

## COVER LETTERS

A **cover letter** serves as an introduction to who you are, what you want, why you would be a good candidate for a job, and how you can be reached. It is a summary of the skills you have that apply to the particular position, and why you want to work for the company. Employers will read the cover letter first. This is the time to market yourself and excite the employer about your resume and a possible interview. The **typing quality** of your cover letter is extremely important. Each letter should be printed on bond paper using a laser-jet printer. The quality of the cover letters should be just as good as the resume because the letter introduces the resume and makes the first impression. The cover letter is like a handshake at an interview. You want to make a good first impression, but it is what you say later that the employer will remember and take into consideration in whether or not to hire you.

### Cover Letter Goal

Give your reader enough information that he/she wants to look at your resume, but is not overwhelmed. Information of importance should be referred to in your cover letter but must be included in your resume, because the cover letter may not be retained by the employer after it is read.

### The Successful Cover Letter

Cover letters should be more than just wrapping paper for your resume. They should set you apart from other candidates by providing a sense of how you think and your eagerness to work for a specific organization. Most of all, they should give readers a compelling reason to want to see you that embraces both your qualifications and the vitality you can bring to a job.

If your cover letters are to meet this tall order, they must clearly point out your skills, knowledge, and track record, and explain how these credentials can make a tangible contribution to a prospective employer. **“Your letter must be job-specific, so respond to each ad accurately,”** says Cater Giles, a human resources executive at Front Ranger Medical Management in Englewood, Colo. If you demonstrate an understanding of the company’s current issues, such as shift in the customer demand or the implications of a recent merger, you’ll greatly enhance your prospects, he says.

Most cover letters fail in this regard. Too often, candidates focus on what they’re looking for (salary, geography, advancement, etc.) and not on how their skills, expertise and past accomplishments can benefit the employer. In job hunting, as in all forms of sales, the focus should be on the customers. “Most job seekers squander the cover letter opportunity,” says Jill Lynch, a senior corporate marketing specialist at Levi Strauss & Co. in San Francisco. “The cover letter is a great chance to pique interest and give a sense of your accomplishments and personality.”

### Types of Cover Letters

The term **“cover letter”** includes three different types.

- The first is called a **Letter of Application**, which is a letter that applies to a specific position and is the same as a cover letter; it is just a different name. (However, some organizations may still require completion of their own application.)
- The second is called a **Letter of Inquiry** and is used to send to organizations that don’t necessarily have positions advertised, yet are targeted by the job seeker as possible places of employment. This is slightly different than the cover letter discussed in this handout.
- The third is used when someone you know told you of a job lead and introduced you to the hiring manager. An effective method of contacting those in your circle of influence is through a special form of written communication called a **Letter of Referral**.

## **The Importance of Targeting Your Cover Letter**

Each letter you address to an employer should be **unique and specific to that particular organization and/or position**. Using form letters in the job search is unacceptable. If you don't know much about the organization or the name of the appropriate person to address, you probably are not prepared to write the letter. The initial piece of correspondence is your chance to convince an employer that you are right for his/her organization and deserve an interview. If the cover letter is not written properly, or does not target the right kinds of positions for which you are qualified, you may not get a second chance.

## **Basic Cover Letter Sections**

Although the content of each letter will be different, there are some basic ideas that need to be included in each letter. Each letter should start with a salutation, or greeting, and should follow with an opening paragraph, body, closing paragraph, and complimentary closing. The following are suggestions for what to include in each section of a typical letter of application or letter of inquiry.

### **Salutation**

- Dear Mr. Smith: or Dear Ms. Smith:
  - for a woman, always use Ms. because most likely you will not know if she is married or not
- If you do not know the name, use Dear Human Resource Manager: or, Dear Hiring Manager:
  - always try to find out the name of the person hiring for the position
  - never use To whom it may concern or Dear Sir or Madam

### **Opening Paragraph**

In your opening statements, declare your interest in the position opening followed by information such as how you learned about the position or organization. If someone referred you to the job, mention his/her name after asking permission from this person to do so. (Referrals by faculty or professionals in the field are a normal occurrence and should be used appropriately). **The first paragraph needs to arouse interest; otherwise the rest of the letter may not be read.**

### **Body**

This is the most important part of the cover letter because at this point, the employer will decide whether to keep reading and whether to look at your resume based on the information presented thus far in your cover letter. State succinctly why you are qualified for the position or why you are interested in the organization. Be sure to point out if you have had relevant work experience and/or education, but do not repeat your entire resume. At some point, refer to your enclosed resume for a more detailed description of your educational background and work experience. Be sure you have researched the company. Show your knowledge of the company, and highlight the skills and abilities you possess which relate to the job for which you are applying. Incorporate keywords taken from the job description and/or information from the company's vision or mission statements into your letter. If the company has had any recent positive news coverage, recognizing that information in your letter is also a plus. If you can touch on everything they are asking for in qualities of the employee and in duties of the employee, it will create a checklist in the mind of the reader, which will make you stand out to him/her.

