

Cover Letters

A well written cover letter is an effective way to present your qualifications to an employer. Letters of application (cover letters) are read, compared, and used to screen candidates for interview consideration.

Your resume, when accompanied by a cover letter, is a sign of a serious and professional approach to job hunting. It will give employers whom you approach an indication that you are sincerely interested in their organization.

A well written cover letter presents your ability to communicate in writing, as well as your organizational ability, both of which are pertinent to most positions. The purpose of the cover letter is to get an interview. Jobs develop from interviews, not letters, so the application letter must achieve a number of things in a minimum of space.

Organization

A cover letter usually includes a minimum of three paragraphs. Each paragraph has a different goal.

First Paragraph.

This opening paragraph explains why you are writing the letter. State your purpose, identify the position you are applying for, and how you learned about the opening. 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.

Second Paragraph.

It is within this paragraph that you tailor your resume to a particular job. Here you should tell the employer why you are a strong candidate for this position. Highlight relevant achievements, skills, and/or experience, mentioning the most interesting points on your resume. Explain how you intend to help the employer and contribute to the organization.

Closing Paragraph.

Here you should state when and how you will contact the employer to arrange a mutually convenient time to interview. Also, be sure to state how and when they may contact you. 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.

Helpful Hints

- Use active, not passive, verbs. For example, use "arranged...", "devised...", "evaluated...", instead of "was responsible for 'arranging...'", 'devising...', 'evaluating...".
- Don't overuse the word "I". Starting every sentence with "I" can give the wrong impression, and you may come across as self-centered. Rather than starting with "I", turn some of your sentences around. It is better to give examples of how you did something than to say, "I did this or that...".
- Your letter will be more effective when you address the letter to a specific person within an organization. If you don't know the person's name, title, or gender, call the organization and ask for the correct information. If you are unable to get a specific name, then using "To Whom It May Concern" or "Dear Sir/Madam" are acceptable alternatives.
- Research the organization before you write the cover letter. Ideally, every cover letter is unique and targeted to a specific position. Use the information obtained through research to demonstrate that you know something about the company. Each time you submit a resume for a specific position it should be accompanied by an original cover letter.
- A cover letter should communicate your ambition and enthusiasm. Stress accomplishments by explaining how you have met specific employer needs. Show how previous accomplishments relate to the position for which you are applying. Also, the reader may be judging you on how well you write so do your best to make the words come alive!
- Never express dissatisfaction with a present or former job or employer. Be sure to avoid discussing any negative reasons for leaving your last job.
- Be sure to use an acceptable business letter format. Send the original and be sure you keep a copy of each letter for your records.
- For a polished, professional image, print your resume and cover letter on matching stationery and enclose them in a matching envelope.
- Also, 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 !). If you can type and have access to a computer or word processor and letter quality printer, it is advisable to use these. If you can't type, hire someone to type your letter professionally.

Cover Letter Tips

Every Resume Should Be Accompanied By A Cover Letter.

1. Each letter of application should be typed individually. Duplicated letters with fill-ins are not appropriate.
2. Keep a record of all correspondence.
3. The letter should be addressed to a particular individual in the company, preferably the head of the department in which you are hoping to work.
4. Use simple, direct language and correct grammar.
5. Use plain bond paper.
6. Strive for a "picture frame effect" with your margins. Business letters are folded in thirds and mailed in long envelopes, about 9 1/2 inches long.
7. Proofread your letters for errors; consider the tone it represents. Use "I" sparingly.
8. Be sure to sign your letters, and make certain your address is plainly visible.