

# Cover Letters

Always send a cover letter when mailing an application or resume to an employer. The term “cover” indicates that the letter serves as a cover sheet to introduce your resume. The purpose is to introduce yourself and show how your background fits the particular job and/or employer to which you are applying. It is your opportunity to expand on points from your resume that you feel are especially noteworthy or relevant. For example, you can let the employer know that you are willing to relocate, that you have a mutual acquaintance or that you have done your homework on the employer and know how you can be an asset to them. Prepare an original cover letter for each job—a form letter will not get you an interview.

## Cover Letter Do's and Don'ts

### Do:

- Use paper to match your resume.
- Write an original cover letter to each employer and position.
- State in the first sentence why you are writing.
- Show that you know your career goals, the position and the employer's organization.
- Demonstrate originality and enthusiasm.
- Proofread for typos and accuracy of address and telephone numbers.
- Run Spell Check on your computer before you print your final copy, but remember that it will not detect if you used the wrong form of a word or if you used a homonym.
- Type or word process the text on envelopes, if mailed.
- Keep electronic copies or photocopies of all materials for your records.

### Don't:

- Don't make the letter more than one page long.
- Don't use generic, all-purpose cover letters.
- Don't photocopy submitted materials.
- Don't be long-winded; make your points succinctly.

## Cover Letters for Advertised Listings

### 1. Research the Employer

Research the prospective employer's organization to match your skills, abilities and values as stated with that of the organization. In your cover letter, show why you are a good fit with the employer. Send the letter to a specific person whenever possible. If you don't, the organization receiving the letter will feel little or no responsibility to respond.

### 2. Analyze the Job Description

Look for the duties and qualifications of the job and design your cover letter to match these as much as you can. Often job listings are very short and vague. In this case, draw from your research of similar jobs to infer what skills and abilities might be required. For instance, if you were looking for a job with a bank, courses and past experience related to finance would be appropriate to mention.

### 3. Analyze Your Background

Think about your background in relation to the job duties and qualifications. Ask yourself, “What have I done that is similar to the duties of this job?” Areas to think about are courses taken, classroom projects, past work experience, summer jobs, internships, volunteer experience, extracurricular involvement (on- and off-campus) and travel.

## Cover Letters for Independent Applications

You will also write cover letter to employers that you identify in your independent job search. Through networking or research, you will learn of specific openings and/or job titles which interest you. Be sure to indicate in the first paragraph what position(s) you're seeking.

Follow the three steps listed above to compose your letter, incorporating these variations:

- If a specific person alerted you to the job opening, include that person's name and professional affiliations (e.g., “Professor Jane Seymore in Berkeley's Civil Engineering Department suggested I contact you about your Sanitary Engineer opening.”). Employers receive many letters and resumes and are more likely to read letters that mention specific people they know.
- If you are inquiring about *possible* openings, you are sending an Inquiry Letter or Prospecting Letter. Address your letter to a specific individual—generally the person who supervises the functional area you're applying to. Be as specific as possible about the positions you're interested in. Ideally, your research will reveal the job titles used by this employer. If not, at least use commonly understood generic job titles in the field. The more specific you are, the more you'll impress the employer in terms of having done your homework, knowing what the employer needs and knowing what you have to offer.



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