### **Closing Paragraph**

The last part of the letter should communicate your desire for a personal interview. State your hope for an interview and how to best contact you. If your letter is being sent out of town, indicate when you will be in the area. This sometimes helps facilitate a mutually convenient meeting time. Reiterate your interest in the

organization and thank the employer for considering you. (You may inquire once or twice regarding the status of the hiring process for the position: once approximately 2 weeks after you send your resume. Remember: you want to be the solution to a problem – not a problem!)

### **The Complimentary Close**

Your Complimentary Close should match the tone of your letter. In this case you are providing information and requesting an interview, so you will want to close appropriately. Complimentary Close selections are as follows:

#### **Complimentary Close:**

#### **General Tone and Degree of Formality:**

Respectfully yours

**highly formal;** usually used in diplomatic, governmental, or ecclesiastical correspondence to show respect and deference to a high-ranking addressee.

Sincerely

**friendly and less formal;** usually used in general correspondence

Cordially

often used in general business correspondence

## QUICK TIPS TO HELP YOU WRITE AN ATTENTION-GRABBING COVER LETTER

- Address each letter to a specific person, even if you have to make a dozen phone calls to learn the contact's name. Make sure you also have the correct spelling and his or her correct title.
- Avoid gimmicky openings. It usually isn't a good thing to begin a cover letter with the kind of jazzy openings corporations use in direct mail pieces. While such openings might attract attention, they often come off as forced, insincere or unintentionally glib. You're better off simply stating in the first paragraph why you are writing and why it is in the reader's best interest to pay attention. For example, *"I understand you have a need for senior accountants. I can help, and would like to tell you more about how..."*
- Write the way you speak. Important as it is to honor the rules of Standard English, it's just as important in the cover letters to avoid stiff, bureaucratic jargon. Write to inform, not to impress. (Hint: If you're tempted to use a word in a letter that you wouldn't use in person, replace it with a word that's more conversational.)
- Incorporate information that reflects your knowledge of the target company: its industry, relevant issues, potential opportunities, etc.
- Check and recheck every letter you send for typos, bad grammar and spelling mistakes; usage and grammar mistakes in letters frequently turn off potential employers, regardless of your qualifications. These errors lead people to conclude that if you aren't careful enough to avoid mistakes in your search, you're likely to be careless when performing the job. Find someone, such as a friend or your spouse, who's good at proofreading, and ask that person to review everything you write. If you use a computer (and you should), use the spelling and grammar checkers. These programs aren't foolproof, but they'll catch obvious errors. Also keep a dictionary and usage manual handy.

### DO

- Address your letter to an individual.
- Make the most of your opening paragraph.
- Use simple language and uncomplicated sentence structure.
- Proofread your cover letter.
- Keep it brief and succinct.
- Be confident.
- Use a business letter format.
- Match your qualifications to the job requirements.
- Make sure a potential employer can reach you.
- Tell the employer what you will bring to his or her company.

### DON'T

- Send your resume without a cover letter.
- Handwrite your letter unless it is requested.
- Send letters that are obviously mass-produced (photocopied).
- Be negative or too humble.
- Repeat your resume.
- Use company stationery.
- Exceed one page.
- Send a cover letter that contains any typos, misspellings, incorrect grammar, or punctuation.
- Mention previous employment references in the cover letter, unless you were referred by them.

## BUSINESS/COVER LETTER BLOCK FORMAT

Your name, address and date should appear approximately 4 spaces from the top of the page, flush left.

Your Name  
Street Address  
City, State Zip Code

Date (Month Day, Year)

Allow 2 spaces

Allow 4 spaces

Addressee's Name  
Addressee's Title  
Addressee's Place of Employment  
Street Address  
City, State Zip Code

Allow 2 spaces

Salutation:

Dear Mr. or Ms. \_\_\_\_\_,  
If you do not know the name, Dear Hiring Manager or Human Resources Manager, do not use Sir or Madam or Whom it may concern

Paragraph 1

**Paragraph 1** should consist of what job you are interested in and how you heard about the job

Paragraph 2

**Paragraphs 2 and 3** should talk about your experiences and what you can bring to the job, why you are a good fit to the job and the company. In these paragraphs you should also talk about your interest in that particular company, use its key words; its mission statement and values

