

COVER LETTERS & PROFESSIONAL BUSINESS CORRESPONDENCE

Your “Call To Action” – Write It Right!

Now that you have mastered the art of the resume, it's time to tackle your cover letter. Cover letters are intended to spark the interest of the reader and to compel the reader to take action. This is the tool that asks for an interview. Many students find composing a cover letter challenging... the hardest one you will ever write is your first good one!



Complement, but do **NOT** duplicate, what is stated on your resume. Your cover letter should interpret your data-oriented, factual resume and add a personal touch. This letter is often your earliest written contact with a potential employer, creating a critical first impression.

Treat your cover letter as a “sales pitch.” The “product” is what you bring to the company: your skills, your experience, your personality. Everything in your cover letter should be there to close the deal, which you do by showing how valuable you are as a professional. If a sentence doesn't serve that goal it should be removed!

What Employers Expect in a Cover Letter

- Tailored skills from the job description → 33%
- Clarity (specifying job applied to) → 26%
- Details from resume → 20%
- Your (personal) value → 19%

“If I'd had more time, I would have written you a much shorter letter.” (E. B. White)

COMMON TYPES OF COVER LETTERS

Targeted Cover Letters are customized to a specific job description and are used to apply for an advertised opening. This type of cover letter should identify the specific opening and describe the skills and abilities you possess in relation to the job duties that are listed in the advertised opening.



Approach Cover Letters express interest and present your qualifications to a particular company or organization you would love to work for but who has not advertised an opening. Keep in mind that many jobs are not advertised!



Networking Cover Letters are necessary when using a referral source to introduce yourself to a prospective employer. This type of letter would be used if your uncle suggests you write to his colleague who is a recruiting manager at a company in which you have an interest.

Prompt Letters stimulate action or a decision on the part of the employer after you have initiated contact.



Why Are Cover Letters So Important?

While your resume is a concise “snapshot” of your education, experience, and skills, your cover letter is a much more personalized document that gives you the chance to capture an employer’s attention.

Think of your cover letter as the link between the facts on your resume and what the employer is looking for as stated in the job description. While employers typically scan resumes, the narrative format of a cover letter invites them to read more carefully. Your cover letter is also the place where you can mention a mutual contact, elaborate on your strengths, and show some personality!

Can I Use the Same Cover Letter with Every Application?

Employers definitely can “sniff out” a generic cover letter that has been sent to multiple places, so be sure **to customize EVERY cover letter** to the particular employer and position.

Should I Include a Cover Letter with Every Resume I Submit?

In a word....**YES!** Whether applying for a specific position or simply networking, submitting a cover letter shows an employer a high level of professionalism that cannot be expressed solely through a resume.



TIP: *You do not need a cover letter when submitting your resume at a career fair.*

How Long Should My Cover Letter Be?

As with your resume, your cover letter should be concise but powerful! A well-constructed cover letter will typically consist of three paragraphs on a single page:

1. **“Hi!”** – Your first paragraph introduces you, states the purpose of your letter, tells how you heard of and what you know about the company, and mentions any contact who may have referred you.
2. **“Why?”** – Your second paragraph focuses on how your skills make you a good fit for the position in which you are interested.
3. **“Bye!”** - Your third paragraph invites follow-up and provides details on the best way to contact you.

To Whom Should I Address My Cover Letter To If I Don't Have a Name?

- Do **NOT** address your letter to “Dear Sir or Madam:” or “To Whom It May Concern:”
- Use LinkedIn, the company website, or a phone call to the central switchboard to get a name and job title!
- When in doubt, the Director of Human Resources or of a specific department is always a good choice
- If all else fails, use “Dear Hiring Manager:”



Dear Sir/Madam...
Dear Potential Customer...
Dear fellow citizen...
Dear friend...
Mon ami...
Hey you gorgeous thing, you...
Dude...

What Are The Most Common Flaws With Cover Letters?

- Too generic, modest, or even dull!
- Poor spelling, grammar and punctuation, misuse of commas and capitalization
- Weak closing paragraph with no stated plan for follow-up
- Poor style – not centered on page, unprofessional font, etc.

TIP: *Proofread your letter...then proofread again....and then have someone else proofread!*

**PROOFREAD
CAREFULLY
TO SEE IF YOU
ANY WORDS OUT**

What Is The Best Format For Submitting My Cover Letter?

- When submitting a printed version of your cover letter, match the font to your resume and use high quality “resume paper” for both documents.
- For electronic submissions, unless otherwise stated by the employer, submit your cover letter and resume as one single PDF attachment. Be sure to include your name in the title of the attachment (i.e. *John Doe Resume Document*).

Can My Cover Letter Ever Be in the Form of an E-mail?

