

Cover Letters

Cover letters are an important communication tool and most job search campaigns cannot be conducted without them. When sending a letter, students should follow the basic business letter format described in this section. There has been a dramatic increase of letters and resumes sent through email and the Internet. Regardless of the communication mode being used, strong letters will produce a positive first impression. Students who send exceptional letters, either on paper or electronically, are noticed and strongly considered for opportunities.

The cover letter is a 3 to 4 paragraph, one-page letter, typed in a business format that introduces you and your resume to an employer and identifies your reason for sending it. The letter is also an opportunity for you to focus on and communicate to a prospective employer your relevant skills, knowledge and accomplishments that match the characteristics of a specific position or organization. Finally, the cover letter serves as an introductory sales letter and motivates the employer to read the resume and invite you for an interview for the position you are seeking.

Cover Letter Guidelines:

Appearance

Individualized: Address the letter to an individual rather than to “Dear Recruiting Manager” whenever possible. Call to get a contact if one is not known. This is important for follow-up. You should follow up your letter with a phone call to confirm that it arrived and to demonstrate continued interest.

Paragraphs: Be brief; keep them short enough to encourage reading.

Paper: Use high quality bond paper with matching envelopes.

Print: Laser-print your letter using block or semi-block basic letter styles. The page should be well balanced.

Signature: Remember to sign your letter.

Writing Style

Targeted: Be specific. Indicate a special reason for wanting to work for that particular employer, if possible, or something about your interest and skills for the industry or career field.

Persuasive: The letter should be problem-solving oriented referring to how you can meet the employer or job needs rather than simply listing accomplishments or your desires.

Tone: Be clear and concise. The letter should expand upon the resume and add personal flavor. Give the impression of confidence, but not conceit. It is best not to be clever or cute, but you may choose to be creative, depending on the type of employer to whom you wish to appeal.

Accuracy: Use correct grammar, punctuation and spelling. Make certain there are no mistakes. Have career counselors and/or individuals you know critique your letters.

Self-Descriptive Words

(Add personal qualities to the letter)

active	independent
adaptable	logical
aggressive	loyal
alert	mature
ambitious	methodical
analytical	objective
attentive	optimistic
broad-minded	perceptive
conscientious	personable
consistent	pleasant
constructive	positive
creative	practical
dependable	productive
diplomatic	realistic
disciplined	reliable
discrete	resourceful
economical	respective
energetic	sense of humor
enterprising	sincere
enthusiastic	sophisticated
extroverted	systematic
fair	talented

Action Words

(Serve to convey a spirited personality and a productive person)

accelerated	managed
adapted	motivated
administered	organized
analyzed	originated
approved	participated
coordinated	performed
conceived	planned
conducted	pinpointed
completed	programmed
controlled	proposed
created	proved
delegated	provided
developed	recommended
directed	reinforced
eliminated	reorganized
established	revamped
expanded	revised
founded	scheduled
generated	set up
influenced	structured
implemented	supervised

Types of Cover Letters:

Letter of Application

Explains your interest in a specific position known to be open with an employer. This letter includes pertinent details about your qualifications and requests action regarding the position.

Letter of Inquiry

Expresses interest in working for the employer and inquires as to whether a particular type of position might be available.

Using Contacts in a Cover Letter

Students should always mention the name of a contact whenever possible. A contact can be a professor, a friend's parent or alumnus/ae. By mentioning the contact's name, a whole new image about the candidate is generated. The employer may conclude that the contact is endorsing the candidate, the resume will be read, and the chance of an interview is more favorable.

(Adapted from: *Career Planning Today*, C. Randall Powell; *Resumes That Knock'em Dead*, Martin John Yates)

Other Resources

BOOKS – Check the Career Resource Library for additional print resources

200 Letters for Job Hunters. William S. Frank. Ten Speed Press.

Cover Letter Almanac & Disk. Adams Media Corporation.

Resume & Job Search Book for College Students. Bob Adams. Adams Media Corporation.

WEBSITES

[Career Lab](#)

[Carnegie Mellon Career and Professional Development Center](#)

Suggested Cover Letter Format

Your Address

Date

Contact Person

Title

Department

Company Name

Address

Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms./Dr. (Contact Person):

First Paragraph - Introduction (2 - 4 sentences)

Establishes the purpose of your letter, attracts attention and arouses interest.

- Mention the name of your contact person, if applicable.
- State why you are writing by naming the specific position or type of job.
- Tell how you heard about the position/employer and why you are interested in it.
- Insert a brief sentence that gives your degree, major, college affiliation, and graduation date.

Second/Third Paragraph - Body (1 - 2 paragraphs, depending on background)

Generate interest with content by indicating how much employer research you have done and how your skills/background match the employer's needs.

- Indicate how you can help the employer achieve organizational goals in your specialty. Focus on what you can do for them rather than why you want the position.
- Highlight your most significant accomplishments, abilities, and experiences that are specifically relevant to the employer and job requirements.
- Sell your credentials - your mission is to prove you should be invited to an interview. Make reference to enclosures.
- Do not simply repeat your resume but point out important experiences and key assets - show some of this to demonstrate to the employer your personal qualities that cannot be indicated on a resume.

Fourth Paragraph - Closing (4 sentences maximum)

State your commitment to action.

- Take the initiative to make clear what happens next - you will be calling to arrange an appointment, and/or ask for additional information.

- State your availability. Let them know if/when you will be in the area.
- Mention enclosed resume or sample work, if applicable.
- Restate contact information so the employer can reach you.
- Thank the employer.

Very truly yours/Sincerely,
(followed by four spaces)

Your Signature
Your Name Typed

Updated 5/27/14