

Effective Cover Letters

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The Cover Letter

- Accompanies Resume
- Highlights Personality
- Communicates skills and highlights specific qualifications that are *directly relevant* to the job you are seeking

What Your Cover Letter Reveals About You

- Communication Skills
- Experience and Qualifications
- Level of Professionalism
- Clues to your personality
- How detail-oriented you are

5 Things to Think About Before Writing

- Employer's needs
- Your objectives
- 3-5 Qualities you'll bring
- How can you match your experience to the job?
 - What are at least two specific accomplishments you can mention which give credence to the qualities you previously identified?
- Why do you want to work for this particular organization?

Cover Letter Format

- Use 11-12 point font (*usually Times New Roman*)
- Different formats can be used (*play it safe—stick to standard business format*)
- Pay attention to spacing
- Pay attention to grammar and spelling

Cover Letter Format

- Your Address
 - Leave your name off (save it for the end)
 - Do not use commas between city and zip
 - Be consistent (St. or Street, MS or Miss. or Mississippi)
- Today's Date

Cover Letter Format

- Inside address and salutation
 - Attempt to contact the company/program for the actual name of the employer to whom you are writing
 - Verify address and correct spelling of names
 - Do not use “Dear Sir or Madam” and avoid “To Whom It May Concern”
 - If employer or recruiter is unknown, use “Dear Employer” or “Dear Search Committee”, etc.

Cover Letter Format

- The First Paragraph

- How you learned of the company or position
- The position for which you are applying
- “Name drop” if someone referred you
- Indicate what interests you about the position (based on your research of the company)
 - Example: I see from your website that Company X incorporates a teamwork atmosphere, which greatly appeals to me.

Cover Letter Format

– The Second Paragraph

- Sell yourself in this paragraph! Tell the employer why he/she should hire you.
- Describe your educational background and relevant experiences that qualify you for the position
- Illustrate through SPECIFIC examples how you will be an asset to the company/program
- Use key words from the job listing and focus directly on the skills/qualifications the company/program is seeking
- Okay to use 1-2 paragraphs for this section.

Cover Letter Format

- The Third Paragraph

- Invite the employer to contact you by including your phone number and e-mail address
- Illustrate open dates for an interview
- Thank the employer for his/her time and consideration
- Consider using the aggressive approach: inform the employer that you will call during a particular week to follow up/set up an interview

Cover Letter Format

- Your Signature
 - Use “Sincerely”
 - Sign your name neatly in blue or black ink
 - Type your name under your signature
- Enclosure(s)
 - Type “Enclosure(s)” at bottom of letter if you are including resume, list of references, or other supporting documents

Common Mistakes

- Failing to communicate a clear purpose
- Appearing unprofessional in form, structure, and design
- Spelling, grammatical, and punctuation errors
- Awkward language/use of passive voice
- Being overly assertive, boastful, obnoxious
- Appearing self-centered rather than job- or employer-centered
- Saying little about your interests, skills, accomplishments, etc.
- Addressed to wrong person and/or wrong place
- Produced on inferior paper

Cardinal Rules for Cover Letters

- Target your letter to the specific job
- Talk more about what you can do for the employer than about what the employer can do for you
- Convey focused career goals
- Maintain a positive tone
- Cut to the chase – don't ramble
- Don't make empty claims that aren't backed up by examples

Cardinal Rules, cont.

- Typically limit cover letter to one page
- Proofread!!!
- Never mail a resume without a cover letter
- Do not staple your cover letter to your resume
- Don't forget to sign your name
- Use quality paper and envelopes
- Get other people's opinions before you mail



Questions?