

COVER LETTERS

The purpose of a cover letter - also known as a letter of application or inquiry - is to encourage an employer to review your qualifications and consider you for an interview. A cover letter should be accompanied by a resume. As often as possible, address cover letters to individuals rather than "To Whom It May Concern." To find a specific contact, look at resources such as the company website, LinkedIn, or other social media. If a contact person such as a human resources manager or personnel manager cannot be found through these means, simply call the organization and ask, "Who is responsible for the hiring decisions of this position?" Make certain you get the proper spelling and note preferences for Ms., Dr., Mrs., Mr., their job title, and address.

Connect to your resume:

Your cover letter should emphasize unique qualifications and personal characteristics which are relevant for the particular organization, industry, or job opportunity. Your cover letter and your resume should have a consistent heading and fonts. Think about:

- What are your particular strengths?
- What accomplishments are worthy of emphasis?
- Do you possess specific skills or talents that are relevant to the job?
- Can you demonstrate essentials of previous jobs?

Consider the employer's perspective and select two or three of the most relevant and impressive facts from your analysis. Organize these facts according to the most appropriate strategy for your cover letter.

Do Your Homework:

A cover letter should explicitly address what YOU can do for the organization, not what the organization can do for you.

One of the most effective ways to do this is to research everything possible. Research the industry by reading their website, social media, LinkedIn reviews and company review websites.

Incorporate company research findings about new accounts, the work environment, products, services, growth areas, and history with your specific qualifications and experience. ("My experience at XYZ in public relations would be very beneficial as you expand new services into ____.") "Contribute" and "mutually beneficial" are convincing words that would demonstrate what you could do for the organization.

Approaches:

In Response to a Job Post:

Mention in your first paragraph where or how you learned about the opening and then address the job requirements and desirable personal characteristics mentioned in the post. For example, if the job post says the company is looking for an assertive and energetic person, describe experiences in which you demonstrated these characteristics.

General Inquiry:

A general inquiry letter can be about a variety of subjects: occupational information, future work possibilities, or advice on career plans. Start with a statement that connects you to the reader ("From my research on Johnson & Johnson"). Mention any personal referrals ("Ms. ___ suggested I contact you"). General inquiry letters should be tailored to each organization.

Closing:

A good cover letter closing tells the reader what to expect in the future. Employers receive correspondence from hundreds of applicants daily. Be direct in your letter and tell the reader you will follow-up within a specific time (typically 7-14 days) to confirm the receipt of your letter and discuss the possibility of an interview. You may also state your availability for an interview at the employer's convenience. Mention any specific dates you will be in the employer's area. List your phone number again and the most likely times you can be reached. An expression of appreciation adds a nice final touch.

Cover letters are usually one page and are clear and concise. The letter should be typed in a professional business-style structure. Match your cover letter design to your resume design to provide a consistent look throughout your application materials. Read the instructions and send materials as they request them.

SUGGESTED COVER LETTER FORMAT

Your Current Address
City, State Zip Code

Today's Date

Mr./Ms. Person to Whom You Are Writing
Title
Name of Organization
Street Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms. Last Name:

State why you are writing. Indicate the position, field, or general area about which you are writing. Explain how you found out about the opening and organization and briefly tell why you are interested in the organization, type of work, or location. Use caution when using I and me to avoid a self-centered tone throughout the letter.

Refer the reader to your resume and mention a few of your main qualifications and skills from past experience and education, which directly relate to the organization and position at hand. Describe some of your personal characteristics which are especially relevant. Always write from the reader's point of view, emphasizing what you have to offer. Avoid vague statements; give proof by concrete examples without repeating your entire resume.

In closing, seek to elicit a response from the employer. Restate your interest in the position; indicate your willingness to arrange an appointment at the convenience of the employer, suggesting possible dates and times. Another good option is to indicate that you plan to follow-up the receipt of your letter by making a phone call within a specific time period. Thank the reader for his/her interest and state that you are looking forward to talking with the employer.

Sincerely,

(Your handwritten signature when possible)

Your typed name

Enclosures
(includes resume and reference page)

PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION EXAMPLES

Use these examples simply as guidelines. Your own letters should reflect careful self-analysis, research of the employer, and creativity.

Thank you letter or email:

Thank you for meeting with me on Wednesday, April 14th to discuss the position of Copywriter at Burston-Marstellar. I appreciated the opportunity to discuss Burston-Marstellar's future and enjoyed interacting with the staff.

My ability to work under pressure and meet deadlines has been proven. I feel confident from our discussion of the special qualifications for this position that my skills and experience mirror your needs. As indicated, I enjoy the challenge of a competitive environment in which success is based on achievement.

Again, thank you for considering me for the position. I look forward to hearing from you.

Application status:

Hello, this is _____. I am reaching out to check on the status of my application for the position of Human Resources Specialist. During our January 30th interview, you indicated a decision would be made by February 7th. I am still very interested in this position. Could you tell me where you are in the hiring process? *or* Could I supply you with further information to facilitate the process? *or* When do you hope to make a decision?

Thank you for your time. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Letter of acknowledgement:

It was my pleasure to receive your phone call today offering the position of Branch Manager Trainee. The time you have given me to make my decision is appreciated. I am anxious to review the formal offer and benefits information you are forwarding to me.

Thank you for your positive response. I look forward to talking with you the first week of May.

Letter of acceptance:

I am pleased to accept your offer to begin employment with Memorial Hospital as a Public Relations Specialist. I look forward to a successful future working with the public relations team.

Per our conversation, I plan to begin work on June 15th. Thank you for the opportunity to work in such a dynamic health care organization

REFERENCES

References should be listed on a separate page from your resume. Include your name and contact information at the top of the page to duplicate the heading on your resume and cover letter. Three to five references are generally sufficient.

Ask, don't assume:

Ask your references for permission to use their names. Confirm the following:

- Do the people you include as references actually want to give you a reference?
- Does their schedule permit time to discuss your qualifications?
- Most importantly, what kind of reference will they be? When it comes to references, neutral is the same as negative, so ask your contacts to be honest: Can the people you ask give you a positive recommendation?

Choose your references carefully:

Potential supervisors are not interested in hearing friends or relatives talk about how nice you are. They want confirmation for their main objective: Are you going to deliver the duties of the job? Good reference sources include previous supervisors, co-workers, professors, or advisers. Think outside the box: If you voluntarily coordinated an organization's fundraising effort, the organization's supervisor could be a great reference. It doesn't matter that you weren't paid.

Provide references with the appropriate tools:

Give each reference a copy of your resume, so he or she has a complete picture of your background. Provide a description of the job to which you are applying. Knowing the duties and responsibilities ahead of time will prepare references for questions they may be asked and help them relate your experience to the potential job.

Communicate with references:

Alert references to potential phone calls. Contact your references and tell them to anticipate a phone call or e-mail. Tell them the name of the company, and the position for which you interviewed. If you know the name of the person who will check your references, offer that information, too.

Keep your references informed. Were you offered the job? If so, did you accept? When will you start?

Thank your references. When you accept a job offer, take the time to write each of your references a thank-you note. They have played a valuable part in your receiving an offer.

Keep in touch. Don't end contact with your references. Send an e-mail, call or meet them for lunch on occasion. You never know when if and when you may need to call upon them to be references in the future.

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References

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