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## Cover Letters

### When to use a cover letter

Many employers will require a cover letter as part of your application. There may be other times when a cover letter is also appropriate. Include a cover letter with your resume when you cannot present it in person, for example if sent through U.S. Postal Service or email. Remember, whatever you write in your email IS your cover letter. A cover letter is not necessary when you deliver your resume to a potential employer at a career fair.

### The purpose of cover letters

The purpose of the cover letter and resume package is to motivate the employer to take action and invite you for an interview. When delivered together, the two documents should be complementary and work together to accomplish your purpose. The appearance of your resume/cover letter package will be enhanced if both documents are printed on the same high-quality bond paper.

A cover letter should work like advertising copy. It should:

* Catch the reader’s attention (opening paragraph)
* Communicate skills and experience (middle paragraph)
* Support your statements with specifics (middle paragraph)
* Compel the reader to act (final paragraph)

Employers report that an impressive cover letter is often more important than the resume when making a decision whether to interview a candidate, so it can be a mistake to focus too much attention on the resume and ignore the potential value of a well-written letter. Like the resume, the cover letter is not intended to get you the job—it is intended to get you an interview (when you can convince the employer face-to-face that you are the right one for the job).

[Image of a younger woman and an older woman sitting at a table in front of a spread of papers.]

The most important aspect of a cover letter is employer focus. Present the employer with indications of your personality and style along with your skills and abilities.

Highlight your qualifications for the specific position you seek, clearly stating your interests and qualifications relative to the employer’s needs.

Always customize your cover letter! Sending out a general cover letter and resume to hundreds of employers is rarely successful. It can create a perception on the employer’s part that you are not a serious and thoughtful person, that you are desperate for a job, or that you don’t really care enough about their organization to learn about them.

Your letter should be just a few paragraphs and only one page in length. While there is no “perfect formula” regarding length and what to include, keep it relevant and relatively brief.

[Inserted diagram. Title; White text on blue background. Things to Avoid in Cover Letters. Body; Black text on yellow background.

Starting every sentence with “I” or “my”.

Extraneous words and wordy phrases, such as “in order to” and “for the purpose of”.

Confusing and complex language and sentence structure (HINT: Read your letter aloud to identify awkwardness, then correct it).

Long sentences and paragraphs.

Weak or overused words.

Font sizes smaller than 10 point and larger than 12 point.

Nondescript phrases such as “I was a computer lab assistant.” Instead, say: “I provided technical assistance”. “I conducted research activities using observation and data analysis skills while…” instead of “I worked as a research assistant”.]

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#### Sample Cover Letter

[Inserted illustration of a cover letter. The structure of the cover letter is as follows;

Your Address

Date

First and Last Name of contact person or “Human Resources Manager” if name is unknown

Title of Contact Person

Employer Contact Information

If employer name is not available, use Human Resources Manager, Director or Hiring Manager

First Paragraph:

Why you are writing

What position you are applying for

How you learned about the position

Who referred you (if applicable)

Body:

Why you are interested in the position

What you can contribute

How your qualifications would benefit the organization

How your skills and experience match their needs

Last Paragraph:

Refer to documents enclosed or available such as list of references

Give the phone number and time that you can be reached or when you will contact them

Thank them for their time and consideration of your application

Or, “Respectfully”

Type your first and last name

Leave four spaces so you can sign your name in ink after it is printed Leave only one blank line and type your name for emailed letters.]