

Cover Letters

The purpose of a cover letter is to introduce yourself to an employer and to state your interest in an organization or a particular position. A cover letter is an opportunity for you to highlight aspects of your background that are especially relevant to the potential employer. A cover letter should always accompany your resume/cv.



Cover letters have a standard structure:

Opening paragraph, in which you explain why you are writing, what you would like to do, and the kind of job you want. Explain where you heard of the opening or why you selected this employer for an inquiry.

Second paragraph contains your description of how your work experience and training is related to the job you are applying for or desire. Remember to mention pertinent data or accomplishments to show that you have specific qualifications in this field or particular type of work.

Third paragraph explain why you are interested in working for this organization and in the particular position. Say that your resume is enclosed. State that you will call in a week or so to inquire about the possibility of an interview (if appropriate). End with "Sincerely," or another professional closing.

Cover Letter Writing Tips

Research the organization. Read annual reports, company brochures, and check the organization's website. If possible, contact people within the organization.



Address your cover letter to the person responsible for hiring. You can call the human resource office or hiring contact and ask for the person responsible for recruitment. Avoid addressing a letter "to whom it may concern." Be sure the name is spelled correctly and the title is correct. A touch of formality is good too: address the person as "Mr.," "Ms.," "Mrs.," "Miss," "Dr.," or "Professor." (Yes, life is complicated.)

Write it in your own words. so that it sounds like you--not like something out of a book. Employers are looking for knowledge, enthusiasm, focus.

Mention someone who referred you to the organization (if possible). Utilize your network of contacts.

Express your professional accomplishments and skills. However, you should not simply restate points from your resume.

Carefully proofread your cover letter for errors.

Be brief. Cover letters are preferably three or four paragraphs that fit easily on one page.

Communicate confidence and professionalism. The cover letter, like your cv, is a marketing tool. It serves as an example of your writing skill and style.

Some common cover letters mistakes:

- Thinking of it as a formality or something extra to attach to a cv.
- Trying to be unique –"I'm the top-notch candidate you're looking for."
- Using gimmicks, literary prose, flashy paper, or colored type.
- Writing lengthy letters (more than one page).
- Not utilizing standard business form.

Sample Cover Letter

Your name
Mailing address
City, state, and zip
Telephone number(s)
Email address

Today's date

Your addressee's name
Professional title
Organization name
Mailing address
City, state and zip

Dear Mr. (or Ms.) last name,

Start your letter with a grabber—a statement that establishes a connection with your reader, a probing question, or a quotable quote. Briefly say what job you are applying for.

The mid-section of your letter should be one or two short paragraphs that make relevant points about your qualifications. You should not summarize your resume! You may incorporate a column or bullet point format here.

Your last paragraph should initiate action by explaining what you will do next (e.g., call the employer) or instigate the reader to contact you to set up an interview. Close by saying "thank you."

Sincerely yours,

Your handwritten signature

Your name (typed)

Enclosure: *Curriculum vitae*

References

Altavista Careers (2001), JobsontheWeb(2001), Virtualville (2001) and MIT Online Resources (2001)