

Writing A Winning Cover Letter

Studies have shown that most cover letters are read in 8 seconds or less. That's not much time in which to introduce and sell yourself to a prospective employer. Thinking of leaving out the cover letter since it seems to command so little attention? Think again. Most employers say they won't even give a resume a second look if it is not accompanied by a cover letter. Always remember, whatever the reason for sending a cover letter, it should help to stimulate interest in you.

The main goal of the cover letter is to help you obtain an interview.

A cover letter is written as an introduction for your resume. There are two different types of cover letters you may need to write: solicited and exploratory. The solicited letter is written to apply for a specific opening and might begin like this, "I would like to be considered for the position of mechanical engineer as seen posted in the Center for Career and Professional Development (CCPD) at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. I am a self starter, a quality that I know would be valued by XYZ Co." The exploratory letter is written to explore potential employment opportunities. You might start this letter by saying, "Recently, I read an interesting article about your corporation in the June 18 edition of the Wall Street Journal. Given your need for experienced software designers, I would like to share my extensive background with you and discuss your current hiring needs."

Creating Your Cover Letter

Content

- Create an individualized cover letter for every resume you send
- Be honest and professional
- Make sure the letter contains no errors in spelling, grammar or punctuation
- Know your audience: research the company before writing
- Address your cover letter to a specific person, not "To Whom it May Concern" (Please note: This may require you to call the company and ask whom this should be. Verify the spelling of their name or to find out the gender of the person to whom you are sending the letter.)
- Cite specific examples to market yourself
- Do not restate details from your resume; refer the reader to your enclosures (resume, portfolio, writing samples, etc.)

Format

- Keep the cover letter to one page; be brief yet informative
- Use a business letter format
- Stick to the three paragraph rule: Introduction, Body (may be split in two paragraphs if needed) and Closing
- Be sure top and bottom margins are equal and side margins are even
- Include your contact information (address, phone number, e-mail)

Presentation

- If mailing your resume and cover letter, print your cover letter on the same paper as your resume
- Select matching envelopes
- Type everything and use spell check

Cover Letter Format Sample:

337 Main Street <your return address>
Troy, New York 12180
June 25, 200_ <date of letter>

Ms. Anne Jones
Senior Staff Recruiter
XYZ Corporation
123 6th Avenue
Anytown, Connecticut 01023

Dear Ms. Jones: <salutation>

<INTRODUCTION>

Opening Paragraph: Use a catchy or clever opening statement while maintaining professionalism. State the reason you are writing. Name the position you are applying for, or the type of work you are seeking. Identify the source from which you learned of the opening (i.e., the CCPD, JobLink, a personal contact, a company website on the Internet, a professional journal or newspaper). Stimulate interest in your resume. Tell the reader you have attached or enclosed a copy of your resume and give the reader a reason to read on!

<BODY>

Middle Paragraph(s): Market yourself! The purpose of this section is to strengthen your resume by providing details which bring your experience to life. Use a "Background Summary" paragraph to summarize relevant education/experience. If you are a recent graduate, explain how your academic background makes you a qualified candidate for the position. You may also include a "Value Selling" paragraph to demonstrate your ability to add value and to highlight your strengths. For example, if you have practical work experience, point out how your specific achievements, skills and unique qualifications will make you an asset to the organization. Indicate why you are interested in the position or the organization and stress what you can do for them. Refer the reader to your enclosed resume which summarizes your qualifications, training and experience. You may use bullets to emphasize achievements in this section!

<CLOSING>

Closing Paragraph: Request a personal interview and indicate your flexibility as to the time and place. Include your phone number (with area code) and your e-mail address (if you check it regularly). Tell the reader when you will call to follow-up if you are able to do so. Thank the reader for taking the time to consider your credentials.

Sincerely, <closing>

<sign your name here>

Mary T. Applicant <type your name>

Enc. <enclosure notation>