

WRITING YOUR COVER LETTER

1. THE “GET ATTENTION” PARAGRAPH

This is where you capture the attention of the reader. Give the name of the position you are applying for (and perhaps indicate how you learned of the opportunity—did someone tell you about it? Who? Did you see an ad? Where?)

Most importantly, you should give an outline of the specific reasons you feel you are ideal for this job in this company. Do not wait until paragraph two to begin selling yourself: start doing it here. Rather than saying “my skills and experience make me qualified for this position,” specify which skills and which experiences. Specifics are always more compelling than generalities.

2. THE “CREATING DESIRE” PARAGRAPH(S)

Here you go into detail, depicting yourself as a serious candidate and one worth inviting for an interview. It is generally a good idea to give the hard details about yourself (specific skills, history, responsibilities, successes, etc.) above “softer” details like personality traits, attitude, and values. Think hard about ways you can reinforce an image of yourself that includes as many of the desired qualities as possible.

- ***It is important that you tell the employer that you have a skill and also show them how this skill is reflected in your experiences.*** Don't just say you are “detail oriented,” give the reader an example of something in your history that proves it; rather than claiming to be “motivated,” make the reader believe you are by drawing on a real experience. Show, don't tell. Remember, you are trying to set yourself apart from other applicants; anyone can claim to be “hard working,” but only a truly hard working person can prove it.

- ***Do not simply restate the contents of your resume.*** You should certainly refer to it, but also expand on relevant areas. It is also acceptable (desirable, even) to refer to things that did not make it onto your resume, if they strengthen your case.

- ***Wherever possible, emphasize how you will benefit the company.*** If you write too much about how you will benefit from being hired (“I hope to learn a great deal about the industry”) then you will be calling attention to the gaps in your experience and knowledge.

- ***Do what you can to demonstrate that you are well rounded.*** If every point you make about yourself is drawn from your educational background, the reader might think of you as narrowly focused; if possible, draw on experiences from a variety of settings.

Your Address
City, State Zip Code

Today's Date

Name of Addressee
Title
Organization Name
Address
City, State Zip code

Dear Mr., Ms., Dr. Smith:

1

2

3

Sincerely,

Your Signature

Your Name

Enclosure: résumé

3. THE “CALL FOR ACTION” PARAGRAPH

Normally just a few lines in length, this is where you express your strong interest in the position and your desire to discuss your application further in an interview. You might also consider giving a brief summary here of the key points in the paragraphs above, but avoid simple repetition.

The purpose of the cover letter is to demonstrate your organizational and writing skills to future employers while distinguishing yourself from the other applicants. A cover letter should always accompany each resume you send out, unless otherwise specified.

A cover letter is particularly important if an objective is not included on the resume. The future employer needs to be aware of why you are sending a resume in and what position you are interested in.

COVER LETTER QUICK TIPS

Target your message. Describe how your skills, expertise, and accomplishments can benefit the employer. Write clearly and concisely, and check for spelling and grammar errors. Use the same font and paper that you used for your resume. Cover letters should be no more than one page.

Be purposeful. Every cover letter is different, but many effective cover letters provide evidence of the following: company knowledge, technical knowledge, enthusiasm, communication skills, leadership, teamwork, responsibility, ability to learn quickly, maturity, and ability to self-start.

Do NOT mass produce. It is especially important to relate your skills and experience to a specific position in a specific organization. Incorporate information that reflects your knowledge of the company, its industry, and relevant issues. Spotlight your accomplishments and measurable results. Consider that each potential employer is looking for different skills and qualities in each applicant.

Send your letter to a specific individual. Ideally, the letter should be addressed to the person who is likely to make employment decisions. It may take some resourcefulness on your part to identify this person, but the letter will be better received.

AVAILABLE ASSISTANCE

Counseling appointments are available to discuss your cover letter with a professional career advisor.

Drop in reviews are available at The Career Center. Bring a draft of your cover letter for review.

Our website (careercenter.illinois.edu) has even more information to help you with your cover letter.