Paragraph 3

Paragraph 4

**Paragraph 4** should include a request/follow up for an interview, such as "I look forward to hearing from you to set up an interview" or "I will follow up with you in two weeks regarding the status of my application" (But then you must make sure to follow up) You will also include how to reach you here, your phone and email

Complimentary Close

Respectfully Yours,  
Sincerely,  
Cordially,

3 - 4 spaces between closing and your name

Name

Allow 2 spaces between the Complimentary Close and Enclosure line

Enclosure (if desired; state what follows, not including the cover letter)

Attachment (If you are sending an e-mail; the cover letter should be the body of the email, be sure to label your resume as your name resume, or job title resume, you may also want your resume to be a pdf, so the formatting doesn't change)

## SAMPLE COVER LETTERS

John Oakley  
7 Apple Court  
Eugene, OR 97401

October xx, 20xx

Mr. Archie Weatherby  
California Investments, Inc.  
25 Sacramento Street  
San Francisco, CA 94102

Dear Mr. Weatherby,

In response to the October xx posting on your company website, I would like to apply for the position of insurance broker. My outgoing personality, sales experience, and my recently completed education make me a strong candidate for a position at California Investments, Inc.

I recently graduated from the University of Oregon with a degree in Marketing, where I was president of both the Future Business Leaders of America and the American Marketing Association. Although a recent graduate, I am not a typical new graduate. I attended schools in Michigan, Arizona, and Oregon, and supported my education by working in radio advertising sales, newspaper subscription sales, and bartending, all of which enhanced my formal education. I have the maturity, skills, and abilities to embark on a career in insurance brokering, and I'd like to do this in California, my home state.

I am especially interested in the position at California Investments, Inc. from the amazing reputation the company has. I saw that the company has been rated one of the "best places to launch a career," which tells me that California Investments, Inc. is dedicated to the success of their employees. I was also impressed by the company's vision that focuses on what is best for their investors. California Investments, Inc. seems to provide an empowering environment for their employees, and I would like the opportunity to contribute to, and learn more about this company.

I hope that you find my qualifications meet the needs of the position. I will be in California at the end of this month, and I'd like very much to talk with you concerning a position at California Investments. I will follow this letter with a phone call to see if I can arrange a time to meet with you. I can be reached at 503-555-0303 or via email at [john.oakley@college.edu](mailto:john.oakley@college.edu). I look forward to speaking with you. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

John Oakley

Enclosure

## Susie A. Sample

706 Applewood Court • Mequon • WI • 53097 • Susie.sample@gmail.com • (414) 555-5555

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October x, 20xx

Mr. Archie Weatherby  
Sales Manager  
Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Network  
626 East Wisconsin Avenue  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53202

Dear Mr. Weatherby,

I am writing to you to apply for the college student position in your IPS Products and Sales II department. I found this position posting from your website and feel I would be an excellent candidate for the position. I am currently a sophomore at Concordia University, majoring in general business, and am interested in a career in the insurance industry.

Through my experiences as an office assistant in Concordia University's Career Services office, I have gained extensive knowledge of office procedures including answering a multiline telephone system, scheduling appointments, and completing projects as assigned. I also have experience using our online job board, which requires inputting new jobs and internships available for students. While working in the Career Services office, I have been able to utilize my abilities to multi-task and prioritize projects, to deal with the student traffic, and still complete the projects I am assigned.

In addition to my knowledge of office procedures, I also have experience utilizing Microsoft Office. I have assisted in creating and mailing invitations to employers for events hosted by Career Services, and am familiar with the mail merge tool, as well as with creating basic word documents. As a Peer Leader, I utilized PowerPoint for classroom presentations. These presentations allowed me to sharpen my communication and presentation skills. I was always on time for class, and made myself available outside of class time to meet with and mentor students that were looking for guidance and information. I would continue to take initiative in the college student position and I look forward to a learning experience in the insurance field.

I am especially interested in the position at Northwestern Mutual Financial Network from the amazing reputation the company has. I saw that the company has been rated one of the "best places to launch a career," which tells me that Northwestern Mutual Financial Network is dedicated to the success of their interns and employees. I was also impressed by the company's vision that focuses on what is best for their policy owners. Northwestern Mutual Financial Network seems to provide an empowering environment for their employees, and I would like the opportunity to contribute to, and learn more about this company.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me at susie.sample@gmail.com or by phone at 414-555-5555. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you to schedule an interview.

