



Cover Letters

A Tool to Generate Interviews

A cover letter is a marketing document that is just as important as a resume. *The purpose of the cover letter is to build interest for your resume and to generate interviews.* It allows you to:

- demonstrate to the recruiter your knowledge of the company,
- show that you have networked; mention the connections you made with the company,
- exhibit relevant experiences, skills sets, and your ability to communicate effectively, and
- express your enthusiasm and highlight your most attractive features as a potential employee.

The bottom line is that a well thought out, *tailored* and *brief* cover letter is a polite way to show your interest and previous networking connections to the company. However, *do no harm!* A well written letter can make you stand out. A poorly written letter can do the same, only negatively.

***Be aware:** Your cover letter is a separate document from your resume; therefore there is no guarantee that it will be read. Be sure that any important points made in the cover letter are already in your resume.

General Guidelines

1. Write to an individual by name. If necessary, go to company research databases, check the website, or call the company to get a name. Verify any information you obtain from published lists, because it may no longer be accurate – people, positions, and titles change frequently. Remember that the standard U.S. salutation uses the title (Mr. or Ms., as appropriate) followed by only the last name:

Dear Mr. Jones:

OR if you know the person well, delete the last name and use the person's first name as follows:

Dear Robert:

For special titles (Physicians, Senators, etc.), consult a reference book such as *Letitia Baldrige's Complete Guide to Executive Manners* for the appropriate salutation.

2. Catch the reader's attention – start with a name that the reader will know (when you have a connection) or start with a personal statement when possible.

“Caroline Williams suggested I write because...”

“I enjoyed our conversation at the Jones School Partio on Tuesday...”

3. Focus on your reader as an individual or as a representative of the company – concentrate on their needs, current business issues and concerns (plus how you can help), not your concerns for personal development. For example, we often see phrases such as, “This would be a great opportunity for me.” Stress **YOU** (the company) more than **I, ME, MY**. Demonstrate that you have researched the company and its needs. Tailor your letter to respond to those needs. This paragraph offers a strong example:

“YUM! Brands is appealing to me because of its dynamic nature and market leading position within the quick-serve restaurant business. I am aware of YUM!'s aggressive growth strategies in the U.S. and overseas and am confident that there will be excellent opportunities to contribute to this expanding company.”



4. Link specific parts of your background to the skills needed for this job. Do not repeat your resume, except in general terms. Consider the following example in response to a job description calling for someone familiar with metrics and project management:

“While working as a Senior Consultant at Deloitte, I participated in the design of a system to determine our client’s market share as well as that of its competitors. These improvements and metrics allowed our clients to plan new product introductions more effectively. I also had the opportunity to lead project teams, coordinate activities across departments, and become comfortable working with a diverse group of employees.”

5. Avoid telling the reader that you are a “great fit” for this job – instead, **demonstrate** how you would fit and how you would add value. The difference between telling and demonstrating? Consider “I’m a great cook” vs. “I really enjoy cooking and have won the Houston Chef’s cook-off award for the past three years.”

6. Explain what you will do next to follow up. Do not expect employers to chase you down. You need to **tell them when you will call or follow up** to see if there is a convenient time to meet. Even if you are applying online, follow up via email.

7. Keep it short – cover letters longer than one page are very rarely read!

8. Write in concrete terms and use action verbs.

9. Be conversational and personable. Avoid stock expressions such as “Attached please find,” “At your earliest convenience,” etc.

10. Consider what motivated you to write. What action do you want? Do you show the initiative to carry that action through?

11. Use Spell Check and proofread carefully! Interviewers never like their names misspelled!

Cover Letter Tips

- Brevity; keep it short and sweet. Get to the point quickly and clearly and make sure you are adding important information that is relevant to the position.
- Take the time to research the company, their goals, and what they are seeking. This should be in addition to assessing what your own objectives are and what you have to offer. This will help the writing process go more smoothly.
- Use terminology and phrases that are meaningful to the employer to show that you understand the industry and their concerns.
- Avoid passive statements and use action words to strengthen your accomplishments and convey confidence to the employer.
- Communicate focused career goals and remember to back up all claims with examples.
- If possible, have others proofread and ask for their opinions, especially if they have experience in the same field/company.
- Employ sentence variety. Do not start every sentence the same way or overuse a phrase, for example, “I am a current MBA student...,” “I am excited about...,” “I am interested in...”



Name
Street or P.O. Box Address
City, State, Zip
Phone number • E-mail address

Date

Mr. or Ms. Recipient's First and Last Name (check the spelling!)

Title

Company Name (check the spelling!)

Street or P.O. Box Address

City, State Zip

Re: the position you are applying for

Dear Ms. (Mr.) Last Name: (remember that the colon is used in business letter salutations)

The first paragraph orients and motivates the reader. If a common acquaintance suggested that you contact this person, you should mention that acquaintance. If not, you might begin by telling who you are and explaining why you are writing. If you are applying for a specific position (such as on MBAFocus), name the position. You might use the first paragraph to tell why you are interested in *this company* or *this position* and how you learned about them.

The second paragraph has two objectives. First, it provides specific evidence that you are knowledgeable about the *company and its needs*, without parroting back lines from recent press releases or annual reports! Second, this paragraph should demonstrate how you would be able to meet the needs and specific demands of *this position*, thus motivating the reader to review your resume. It is important to *stay focused on the needs of the reader*. Use this paragraph to reference your resume, but do not repeat it exactly. Specify your educational or work experiences and accomplishments that demonstrate that you can *meet the needs of this position and this company*. Be sure to describe the leadership, management, technical, or other demonstrated skills that can be applied to the requirements of this job. You, as the "product," need to meet the wants/needs of the "buyer," and this letter is your chance to demonstrate this.

The closing paragraph establishes momentum for next steps. You should provide contact information and request a meeting. Will you call or contact the reader? Will you be in his or her area anytime soon? How can you be reached? (Note: It's best to keep the "ball in your court" by saying you will call or contact the reader – otherwise, you are waiting for a phone call. When you do follow up by phone, remind the reader of your letter at the beginning of your conversation. Have a prepared message in case you reach an answering machine!) Close with a brief statement of "good will" or positive regards for the person.

Sincerely,
Your Signature

Your typed name

Enclosure: list any enclosures or attachments, such as your resume