

COVER LETTERS

WHAT'S THE PURPOSE?

- A Cover Letter is the first contact you make with an organization or company. It accompanies a resume that is being sent to an organization for a specific position. The well-written cover letter will lead the reader to the other part of the application-the resume. In other words, the cover letter bridges the gap between your skills and experience and the qualifications of the position.
- It demonstrates your ability to communicate in writing and organize your thoughts in a cohesive manner, both of which are pertinent to most positions.
- A well-written cover letter commands the reader's attention. It demonstrates interest and knowledge in the industry and/or employer.
- The opportunity to interview is the ultimate goal of your cover letter and resume. A cover letter is like an individual commercial where the most attractive features are highlighted for the employer so **GRAB THEIR ATTENTION!**

THE INGREDIENTS TO A GREAT COVER LETTER

All cover letters are different but most have these key ingredients: **the return address, the date, the addressee, the salutation, introduction, body, closing, and the enclosure line.** The introduction and closing should each be one paragraph while the body can be one or two paragraphs.

STARTING OFF...

The return address and phone number must be at the top of the page. If the resume has a specific letter head remember to use that same letter head for the cover letter. The date will appear two lines below the return address. Make sure to write out the date; don't abbreviate. Next, include the company contact information (contact name and title, address, and phone number) two lines beneath the date. Always try to find out the name and proper title of the person receiving the letter. The salutation will fall two lines below the addressee information. Begin with "Dear Mr." or "Dear Ms.", followed by the person's last name. Never address the letter by their first name. If it is a cold call letter, salutations may be more general like, "Dear Human Resource Manager," or "To Whom It May Concern."

INTRODUCTION

This opening paragraph explains why you are writing the letter. State your purpose, and name the specific position or type of work for which you are applying. 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.

The first paragraph must attract enough attention to make the employer want to read on. This is definitely no time for drabness. Here are some samples of "personal" opening lines:

- Your advertisement in the Sun-Sentinel, dated Saturday, July 20, indicated your need for....
- Gordon Sumner suggested I contact you regarding.....
- I am writing to inquire about the position.....
- Because of my background in...I am applying for...
- My reason for contacting you

BODY

This is the section where you must **sell yourself** and **your abilities**. In the second paragraph, communicate the way in which your skills and experiences can be of value to this particular employer. Show how you will benefit the firm. Specifically discuss how your skills meet the requirements of the position. Highlight relevant achievements, skills, and/or experience, mentioning one or two of the most interesting points on your resume. Explain how you intend to contribute to the organization/employer. You can list in bullets or paragraph-format your skills and qualifications.

Here are some examples:

- The enclosed resume highlights my technical expertise in computer-aided design. As one of the few students chosen to work with...at Nova Southeastern University, I have incorporated into my design project techniques which.... My accomplishments in this area have prepared me to make a strong contribution to your organization.
- The position of _____ would allow me to....
- My qualifications and experience include.....
- The experience I have gained in the accounting field.....
- Your company interests me because.....

If you feel the need to have a third paragraph, you can include information which hasn't been mentioned on your resume or needs to be described in more detail (for example: your cooperative education experience or gaps in your employment).

CLOSING

In this final paragraph, the letter changes from **desire** into **action**. Here you should state when and how you would contact the employer to arrange a mutually convenient time to interview. Include your phone number and how you can be reached. 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.

Here are some closing statements:

- I would like to meet with you and will call to set up an appointment at your convenience.
- Thank you for your time and consideration; I hope to hear from you soon.
- You will find my resume enclosed. I look forward to discussing my experience and qualifications with you...
- I will speak with you further and will call the week of _____ to follow up.

Once you write your salutation, don't forget to write "Enc: resume" to remind the employer that your resume and/or other material accompanies the cover letter.

TOP 10 COVER LETTER TIPS

1. Send the letter to the appropriate person.

Your letter will be more effective when you address the letter to a specific person within an organization. Don't hesitate to call the organization directly to find out the name (and correct spelling!) and title of the person in charge. If you are unable to get a specific name, "Dear Hiring Manager", "Dear Human Resources Manager", or "Dear Director" are acceptable alternatives.

2. Research the employer.

What better way to send a letter with *direct impact* than to focus on facts unique to this particular employer?

Use the information obtained through research to demonstrate that you know something about the company.

