

Career Development

COVER LETTERS 101

WHATS THE PURPOSE?

A cover letter is the first contact you make with an organization or company. It accompanies a resume that is being sent to an organization for a specific position. The well-written cover letter will lead the reader to the other part of the application-the resume. In other words, the cover letter bridges the gap between your skills and experience and the qualifications of the position.

It demonstrates your ability to communicate in writing and organize your thoughts in a cohesive manner, both of which are pertinent to most positions.

A well-written cover letter commands the reader's attention. It demonstrates interest and knowledge in the industry and/or employer.

The opportunity to interview is the ultimate goal of your cover letter and resume. A cover letter is like an individual commercial where the most attractive features are highlighted for the employer so it GRABS THEIR ATTENTION.

INGREDIENTS OF A GREAT COVER LETTER

All cover letters are different but most have these key ingredients: the return address, the date, the addressee, the salutation, introduction, body, closing, and the enclosure line. The introduction and closing should each be one paragraph while the body can be one or two paragraphs.

STARTING OFF

The return address and phone number must be at the top of the page. If the resume has a specific letter head remember to use that same letter head for the cover letter. The date will appear two lines below the return address. Make sure to write out the date; don't abbreviate. Next, include the company contact information (contact name and title, address, and phone number) two lines beneath the date.

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Always try to find out the name and proper title of the person receiving the letter. The salutation will fall two lines below the addressee information. Begin with “Dear Mr. _____,” or “Dear Ms. _____ ” followed by the person’s last name and a colon. Never address the letter by their first name. If it is a cold call letter, salutations may be more general like, “Dear Human Resource Manager” or “Dear Hiring Manager.”

OPENING

This opening paragraph explains why you are writing the letter. State your purpose, and name the specific position or type of work for which you are applying. If you are responding to an advertisement, state the name and date of the publication where you found the ad. If a well-respected person referred you to the organization, mention the person’s name and connection.

The first paragraph must attract enough attention to make the employer want to read on. This is definitely no time for drabness. Here are some samples of “personal” opening line:

- » Your advertisement in the Sun-Sentinel, dated Saturday, July 20, indicated your need for...
- » After speaking with Gordon Sumner regarding the position, I...
- » I am writing to inquire about the position...
- » Because of my background in...I am applying for...
- » My reason for contacting you...

BODY

This is the section where you must sell yourself and your abilities. In the second paragraph, communicate the way in which your skills and experiences can be of value to this particular employer. Show how you will benefit the firm. Specifically discuss how your skills meet the requirements of the position. Highlight relevant achievements, skills, and/or experience, mentioning one or two of the most interesting points on your resume. Explain how you intend to contribute to the organization/employer. You can list in bullets or paragraph-format your skills and qualifications.

Here are some examples:

- » The enclosed resume highlights my technical expertise in computer-aided design. As one of the few students chosen to work with _____ at Nova Southeastern University, I have incorporated into my design project techniques which . My accomplishments in this area have prepared me to make a strong contribution to your organization.

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- » The position of would allow me to....
- » My qualifications and experience include.....
- » The experience I have gained in the accounting field.....
- » Your company interests me because.....

If you feel the need to have a third paragraph, you can include information which hasn't been mentioned on your resume or needs to be described in more detail (for example: your cooperative education experience or gaps in your employment).

CLOSING

This final paragraph the letter changes from desire into action. Here you should state when and how you would contact the employer to arrange a mutually convenient time to interview. Include your phone number and how you can be reached. Do not assume an employer will contact you once you have sent your cover letter and resume. It is your responsibility to follow up. Finally, thank the individual and mention that you are looking forward to meeting him or her.

Here are some closing statements:

- » I would like to meet with you and will call to set up an appointment at your convenience.
- » Thank you for your time and consideration; I hope to hear from you soon.
- » You will find my resume enclosed. I look forward to discussing my experience and qualifications with you.
- » I will speak with you further and will call the week of to follow up.
- » Once you write your salutation, don't forget to write "Enc: Resume" to remind the employer that your resume and / or other material accompanies the cover letter.

TOP 10 COVER LETTER TIPS

1. Send the letter to the appropriate person.

Your letter will be more effective when you address the letter to a specific person within an organization. Don't hesitate to call the organization directly to find out the name (and correct spelling!) and title of the person in charge. If you are unable to get a specific name, "Dear Hiring Manager", "Dear Human Resources Manager", or "Dear Director" are acceptable alternatives.

2. Research the employer.

What better way to send a letter with direct impact than to focus on facts unique to this particular employer? Use the information obtained through research to demonstrate that you

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know something about the company while also explaining why you want to work for the organization.

3. Take your time.

Do not send your resume and letter out the day after the ad is run. Wait a few days. Time your letter so that it is the first wave of letters and resumes have already arrived in one massive pile. The likelihood of your letter and resume being read is greater if it is 1 of 3 or 4 rather than 1 of 20.

4. Time your letters and follow-up calls effectively.

If emailing your resume, send it between 6am and 9am on Monday. A study conducted by Bright.com, a jobseeker website now part of LinkedIn, has shown that a third of resumes sent that day made it to the next round of the hiring process. The least successful day of the week to email resumes was Saturday. Time your follow-up calls no more than three days after the arrival of your documents. It is much more likely to be forgotten after that. Avoid emailing or calling on Friday after lunch since people typically have the weekend on their minds.

5. Keep it to ONE page!

Three to four short paragraphs are plenty for an employer to read; any longer and it may not be read.

6. Leave qualifiers out of your letter.

Don't use the expressions "I feel that..." or "I think that...." These qualifiers only weaken what comes after them. Usually, these statements can be left out and the remaining sentence can stand as is.

7. Count the "I's" in your letter.

If you use the word "I" more than 3 or 4 times to start your sentences, you've used it too much. Starting every sentence with "I" can give the wrong impression. Change sentences in order to eliminate the "I" For example, "I have had experience in..." could be changed to "My experience includes...."

8. Retain a copy.

Be sure to use an acceptable business letter format (see samples). Send the original and be sure to keep a copy for your records.

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9. Match your stationery.

For a polished, professional image, print your resume and cover letter on matching resume paper and enclose them in a matching envelope. Avoid using colored paper and graphics. Stay conservative.

10. Reread your letter.

Keep in mind that the professional image you want to give to a prospective employer includes a neatly typed, grammatically correct and accurate letter and resume (NO TYPOS!). The best way to check for mistakes is to have others read and view it before sending it to employers. REMEMBER, your cover letter and resume represent YOU, so make it leave the best impression.

Schedule an appointment with a Career Coach for a resume review, after working on your resume in [VMock](#) and achieving a score of 70% or higher.