
COVER LETTERS

An internship or job search often requires several different types of correspondence, including letters and e-mail. This correspondence will contribute to an employer's impression of you; make it a positive one! The type of letter you use will depend upon your specific purpose and job search situation. Employers often use these letters, along with your resume, in screening applicants or in making final hiring decisions.

Cover Letters

Cover letters serve as an introduction to your resume.

- Research the organization to discover its needs and the desired qualifications for applicants.
- Identify qualities you possess that the company is seeking and provide examples that demonstrate these qualities.
- Connect selected skills/ experiences on your resume to the job description and employer expectations. Expand on these points by providing specific details or examples
- When sending your cover letter electronically, it's your preference to use the text of your cover letter as the body of the email with a resume attachment OR send a short email with your cover letter and resume as attachments.

Writing a Cover Letter

Precisely because this letter is your introduction to an employer and because first impressions count, you should take great care to write an impressive and effective letter. Remember that the letter not only tells of your accomplishments but also reveals how effectively you can communicate.

The appropriate content, format, and tone for application letters vary according to the position and the personality of the applicant. Thus you will want to ask several people (if possible) who have had experience in obtaining jobs or in hiring in your field to critique a draft of your letter and to offer suggestions for revision.

Despite the differences in what constitutes a good application letter, the suggestions on these pages apply generally.

What to include in a cover letter

1. Try to limit your letter to a single page. Be succinct.
2. Assess the employer's needs and your skills. Then try to match them in the letter in a way that will appeal to the employer's self-interest.
3. As much as possible, tailor your letter to each job opportunity. Demonstrate, if possible, some knowledge of the organization to which you are applying.
4. Write in a style that is mature but clear; avoid long and intricate sentences and paragraphs; avoid jargon. Use action verbs and the active voice; convey confidence, optimism, and enthusiasm coupled with respect and professionalism.
5. Show some personality, but avoid hard-sell, gimmicky, or unorthodox letters. Start fast; attract interest immediately.
6. Arrange the points in a logical sequence; organize each paragraph around a main point.

How to organize a cover letter

Opening Paragraph

Clearly state why you are writing, name the position or type of work you are exploring and, where applicable, how you heard about the person or organization. A summary statement may work well here by including three reasons you think you would be a good fit for the opportunity.

Middle Paragraphs

Explain why you are interested in this employer and your reasons for desiring this type of work. If you have had relevant school or work experience, be sure to point it out with one or two key examples; but do not reiterate your entire resume. Emphasize skills or abilities that relate to the job. Be sure to do this in a confident manner and remember that the reader will view your letter as an example of your writing skills.

Closing Paragraph

Reiterate your interest in the position, and your enthusiasm for using your skills to contribute to the work of the organization. Thank the reader for his/ her consideration of your application, and end by stating that you look forward to the opportunity to further discuss the position.

Questions to guide your writing

- Who is my audience?
- What is my objective?
- What are the objectives and needs of my audience?
- How can I best express my objective in relationship to my audience's objectives and needs?
- What specific benefits can I offer to my audience and how can I best express them?
- What opening sentence and paragraph will grab the attention of my audience in a positive manner and invite them to read further?
- How can I maintain and heighten the interest and desire of the reader throughout the letter?
- What evidence can I present of my value to my audience?
- If a resume is enclosed with the letter, how can I best make the letter advertise the resume?
- What closing sentence or paragraph will best assure the reader of my capabilities and persuade him or her to contact me for further information?
- Is the letter my best professional effort?
- Have I spent sufficient time drafting, revising, and proofreading the letter?

If you need assistance writing or proofreading your cover letter please visit the office of Career Development in the lower level of Stoxen Library.

Career Development

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