

Cover Letters

Writing a cover letter often seems like a particularly daunting task. However, if you approach it “one step at a time”, you’ll soon be skilled at writing letters to send with your resume.

A cover letter should accompany each resume you send out. Your cover letter may make the difference between obtaining an interview and having your resume overlooked.

A cover letter should complement, not duplicate your resume. Its purpose is to interpret the data-oriented resume and add a personal touch. A cover letter is often your first written contact with a potential employer, creating a very critical first impression.

There are three general types of cover letters:

- The **application letter**, which responds to a known job opening.
- The **prospecting letter** which inquires about possible positions.
- The **networking letter** which requests information and assistance in your job search.

Your cover letter should be designed specifically for each purpose outlined above as well as for each position you seek. Do not design a form letter and send it to every potential employer (you know what you do with junk mail!).

Effective cover letters explain the reasons for your interest in the specific organization and identify your most relevant skills or experiences (remember, relevance is determined by the employer’s self-interest). You should express a high level of interest and knowledge about the position.

Your cover letter should follow the basic format of a typical business letter and should address three general issues:

1. First Paragraph - Why you are writing
2. Middle Paragraphs - What you have to offer
3. Concluding Paragraph - How you will follow-up

Cover Letter Checklist

Before you send your cover letter, review this checklist to make sure that you have covered all the basics and are sending a perfect cover letter to your prospective employer.

- The contact name and company name are correct.
- The letter is addressed to an individual, if possible. (Telephone the company and ask who your letter of inquiry should be directed to. Most often you will be given the name of the person who will review resumes).
- Letter mentions the position you are applying for and where it was listed.
- Your personal information (name, address, home phone, cell phone, email) is all included and correct.
- If you have a contact at the company, you have mentioned him or her in the first paragraph.
- Cover letter is [targeted](#) to the position you are applying for.
- Letter is focused, concise, clear, and well organized.
- If you have a gap in your employment history you have explained it in your cover letter. Whether from being laid-off and out of work, taking time out from the workplace to spend with

your family, traveling, going back to school, or for any reason, your cover letter gives you an opportunity to explain an employment gap.

- Font is 10 or 12 points and easy to read (Times New Roman or Arial, for example).
- There are no spelling, grammatical or typographical errors.
- You have read the cover letter out loud to make sure there are no missing words.
- You have kept a copy for your records.
- Letter is signed if you are mailing it. With an email cover letter it is most important to follow the employer's instructions. If the job posting says to include your cover letter and resume as an attachment, attach Microsoft Word or Adobe PDF files to your email message.
- Resume and letter are mailed flat in a business envelope (first choice) or neatly folded into thirds with the resume on top of the letter.
- Cover letter is printed on good quality bond paper that matches your resume