

The Letter of Success!

Writing Effective Cover Letters

Career Foundations: Item 2

A cover letter, or letter of application as it is sometimes called, is the letter that covers your resume, literally. A cover letter introduces you to the potential employer. It makes a first impression and serves to set the tone for your resume. A well-crafted cover letter contains useful information not found in your resume and spotlights important items that are included in the resume. So, it is a fairly important piece of writing.

A good cover letter is one page in length (3 paragraphs) and details how you match the position. Like any good essay, the opening paragraph should catch the employer's attention and state what position you are applying for and why. The middle should develop your theme by providing specific examples of your qualifications. The end should summarize by requesting an interview and providing contact information.

Three Types of Cover Letters

Invited cover letter is normally a response to a want ad. This type allows you to speak to the requirements of the ad. You can offer the employer the requirements sought because you know the requirements sought; it's all spelled out in the ad.

Uninvited cover letter is commonly used when sending out many resumes at once. It can blanket a whole field of companies and can be very effective.

Referral cover letter is similar to the uninvited letter. This letter would prominently display the name of a person your addressee knows.

Characteristics of a Good Cover Letter

- ◆ Makes a good first impression
- ◆ Is original and specific to each job application situation
- ◆ Provides an answer to the question "Why should I hire you?"
- ◆ Is direct and to the point
- ◆ Is usually one page or less in length
- ◆ Is written on paper that matches your resume paper (a matching envelope should also be used).

General Rules

- ◆ Single space your letter and double space between paragraphs.
- ◆ Keep your paragraphs brief and relevant.
- ◆ If possible, laser-print your letter on good quality bond paper.
- ◆ Tailor your letter to the position and company. You are selling yourself, so show how your qualifications match the job duties and company goals.
- ◆ Proofread your letter carefully. Misspellings and grammatical errors make you seem careless

Addressing the Letter

- ◆ You will start with your address. Some people like to use the same letterhead and print style they use on their resumes. That is perfectly acceptable. In this case, your name will be first.
- ◆ After your address, space down at least two lines and enter the date.
- ◆ Space down two more lines and type the name of the person to whom you are addressing your letter. You can type the person's title on the same line or on the line below.
- ◆ On the next line, type the company name, followed by the address on the next two or three lines.
- ◆ Begin your salutation with Dear Mr. or Ms., followed by the persons name and a colon.

Grab Attention with Your Opening

- ◆ State your career objective and/or relevant training experience. This is a simple, direct approach which appeals to many employers because it matches you to the position immediately.
- ◆ Refer to a company or career research you have done. Companies like to know that you have "done your homework." The more you know about a company and the careers it offers, the better you can match your qualifications to the employer's position. They will be flattered and you will increase your chances of getting an interview.
- ◆ Refer to the content of the employer's ad: mention the position for which you are applying and link the position requirements to your own skills and qualifications. Avoid referring exclusively to the name of publication and date. Employers usually know which ad you are responding to because of address codes. Besides, it is a boring opening and you are trying to grab attention.

Building Your Middle

- ◆ Develop your opening theme in this section.
- ◆ This is a place for you to discuss your qualifications and skills, giving examples from past work experience to illustrate your strong points.
- ◆ Employers consider achievements to be indicators of future success, so do not be modest about yours. Using numbers demonstrates achievement. If you have increased sales, cut costs, or efficiently maintained work schedules, include that fact. Show how your experience and achievements match the position requirements or company goals. The better job you do at matching yourself to the position, the more likely you are to get an interview.

Writing an Action Close

- ◆ Your closing paragraph or sentence should encourage action. Offer one of two choices: either contact me or I will contact you. The latter choice works better with private corporations. Government and other public agencies usually prefer that you do not call them requesting an interview.
- ◆ If you have not already said in another part of your letter that you believe your skills and qualifications will be an asset to the company, now is the time.
- ◆ Finally, thank the employer for taking the time to read and consider your letter.



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