



## Writing Your Cover Letter

### General Guidelines

A cover letter is a formal letter that should accompany your resume when applying for a position. While there is any number of ways to approach the letter, try to keep the following in mind:

- Be professional. First and foremost, your letter needs to look and sound professional. This means using a business format (see below) and being sure that everything is grammatically and technically correct. Job candidates have been eliminated for much less. So proofread carefully and allow others to look at it as well.
- Limit length. Your letter should not be more than one page. And avoid filling every inch of the page with words. A long, thickly written letter might turn off a reader. You want to *invite* them to examine your skills. Make that task as easy as possible. Generally cover letters are 3–4 paragraphs, but the exact number might depend upon your experience.
- Cater each letter to its recipient. Try to cater your letter to the type of firm you are applying to. If the firm does commercial work, gear the content of the letter towards commercial work. If it does residential work, make it residential. If you can, avoid sending a purely generic letter that contains information irrelevant to this particular employer. Focus is very important here. If the firm is trying to winnow down a stack of applicants, you don't want to give them any reason to put your letter down.
- Impress upon the employer that you have done your homework. Most firms have web sites – visit them. Learn about the types of projects they work on. Read their mission statement, and use this information to your advantage. Make reference to it in your letter; communicate to them that you have made the effort to do some research on them. This initiative should impress them. (And if you show up at an interview and have no clue what kind of work they do – that just looks bad.) Do, however, make sure that any references you make are concrete. Empty, flowery praise, may not accomplish anything. Keep the focus on you and your accomplishments/skills and what, specifically, you can do for the company.

## Sections of a Cover Letter

### HEADING

Use correct business letter format. Atop the page use one of the following formats:

Block: All of following information is flush left.

Your Street Address City, State Zip  Date  Name of Person (if you have it) Title of Person Firm Street City, State Zip  Dear _____:
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Indented: Your address and the date are indented to the far right. The information for the person you are writing to remains on the far left.

	Street Address City, State Zip  Date
Name of Person (if you have it) Title of Person Firm Street City, State Zip  Dear _____:	

### For the salutation:

- If you know the person's name, insert Mr. or Ms. and their last name. Use Mrs. only if you know she goes by Mrs.
- If you don't know the contact person's name, use "Dear Sir or Madam:" or "To Whom It May Concern:"

### Paragraph 1: The Introduction

Use this to introduce yourself to your prospective employer. You *should* mention that you are a Boston Architectural College student (spell BAC out the first time you use it). And make clear your intentions, the position for which you are applying, and where you found the job listed. If you are new to design, one thing you should never do is apologize for your lack of direct experience. Instead stress what you do have to offer:

I am a Boston Architectural College student and am interested in the draftsperson position you have advertised in the school's Laboratory listings. Because of my educational and professional backgrounds, I think I am a good candidate for the job.

Keep this paragraph fairly short and very focused. It should give the reader a sense of who you are and why you are writing. These sentences alone may be sufficient, or, you may want to be even more specific about why you are a good candidate:

Because of my experience as a skilled drafter, I think I am a good candidate for the job.

### Paragraphs 2 & 3: The Body

These next two paragraphs are the body of your letter. This is where you really sell yourself. (Note: it is okay to have only one paragraph in your body. If you have limited experience, this may be the correct approach.)

While a resume provides a general overview of your skills, in a cover letter you get the chance to drive home your qualifications. Don't just repeat what you say in the resume, elaborate further. Provide more details and anecdotes that show you have the appropriate skills and accomplishments.

Structurally, make sure you have strong topic sentences. Start off a paragraph by clearly identifying a skill you have to offer. Then as you go deeper into the paragraph elaborate further on that skill and/or additional ones. Remember, readers see the first and last sentences of a paragraph the most clearly, so make sure your most important information is located there.

In addition, try to focus your paragraphs around a central topic, perhaps a particular skill or set of skills. Some students have one paragraph that focuses on their professional design experience, while the second focuses more on their academic background. Others focus one paragraph on their design skills and the second on their office and communication skills. Regardless of how you organize it, make sure that the ideas in a given paragraph hang together. This letter is a form of communication to a potential employer. If it is scattered, then this potential employer's first impression of you is as a

scattered, unprofessional individual. Needless to say, this probably won't get you an interview.

If you have only a single paragraph in this section, that is fine. Simply take the same approach. Put your skills and accomplishments on display. Give the employer reason to want to hire you.

#### Paragraph 4: The Conclusion

This paragraph should also be nice and short. You should thank the reader for his or her time, express a desire to follow-up, and remind the prospective employer of your contact information. Make the follow-up phone call your responsibility, unless prohibited. (Many companies now state in the job advertisements "No phone calls allowed." Pay attention to this. Play by their rules.) For instance, the final paragraph could look like:

Thank you for your time and attention. I look forward to speaking with you further about this position. You may contact me at the above address (or email) or at 617-555-5555.

#### Closing

After the final paragraph skip a line and close with a professional valediction such as "Sincerely" or "Best Regards." Then skip four lines and type your full name. Sign the printed copy in the space above your typed name.

For information about how to write a resume, please see writing tip sheets *Chronological Resume* and *Functional Resume*.