

## ***Writing an Effective Cover Letter***

A cover letter is often an employer's first impression of you. Most businesses require a cover letter as part of your application processes so creating a professional, well written letter is essential in putting a complete application together.

Unlike a resume which you may be able to use with little modifications for different positions, a cover letter should be carefully tailored to each job for which you apply. The points you address in the letter should be directly tied to the job announcement and how your qualifications align with that position.

Along with the content, layout should be given detailed attention as well. Your letter should include a header, a 3 to 4 paragraph body and your signature.

**Header:** Your Header formatting should be the same style and information as your resume.

When addressing the letter, try to avoid 'To Whom it May Concern'. If a name is not known, consider calling the company and asking who is involved in the screening process or ask whose attention resumes are sent to. Don't be afraid to ask who the manager is for a specific department and if they are involved in screening applicants. This is especially important when you are sending your resume to a company who is not actively looking. When you are not able to find an addressee 'Prospective Employee' or 'Dear Manager', 'Human Resource Manager' is an option.

**Body of Letter:** (generally 2 to 3 paragraphs.)

### 1<sup>st</sup> Paragraph

This paragraph is a key element as it explains your intent to apply for a specific position with a specific company. Include how you knew to apply for the position, where you found the posting or who you heard about the position from.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Paragraph

The intent of this paragraph is to give examples of your qualifications and/or skills that you have to offer for the position you are applying for and why you should be considered for the job. The lead line needs to grab the reader and reel him/her in. Ideas to lead with:

- "As an experienced (whatever professional), ..."
- "I recently read about (something relevant to the company)."

As you explain your qualifications, keep in mind what the job listing entails. You want your qualifications to align with the needs of the employer. By explaining your qualification, you are telling the employer what your particular skills are that would be an asset to their company. Explain the way your academic background makes you a qualified candidate for the position.

Consider writing a pitch that shows your professional value. To prepare yourself for writing this section of your letter, answer the following questions:

- What skills and experience is the employer looking for in the ideal candidate for the job you want?
- Which of your achievements demonstrates that you have the skills and experience the employer is looking for?
- Which of your personality traits is the employer looking for in the perfect applicant for the position you seek?

This is a place to add items that are not included in your resume. If you have several specific examples here, it is acceptable to extend this section to two paragraphs if needed.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Paragraph

The concluding paragraph should discuss next steps as well as thanking them for their consideration. Tell them you look forward to discussing the job further or that you will follow-up with them in a certain amount of time. Be clear that you welcome an interview to discuss the duties of the job and your qualifications further.

Sign your letter with “Sincerely”, “Respectfully” or “Best Regards”. Make sure to sign your letter and not just type out your name. If you are submitting this electronically, still sign it and send as a pdf. Tip: You may want to create an image file of your signature that you can use on future letters if you don’t have easy access to a scanner.

### **Additional Suggestions:**

It is OK to:

- personalize your cover letter, using strong powerful words.
  - Ideas: <http://www2.ferrum.edu/career/guide/keywords.htm>
- in essence “brag” about your capabilities (don’t undersell yourself)
- state your enthusiasm to work for them

Be sure to:

- have consistent formatting that aligns with your resume
- be straight forward and brief, you need to capture their attention in just a few sentences
- tell them why you are a fit for the job
- incorporate what you know about the company
- explain how you are different from other applicants
- always have someone else proofread your work before sending to an employer
- use employer industry related language

Be sure to avoid:

- restating what is on your resume
- including any negative comments

- using **Bold** typeface throughout your paragraphs
- spelling errors
- sending a resume without a cover letter
- sounding passive, apologetic or indifferent
- more than 1 page in length

If you are having trouble getting started, try searching online for sample cover letters. This is a good method to get started, but avoid copying what you may find. Remember, the cover letter should target the position and relate your qualifications. You won't find a sample that meets those requirements.

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