

HOW TO COMPOSE AN EFFECTIVE COVER LETTER

Office of Career Services

Texas State University

A cover letter affords you the opportunity to present yourself as the perfect candidate for a particular job. Employers have needs, or they wouldn't have openings. You have qualifications. A cover letter helps to bridge the two.

Highlight your most attractive features as a potential employee. A cover letter allows you to select one or two accomplishments or special skills that reflect your suitability for a desired position.

First try to determine the appropriate person to whom you should address your cover letter. The more influential your contact, the better. Try to contact the head of the department in which you are interested in. Be sure to include your contact's name and title on both your letter and envelope.

When should you send a cover letter?—Every time you make contact with a potential employer. Even if the advertisement says "send only resume" be sure include a cover letter.

WHY CREATE A COVER LETTER?

A well-prepared resume is sometimes not enough to convince an employer that you should be interviewed for a position. As important as your resume is your cover letter, which allows you to direct the reader's attention to aspects of your education and experience that are the most relevant.

Cover letters demonstrate your knowledge of the company you are targeting and explains any part of your work history that needs clarification. A cover letter also demonstrates that you can organize your thoughts and express yourself clearly and appropriately. In a sense, your cover letter reflects your communication skills and, to a certain degree, your personality.

WHAT MAKES UP A COVER LETTER?

Cover letters are usually one-page documents consisting of a beginning, middle, and an end. Typically, these three components can be conveyed in as little as three paragraphs. The beginning is the introduction that expresses who you are and why you are writing. This paragraph should include any relevant contacts you have in the company, and for which specific position you are applying. The middle section can be one or two paragraphs and is the sales pitch that describes what you have to offer. This section should also expand upon your interest in the position and how your qualifications fit in with the position. The concluding paragraph is the closing in which you propose steps for further action. You should request an interview or meeting. Ask for the next step in the process, clearly and without apology or arrogance. View the samples in this handout for more specific guidelines on how to develop the right cover letter format for you.

CONTENT OF THE LETTER

Address the company/employer

A cover letter should be addressed to the specific company and individual who will process your application. You can usually find this information through research or by calling the company.

Address the position

The letter should name the position for which you are applying, indicate your knowledge of and interest in the company, and your qualifications for the position. You want the reader to know:

Why do you want to work with this specific company?

How do you fit in with this company?

What are your qualifications for this particular position?

Address your assets

Include - Positive information supporting hire. **Omit** - Information unrelated to position.

- Information on your skills, strengths, accomplishments, interests, and goals.	- Negative talk about you or prior employers.
- Examples of productivity, performance.	- Salary requirements or history.
- Benefits you can offer the employers.	- Personal information such as marital status, hobbies, etc.

LAYOUT OF THE COVER LETTER

- Paragraph form with a conversational, though formal tone
- No spelling or typing errors
- Write the letter in your own words so that it sounds like you, not like something out of a book
- Individually typed and signed
- Writing style should be clear, objective, and persuasive, rather than narrative
- Use 8 ½" by 11" paper, good quality that matches your resume

Cover Letter Format

Contact's Name
Contact's Title
Company Name
Company Address
City, State Zip Code

Date of Letter

Dear Mr. or Ms. Contact:

Your opening paragraph should arouse interest on the part of the reader. Tell why you are writing the letter, the specific position or type of work for which you are applying, and how you learned of the opening. Give information to show your specific interest in this company.

Your middle paragraphs should create desire. Give the details of your background which will show the reader why you should be considered as a candidate. Be as specific as possible about the kind of job you want. Mention why you are interested in the position, the organization, its products, or its services. Above all, indicate what you can do for the employer. If you are a recent graduate, explain how your academic background makes you a qualified candidate. If you have some practical work experience, point out your specific achievements or unique qualifications. Do not make the reader try to guess what you would be interested in.

Refer the reader to your general qualifications, cited on your enclosed resume. Use as much space as you need to tell your story, but keep it brief and to the point.

