

Cover Letters

Career Planning

College of the Holy Cross

A cover letter accompanies your resume and together they serve to introduce you to the employer. If these documents are effective, you will be invited to interview. It must be well-crafted, targeted, and speak eloquently on your behalf. The cover letter should be viewed as an excellent opportunity to market yourself to an employer.

PURPOSE

Cover letters are important for several reasons:

1. **The letter is the vehicle, not the resume, through which you make the connection between your skills and the responsibilities of the job you want.** In other words, do not just summarize your resume – choose the two or three key points you want to highlight. Don't expect the employer to read your resume and make all the pertinent connections. You need to identify how your experience relates to the position for which you are applying. If you can't do so, the employer won't either.
2. **The letter is a writing sample.** How can you convince an employer that you have strong writing skills if your cover letter is poorly written?
3. **To obtain the interview.** Along with your resume, the cover letter will determine if you will be invited to interview.
4. **To convey enthusiasm for the work.** Apply only to positions that genuinely appeal to you and this will come easily. Make it clear that you are interested in this position.

KEY ELEMENTS

Here's your chance to showcase one of your strongest liberal arts skills: writing ability.

Keep your audience in mind. Always take the employer's perspective. This person has a position to fill, wants to find the best candidate, and in a short period of time. Be direct. Tell the employer what you have to offer, how your skills and experience relate to the job requirements, and show enthusiasm. **Use specific examples to illustrate why you are a strong candidate for the job.**

Keep it brief and to the point. Two ways to meet these criteria are to be concise and articulate. The cover letter should never exceed one page and generally be between three and four paragraphs.

Don't bury your lead, attract the reader's attention. State your reason for writing in the first paragraph; name the position for which you're applying and indicate how you learned about this opportunity. Did someone refer you to this job? Say so in the first paragraph. Do you have any direct or related experience? Say so in the second paragraph. Worse still, don't overlook the experience entirely thinking it'll be obvious when the employer sees your resume. Never just state that you have experience – always give examples. That is how you will stand out and make yourself unique.

Research the employer. Know the organization's mission, services and/or products and articulate specific reason(s) for your interest in working for this organization.

Use positive language and tone. Express a 'can-do' attitude and an eagerness to contribute to the organization.

Address all major job requirements. If you are responding to a job listing, identify how your background and experience relate to the responsibilities of the position.

Customize the letter. Know the name, correct spelling, and job title of the person to whom you are writing. If it's not stated in the job listing, call the organization to find out. Don't create a form letter and just change the addresses each time you send it out. Employers can spot a form letter a mile away. If you are thoughtful and selective about what you are applying for, you should be able to make each letter somewhat different.

FORMAT, APPEARANCE, TONE and STYLE

Use proper business format. **Pay attention to the details – such as spelling, grammar, margins and overall layout.** Have someone who is good at proofreading review it.

FINAL HINTS

- ◆ Keep copies of each cover letter and resume which you sent to an employer.
- ◆ Whenever possible follow-up each mailing with a telephone call to confirm receipt of your material and to express your interest in the position.
- ◆ Minimize the number of sentences which begin with the word "I".
- ◆ Don't count on "spellchecker" to proof the cover letter. It misses things and can't distinguish between others, e.g., 'their' and 'there'.

COVER LETTER OUTLINE

Your Street Address
City, State Zip Code

Date

Contact Name
Title and/or department
Organization
Street Address
City, State Zip Code

Salutation:

Opening Paragraph: Try to attract the reader's attention and state your reason for writing. Indicate the position or type of work for which you are applying and how you learned of this opportunity. Focus on something that sets this organization apart from similar employers and why that appeals to you.

Second Paragraph: State why you are interested in this position, this employer and the field. Make clear connections between your qualifications and the responsibilities of the position. Provide specific examples, don't speak in generalities.

Closing Paragraph: Reiterate your enthusiasm for the position and your desire to schedule an interview. Include your telephone number as well as email address.

Closing,

Typed Name