YES! But you will still need to follow the strict guidelines for professional correspondence outlined in this guide. Do **NOT** let your guard down and make the “tone” of your email more casual. Employers are evaluating your written communication skills every time they hear from you!

What If I Already Have a Cover Letter But Feel It Doesn’t Measure Up?

Toss it! Open a new document and start fresh!

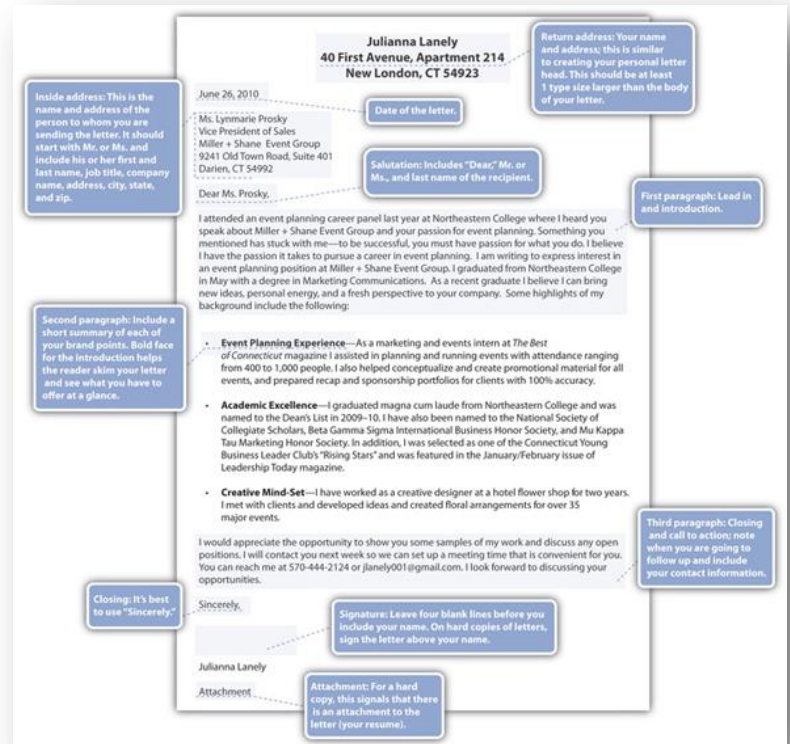


TIP: You may need to do a little editing to be sure your new cover letter flows smoothly. Then stop. You’re done! Short and sweet, as the saying goes

PREPARING A COVER LETTER

When you are preparing your cover letter, make sure to do the following...

- Choose a professional font and font size that match your resume
 - Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri
- Be sure to include the date on your letter
- Determine to whom you should address the letter, using both name and professional title
- Always use a colon, and **NOT** a comma in your salutation
 - Dear Ms. Smith:
- Open with a strong statement that captures the reader's interest
- Ask for an interview, meeting, or phone conversation in your final paragraph!
- Sign your letter
- Center your letter on the page in a "picture frame" format
- Keep the reader's interest by varying sentence structure and length
- Have at least two sentences in each paragraph



TIP: Try reading your letter backwards, word by word, when you are proofreading. That way the content won't get in the way of checking your spelling.

TIP: Always spell check your letters, then read them over for words that are spelled correctly but used inappropriately (example: "there" instead of "their").

Up Your Language... Up Your Game!

No contractions and no exclamation points!

- Instead of “I’ve completed two internships...” → “I have completed...”
- Instead of “I can’t wait to meet you!” → “I look forward to meeting you.”

Avoid starting every sentence with “I” – be sure to vary your sentence structure.

- Instead of “I am a senior Biology major at High Point University...” → “As a senior Biology major at High Point University, I...”



Polish your language:

- Instead of “I feel...” → “I am confident...”
- Instead of “shows...” → “illustrates...”
- Instead of “more...” → “further...”
- Instead of “like...” → “such as...”
- Instead of “start...” → “begin...”
- Instead of “talk to you” → “speak with you...”
- Instead of “looking for...” → “seeking...”

Avoid these phrases:

- “There is...” or “There are...”
- “I am...”

Remember to use “action verbs!”

- Instead of “assisted” or “worked with” → “collaborated”
- Instead of “served as head lifeguard” → “supervised team of five lifeguards”

BREAKING DOWN THE STRUCTURE OF A COVER LETTER

Opening Paragraph: *Introduction | Purpose | Name-dropping | Admiration*

The first paragraph clearly states why you are writing. You might think this is obvious, but a hiring manager might have more than one position open. Be sure to state clearly the position for which you are applying, using the exact job title. Your opening paragraph is also the place to mention how, or from whom, you learned about the position or organization. You should also explain why you would love to work for this company – but keep it concise.