Sincerely,

Susie A. Sample

Enclosure

## EMAIL COVER LETTERS

**When emailing a resume to an employer, you should always include a cover letter.** Cover letters that accompany e-resumes should be brief and concise. Keep in mind that recruiters want you to introduce yourself. They want to see how you write, and they want to see you make a case for why the position they need to fill is the one you're right for. Be sure to indicate which position you're applying for, what your qualifications are, and what you can contribute to the company.

**Next, check the employer's web site for instructions** on how to send your resume via email, or ask the employer for their preferred method. For example, an employer may simply wish for you to submit your resume as a Microsoft Word document as an attachment to your email. Or an employer may wish for you to submit your resume as an ASCII file — a document that is pure text and contains no formatting (i.e., no font enhancements, no spacing enhancements, etc.). Or the employer may have other preferences and instructions. If no instructions are found, write a short cover letter, and then write the words, "Begin resume" or "[begin resume]", then insert the resume into the body of the email message. At the bottom, repeat the signal: "End resume" or "[end resume]"

**Don't waste your subject line.** Don't ever leave the subject line of your email blank, but don't waste it by just inserting the job number. Instead, use the subject line to entice the reader into your cover letter. For example, for a director of nursing position, say something such as: "experienced nurse for director of nursing position."

**Your opening paragraph is critical.** More than ever, your first paragraph has to be dynamic; you need to both hook the reader and then sell him or her on your abilities in that first paragraph. See the sample letter (below) for a dynamic email opening paragraph.

**Keep your cover letter short.** Brevity is critical with an email cover letter. Focus on your key selling points. The idea is that your cover letter should not be any longer than one screen in length.

**Take advantage of keywords.** Use keywords pertinent to the job you are seeking, and focus on key industry buzzwords and critical skills sets. Noun phrases become more important than action verbs. Because your cover letter may be filed into a database, using critical keywords will enhance the likelihood that your cover letter and resume will be retrieved in a future search.

**Stick with plain styling (ASCII text).** Write your cover letter in your favorite word processor, but strip away all formatting once you've completed editing it by saving the file as "plain text." Because some email packages allow you to manipulate font style, color, and size, make sure your email is also being sent in plain text -- black font, normal size and typeface (10 point, Arial, Helvetica, Times Roman), on a white background.

**Check your line length.** Make sure your lines are no more than 60 characters in length. Some email packages automatically do word wrap for you (much like word processing software), but you should check. You don't want your cover letter to arrive fragmented on multiple lines.

**Always use standard cover letter protocol.** Just because it's an email, doesn't mean you should abandon standard business letter writing guidelines. Thus, make sure to include a salutation (Dear Ms. Smith) and a standard closing (such as "sincerely"). Leave blank lines between paragraphs. And avoid the use of emotions, abbreviations, wild colors, and other cool techniques and shortcuts used in everyday emails.



**Only send as an attachment when requested.** Some companies actually block all emails with attachments; thus, your email would never even be received if you used an attachment. If sending a resume as an attachment to your email cover letter, be sure to name the attachment using your name, resume, and position.

**Never hit "send" without thoroughly spell checking and proofreading your email letter.** Don't just rely on your email software's spellchecker. Take the time to really proofread it. A simple typo could be the downfall of a brilliant cover letter. Avoid all mistakes. I recommend putting in the address of who you are sending the email to last, so as not to accidentally send out before it is ready.

**Be sure to test your message before sending it to the company.** Even if you're sure your letter is perfect, send it to a friend or another one of your email accounts first and check for the content and style one more time.

### Sample Email Cover Letter

Date: Tues, 15 May 20xx 19:52:59 -0700 (EDT)  
From: kevin lee smith [ksmith@yahoo.com]  
Subject: Seasoned Sales Rep With MBA Ideal for Regional Sales Manager (mtt-01/3439)  
To: scott.hent@marriott.com  
Content-Type: text/plain; charset=us-ascii

Dear Mr. Hent:

Having broken sales records and exceeded sales quotas in all my previous positions, and having recently completed my MBA in Marketing from the Stern School of Managerial Leadership at Florida State University, I am an ideal candidate for the regional sales manager position at Marriott Vacation Club International.

As the leading sales representative for Disney Vacation Club, I developed key sales material, trained new sales reps, and reinvented the way club memberships are sold. My team's revenue was more than double the average for the entire operation.

The vacation club industry is a dynamic and growing industry, and I am convinced I can help Marriott grow its reputation and dominant position in the industry.

We should meet to discuss the position. I will contact you in the next 10 days to arrange an interview. Should you have any questions before that time, please feel free to call me at 904-555-2341 or email me. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Cordially,

Kevin Lee Smith