



Why a Cover Letter?

Cover letters are the first opportunity to selling yourself as the product.

Why the fuss?

Hands down: Cover letters are an integral part of your online or in person résumé.

But why a cover letter if you already have a résumé? Simply put: The cover letter explains why you believe you are a good fit for the position, while the résumé proves how you are qualified for the position through your skills and experience.

Well-written cover letters are your first opportunity to sell yourself, create an impression, and separate yourself from the competition. They introduce you and your résumé, and help determine whether you make it to the interview stage. Some employers won't even read a résumé without a cover letter.

Introduction, overview, and summary.

Your cover letter puts your skills into context. It is the part of your résumé where you have the employer's full attention to quickly explain how all those skills and accomplishments neatly organized in your résumé will make you the best fit of all candidates for the company.

The tone should be businesslike, yet engaging and enthusiastic. Get to the point right after the salutation: State why you are writing, the position you're interested in, and what makes you the best candidate. Include how you learned of the position, add your degree and school, and, as appropriate, your current position and relevant extracurricular activities. Close with a "Thank you." and a request for an interview.

Keep it professional: Be brief, pertinent, neat, and accurate. You only have about three or four short paragraphs on one page to make your case.

Looks count on paper.

Cover letters should be inviting to the eye. Use an easy-to-read typeface, such as Helvetica, Arial, or Times, in 10-point or 12-point size. Avoid using all boldface, all italics, or all capital letters. Align type flush left and ragged right for easiest reading. Use black ink on high-grade white or ivory letterhead stationery.

Place your full address and contact info at the top left, followed by a line space, the date, another full line space, the employer's name, company, and full address, another line space, and salutation. Follow that with another line space and then the body of your letter. Leave a line space between paragraphs, without any indentation. Then one more line space, and conclude your letter with "Sincerely," on a line of its own, leaving sufficient space below for your penned full signature, just above your typed full name.

Whenever possible, address your letter to a specific person, not "To Whom It May Concern". If addressing "Robert Smith", use "Dear Mr. Smith:" or "Dear Sir:" with a colon as a salutation; not "Dear Robert,,"; not "Hi, Bob!"

If you can't identify the right person, then say "Human Resources Director" or "Director/Manager of [specific department]", or "Dear Recruiter".

Finessing the details.

Research the company so each cover letter is company-specific. Use straightforward language, active not passive words, good grammar, and accurate spelling. No slang, texting abbreviations, or other symbols.

Read your letter through for clarity. Remember, you're selling "you" and you don't have more than a few moments of an employer's time to do that, so don't use generic language such as "I like to work with people."

Hone your sentences carefully so each word counts. You need to keep the prospective employer's attention.

Finally, place your finished cover letter carefully on top of your résumé. Mail them together unfolded in a high-quality 9 x 12" white envelope, instead of the standard matching #10, for greater impact.



i n a nutshell:

Cover letters are sales letters, so make sure your message and medium are both clear and clean:

- Use plain quality stationery
- Personalize your letter
- Address the specific job and give qualification specifics
- Focus on what you can offer
- Be direct, relevant, and brief
- Don't rehash your résumé; highlight major points
- Proof, proof, proof for typos and accuracy; and don't lie
- Include a "Thank you," request an interview, then follow up

Remember, your cover letter is the key to your interview. It must be perfect!

Sample Cover Letter Layout

Steven Z. Sample

2003 Riverside Drive
Lynchburg, VA 24502
434-555-0555
ssample@liberty.edu

May 9, 2014

Name of Manager
Title and Department
Name of Company
Street Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms:

State the job you are applying for and how you learned of the opening (employment agency, relative, friend, media). If you are inquiring about a possible job opening, then specify the type of job that you are seeking. Indicate you are enclosing a copy of your resume.

Explain why you are interested in the prospective job, company, and its services. Why are you passionate about this as a career? Remember, this isn't about what you can get from them but what you can offer them. This will require you to research the company and position. Describe which character traits make you an ideal candidate for the job and how you will benefit the company. Be specific. Point out your academic background, specific achievements, or work experience that is applicable to your potential job. Even if you haven't had related work experience, or the only relevant experience is from your education thus far, include examples of your energy, initiative, and eagerness to work with and benefit the company. Try NOT to simply restate the same information that is in your resume. Your goal is to "sell" your best qualities in order to "lure" the reader to review your resume. If your cover letter is poorly written, your resume will not be read.

Request an appointment or personal interview at the reader's convenience. Close your letter in a manner that will encourage a speedy reply. For example, name a date on which you will call to set up your interview, ask if additional information or references are desired, or if the company recruits in your area. Thank the reader for his or her time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Enclosure (Resume/References/Samples/Etc.)

Cover Letter Sample –Response to Job Posting

Jane Doe
123 Abcd Lane
Stephens City, VA 22655
Professionalemil@yahoo.com

February 6, 2014

Ms. Renae Hall
Recruiter, Human Resource Office
Union First Market Bank
10131 Jefferson Davis Highway
Fredericksburg, VA 22407

Dear Ms. Hall:

Please accept the attached resume as application for the Seasonal Teller Winchester position, which I saw advertised on the Lord Fairfax Community College on-line job board. I am a general studies student completing my general education requirements who intends to transfer and major in business marketing. I am seeking full-time relevant summer employment and feel that my skills and educational goals are a perfect fit for this position.

From my resume you can see that I have extensive customer service experience, as well as retail experience handling cash and adeptly utilizing a computerized check-out system. I have been recognized for being able to think on my feet and work independently, as well as my ability to be a team player and function in that capacity as well. I was able to handle customers in a quick and courteous manner and effectively follow all procedures required by the organization. At both Wal-Mart and McDonalds I was recognized as sales associate and employee of the months for superior customer service and dedication.

After you have reviewed my resume I would like to ask for the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the position particulars, and how I may assist Union First Market Bank with their teller needs. I may be reached at (540)555-1212 so we may arrange a convenient time. Thank you in advance for your consideration and I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

(if sent by mail sign in blue or black ink)

Jane Doe

Enclosure