

A QuickRef Guide to **COVER LETTERS**

Use this QuickRef Guide to make sure you've covered the basics of developing your cover letter. A cover letter introduces your resume and serves as a writing sample, both of which can have a role in determining whether or not you will receive a job interview. Keep in mind that each and every cover letter you write should be individually tailored to the job and organization for which you are applying!

The staff at The Career Centers will **critique your cover letter** with you. It is to your advantage to **schedule an appointment** before having your cover letter critiqued. Use this guide as a checklist.

- A cover letter **always accompanies each resume that you mail, fax, or email**. When applying through an organization's online application system, adhere to all application instructions. A cover letter may or may not be needed. When a cover letter is optional, it is usually better to include it.
- You do **NOT** need a cover letter if you are directly handing your resume to an employer (i.e. at a career fair or job interview).
- **Always customize your cover letter** to the position and organization, even if you are applying for more than one job within an organization. Identify the name and title of the person to whom the letter should be addressed. For online postings, include the name of the contact person and/or title that are listed. For ads with no contact information, you should still attempt to identify the organization, if possible. Only address the letter to "Dear Hiring Manager" if you are not able to find the necessary contact information.
- If the employer asks you to include "**salary requirements**" in the letter, and you choose to provide this information, always state your requirements in a range and that you are open to negotiation. You should research salary figures for the position and geographic area. If an employer asks you to include "salary history," he or she is looking for consistency. Gaps or salary cuts should be explained in general terms.
- **Avoid gimmicks**, including referring to yourself in the third person (i.e. "Joe Jobseeker is a 2006 graduate of Cuyahoga Community College,") Focus on your skills, experience, education and personal qualities as they pertain to the position creating a professional impression. Clarity and brevity are always appreciated.
- Your cover letter must be **error-free and grammatically correct**. Avoid over-using the word "I". Look for other ways to begin sentences, perhaps a powerful action verb.
- Have someone **proofread your letter and read it out loud** to make sure that your ideas flow and to catch any awkward sentences or overuse of particular words.
- Use a **block** (left-justified margins) **business letter format**. **Center the letter vertically** on the page.
- The letter should be **no more than one page** in length and printed on the same paper you used for your resume.
- For **electronic submission** of your cover letter, employers often prefer certain formats (Word, plain text, PDF). A staff member can help you save different versions of your cover letter.

Letter should be centered vertically on the page.

Joe Jobseeker
456 Main St.
Parma, OH 44130
216-987-5576 ▪ Joe.Jobseeker@acad.tri-c.edu

----- (1 line space) -----

Today's Date

----- (2 line spaces) -----

Name

Title

Name of the Organization

Mailing Address of the Organization

City, State abbreviation and Zip code (Place two spaces between the state abbr. & zip code.)

----- (1 line space) -----

Dear Dr., Mr., Mrs., or Ms. Smith:

----- (1 line space) -----

First Paragraph (Do not write "First Paragraph" and do not use bullets within this section of your letter.)

- Specify what position you are applying for and how you heard about it.
- State your degree and institution and when you will receive/received it.
- Briefly state your basic reasons for applying for the position.

Second Paragraph

- Highlight your qualifications for this position – keep in mind what the employer has stated s/he is looking for – past work experiences, internships, academic path, and/or personality traits. Try to elaborate on at least one achievement that you believe makes you a strong applicant.
- More than likely, this will be your longest paragraph. Sell your skills, experience, and education!

Third Paragraph

- Refer the reader to your enclosed resume.
- If there is anything from your resume that you want to highlight, mention it here.
- Indicate specifically why you want to work for the organization. This requires you to do research!

Fourth Paragraph

- Express that you believe you are qualified for the position.
- Express your desire to meet to discuss your qualifications – ask for an interview!
- Give your phone number. If you need to, specify a good time to call.
- State that you will call within one week to ensure your application materials were received.

----- (1 line space) -----

Sincerely,

Sign your name in this space ----- (3 line spaces) -----

Your name typed out

----- (1 line space) -----

Enclosures (Only needed if enclosing additional documents such as a resume.)