In your closing paragraph, ask for action. Indicate a desire for a personal interview. You may suggest alternative dates and times or simply advise employers of your flexibility as to time and place. State your phone number in the letter and offer any assistance toward a speedy response, such as additional information. A positive request is harder to ignore than a vague hope.

Sincerely yours,

Sign your name here

Print Your Name

Your Street Address
City, State Zip Code
Your Phone Number
Your Email Address

Enclosure

Cover Letter Example

**Mr. John M. Curtis
Recruiting Coordinator
HAL Corporation
55 Washington Avenue
New York, New York 10081**

January 30, 2002

Dear Mr. Curtis:

As an experienced computer programmer who is presently pursuing a master's degree in electrical engineering at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, I am writing to request information about possible summer employment opportunities with HAL. I am interested in a position that will allow me to combine the talents I have developed in both computer programming and electrical engineering. However, as you can see from the attached resume, I have extensive experience in many related fields, and I always enjoy new challenges.

I feel that it is important for me to maintain a practical, real-world perspective while developing my academic abilities. I am proud I financed my entire education through scholarships and jobs related to my field of study. My working has only enhanced my appreciation for my education. I find that I learn as much from my summer jobs as I do from my academic studies. For example, during last summer, while working for IBM in Boca Raton, Fla., I gained a great deal of practical experience in the field of electronic circuit logic and driver design. When I returned to school in the fall and took Computer Hardware Design, I found I was thoroughly prepared.

Having said all this, I realize your first consideration in hiring must not be the potential educational experience HAL can provide, but the skills and services an applicant has to offer. I hope the experience and education cited in my resume suggest how I might be of service to HAL.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss with you how I might best assist HAL in its present corporate needs. I will be available for hire from May 14 through August 31, 2003. Please let me know what summer employment is available at HAL for someone with my education, experience, and interests. I can be reached at (518) 271-0000. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Joan Doe

Joan Doe

**1234 15th Street
Troy, New York 12180
(518) 271-0000
Jwdoe23@yahoo.com**

Enclosure

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE WRITING YOUR COVER LETTER

What is the prospective employer seeking?

Think about skills, knowledge, and experiences that would be an asset in the job you are targeting.

What are your objectives?

Are you applying for a specific position, trying to get an interview, or hoping to spend some time talking to someone who can discuss opportunities in general at that organization?

What are the qualities that you bring to this employer or job?

Think of at least two specific accomplishments you can mention which give credit to the qualities you identified.

Why do you want to work for this particular organization or person?

What do you know about the organization?

What is it about their products or services, philosophy, mission, goals, and needs that relates to your interests, background and values?

GUIDELINES FOR SUCCESSFUL COVER LETTER WRITING

1. Tailor your letter as much as possible to target the reader and industry.
2. Talk more about what you have to offer the prospective employer than about what they can do for you.
3. Communicate focused career goals.
4. Avoid saying anything negative about your employment situation or your life in general.
5. Get to the point quickly and clearly.
6. Back up claims with examples.
7. Keep the letter to one page unless told otherwise by the prospective employer.
8. Let other people read it and get their opinions before sending it.
9. Keep easily accessible copies of all letters you mail, fax, or e-mail.
10. Proof read for misspellings and typing errors.
11. Use terms and phrases that are meaningful to the employer.
12. Show concern, interest, and pride for your profession; demonstrate energy and enthusiasm.
13. Avoid stuffiness, and maintain a balance between professionalism and friendliness.
14. Include information relevant to the job you are seeking.
15. Utilize Texas State Career Services by getting your cover letter critiqued, or by using the library resources.

USEFUL ACTION VERBS

Utilize action verbs to highlight your skills:

Management Skills

adapted
delegated
oversaw

Technical Skills

administered
maintained
utilized

Financial Skills

allocated
appraised
reduced

Helping Skills

advocated
resolved
supported

Communication Skills

addressed
explained
resolved

Teaching Skills

advised
coordinated
facilitated

Creative Skills

created
invented
integrated

Organizational Skills

distributed
implemented
executed

OFFICE OF CAREER SERVICES

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Visit us anytime at www.careerservices.txstate.edu