Examples

Introduction:

“Upon graduating from High Point University with a degree in Accounting, I am eager to gain practical experience and apply my skills”

Why you are writing:

“Upon reading your advertisement in the New York Times, I was very excited to learn of your need for an entry level accountant.”

“I was very excited to read about the opening for an entry level accountant with_____.”

“Your recent advertisement for a graphic artist prompted me to contact you...”

Who referred you:

“John Doe suggested that I contact you regarding your search for a graphic artist...”

“Ms. Bridget Holcombe, my career advisor at High Point University, suggested I reach out to you for more information about the XYZ summer internship program.”

Why you admire the company: Make it clear why this is the company you want to work for. Make them feel special and as if they are your #1 choice!

“I am motivated to be a part of an organization that values commitment to excellent, teamwork, and individual initiative.”

“Forever 21 is a fast-paced environment, which is ideal because I like working under pressure and quickly. I am particularly impressed with Forever 21’s ability to quickly take high fashion inspiration and turn it into affordable clothing that is exceptionally fashion forward.”

Second Paragraph: Why you are the best candidate for the position

In the second paragraph you need to give specific examples and explain how either your past experience or training prepares you for this particular position. You should think of this as your “bragging” paragraph! You will also need to indicate what you can do for the employer rather than what the employer can do for you. But be careful: do not merely restate what is on your resume.

Don’t: “I was the office manager at ABC Company for the past two summers and oversaw all logistical decisions.”

Do: “During my time at ABC Company, I reduced office expenses by 12% and successfully managed the move to a new building.”

Do: Choose your best qualities and state them clearly and efficiently in your second paragraph.

Don’t: *BORE* the reader with *BUZZWORDS*

“I feel I am well qualified for this position because I am deadline-oriented, organized, a leader, a professional, a self-starter, a hard worker, creative, dedicated, positive, punctual, eager to learn, adaptable, sociable, dynamic, reliable, mature, efficient, a team player, analytical, a problem solver, dependable, communicative, and have great attention to detail.”



Final Paragraph: *Your plan for follow-up*

Be confident but gracious. Mention that you look forward to talking about the position in more detail and welcome the chance to meet in person. Always thank employers for their time and consideration.

Examples

“The enclosed (attached) resume describes my qualifications for the _____ position.”

“Please consider my request for a personal interview to discuss my qualifications.”

“I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you and further discuss the position and my ability to meet your needs.”

“I will contact you next week to arrange a time to discuss my qualifications in person.”

“I can be reached by phone at (555) 555-5555 weekdays after 5:00 p.m. You may also leave a message and I will return your call as soon as possible.”

“Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to speaking with you soon.”

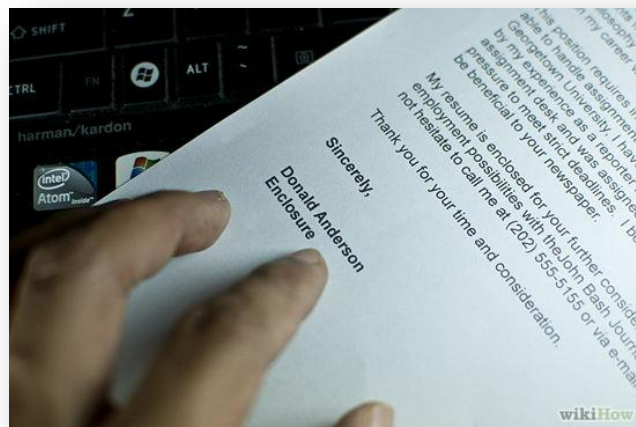
“Enclosed is my resume for your review. I would be happy to send you my portfolio or provide you with any additional information about my background and experiences you may need. I will call you next week to make sure you received my application and answer any questions you may have about my qualifications for this internship. Thank you for your consideration.”

Sample Closings

“Sincerely,” or “Sincerely yours,”

“Respectfully yours,”

“Best regards,”





- Keep copies of all cover letters so that you can refer back to them
- When modifying an existing cover letter for a new employer, proofread carefully to make sure you do not mention the wrong company in your letter!
- Always print out a copy of your letter to see how it fits on the page – create a “picture frame” effect!
- During your final edit, look for places to insert ***action verbs!***

Email Correspondence

- First impressions count! Don’t let the speed and ease of sending email blind you to the fact that you will be judged on what you say and how you say it.
 - Be aware that email creates a written record
 - A well-written email can quickly impress an employer (and the reverse is true as well)
- Be sure to create an email “signature” that includes your contact information.
- Retain copies of the emails you send and receive
- When people take time to respond and give information, respond with thanks