3. When responding to advertised openings,

Do not send your resume and letter out the day after the ad is run. Wait a few days. Time your letter so that the first wave of letters and resumes have already arrived in one massive pile. The likelihood of your letter and resume being read is greater if it is 1 of 3 or 4 rather than 1 of 20.

4. Time your letters and follow-up calls effectively.

Your letters should arrive sometime after Monday--Mondays are the heaviest mail days. Tuesday is the most productive workday of the week. Time your follow-up calls no more than three days after the arrival of your letter. It is much more likely to be forgotten after that. Avoid calling on Monday morning or trying to fax your cover letter and resume on Friday after lunch since people will typically have the weekend on their minds.

5. Keep it to ONE page!

Three to four short paragraphs are plenty for an employer to read. If it's any longer, it's unlikely to be read.

6. Leave qualifiers out of your letter.

Don't use the expressions "I feel that..." or "I think that...." These qualifiers only weaken what comes after them. Usually, these statements can be left out and the remaining sentence can stand as is.

7. Count the "I's" in your letter.

Don't overuse the word "I". If you use the word "I" more than 3 or 4 times to start your sentences, you've used it too much. Starting every sentence with "I" can give the wrong impression.. Change sentences so that the word "I" is eliminated. For example, "I have had experience in..." could be changed to "My experience includes...."

8. Retain a copy.

Be sure to use an acceptable business letter format (see samples). Send the original and be sure to keep a copy for your records.

9. Match your stationery.

For a polished, professional image, print your resume and cover letter on matching stationery and enclose them in a matching envelope. Avoid using colored paper and graphics. Stay conservative.

10. Reread your letter.

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!**). Don't be satisfied with the computer spelling and grammar check on your computer. The best way to check for mistakes is to have others read and view it before sending it to employers. REMEMBER, your cover letter and resume represent YOU so make it leave the best impression.

RESOURCES

Adams Media Corporation, The Adams Cover Letter Almanac, 1995.

Martin Yate, Cover Letters That Knock 'Em Dead, 1997.

Martin, Eric R., Langhorne, Karyn E. How To Write Successful Cover Letters, 1994.

SAMPLE COVER LETTER

Gordon Sumner
1400 S. University Drive
Davie, FL 33314

Return Address

February 18, 2001

Date

Inside Address

Mr. Jeffery Bean, President
National Salsa Society
Miami, FL 33031

Salutation

Dear Mr. Bean:

Body

Your advertisement in the Sun-Sentinel, dated February 17, indicated the need for a Director for your association. I have had an interest in salsa products for a long time and the work of your organization has my respect.

As you can see from my resume, I have had two years of experience working as Assistant Director of the Indiana Salsa Society. My work at the Indiana branch involves managing the day-to-day activities of the society and includes working on increasing sales, fundraising, and publicity releases focusing on the different types of salsa.

In addition to my jobs I am presently pursuing a bachelor's degree in Business Administration at Nova Southeastern University and plan to graduate in May 2001. I have found taking courses in business while working in an administrative position provides me with an excellent balance of practical experience and educational training.

I would like very much to put my skills to work for your organization. I will call you within the next week to discuss the possibility of an interview, or you may reach me at (555) 555-5555 during normal business hours. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Closing

Signature

Typed Name

Gordon Sumner

Enc: resume (optional)

Enclosure

BULLET FORMAT COVER LETTER

15 Yellow Brick Rd.
Witchitaw, KS 88888

February 18, 2001

Mr. Frank N. Stein
Director of Search Committee
University of Bloodsworth
1414 Mockingbird Lane
Bloodsworth, KS 88828

Dear Mr. Stein:

I am writing in response to your job posting in JOBIT for the position of Coordinator of Student Services. Please consider me as an applicant for the position.

My student services experience includes:

- Counseling and advising a diverse population of students.
- Presenting seminars on time management, note taking, and study habits.
- Developing a marketing plan to increase student participation and use of services.
- Coordinating workshops and seminars for student and staff development.
- Training in areas relevant to students' needs such as diversity, conflict mediation, crisis intervention, and safety.

I would very much like to put my skills to work for your office and will call you within the next week to discuss the possibility of setting up an interview. If you have any further questions, I can be reached at (222) 555-3434. Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to speaking with you in the future.

Sincerely,

(Sign your name)

Dora Thee

Enclosure