing's portfolio, and was particularly inspired by the print campaign you did for Lakeside Plaza last fall. I feel that the post-contemporary style you frequently use is an excellent fit with my personal creative style. In order for you to get a better sense of my style, and how it could support and complement Design Marketing's upcoming projects, I'd like to invite you to review my online portfolio, located at: <http://www.janesmithmarketingportfolio.com>.

I would love to have the opportunity to be a part of the Design Marketing team, and I feel that the combination of my skills, experience, and passion make me an excellent candidate for the Marketing Agent position. I can be reached at (555)123-4567 or at janesmith@internet.com. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to speaking with you further regarding the ways in which I could contribute to the continued success of Design Marketing.

Sincerely,

Jane A. Smith

SAMPLE COVER LETTER – For an Internship

PO Box 1234
Boise, Idaho 83706

August 1, 2009

Mr. Robert White, Personnel Director
Western Public Relations
123 Jefferson Street
Suite 21
Boise, Idaho 83706

Dear Mr. White:

While recently researching public relations firms, I discovered the internship opportunities that Western Public Relations offers. I feel that my qualifications and professional goals are well matched with what you are looking for in an intern.

As my enclosed resume indicates, I am a current student at Boise State University, working towards the completion of a Bachelors degree in Psychology. My professional goal is to apply the knowledge of human perception I am gaining through my degree to the practice of public relations. As I am entering my junior year, I am actively seeking opportunities to learn the field of public relations and get practical experience. In my previous work experiences, I have demonstrated strong interpersonal and organizational skills, and through class projects, I have developed excellent public speaking abilities.

The internship with Western Public Relations is especially appealing to me because of how well-established the company is. The opportunity to work with and learn from the experienced staff of such a respected company in the PR world would be invaluable. I am eager to put my potential to use and to make my own unique contributions to the success of the organization. If possible, I would like to meet with you to further discuss this opportunity. I can be reached by phone at (208) 555-1234, or by e-mail at JohnSmith@internet.com.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

John Smith