

# Writing Professional Cover Letters

The purpose of a cover letter is to persuade the employer to read your résumé and grant you an interview. This one-page business letter should give a summary of your skills, experience, and background as they relate to the job for which you are applying. Always include a cover letter when sending your résumé, except in those instances where you personally hand-deliver your résumé to the interviewer.

## The cover letter allows you the opportunity to:

- **Demonstrate** your knowledge of the organization by referring to the research you have conducted
- **Illustrate** what you can do for the employer instead of what he/she can do for you
- **Relate** your skills to the requirements of the job by interpreting and highlighting accomplishments stated in your résumé
- **Ask** specifically for an interview

Studies indicate that your cover letter has a life expectancy of about **eight seconds**, so it must be brief, yet informative. The letter should have three recognizable parts: the opening, which explains why you are writing; the main body, which lists two or three of your major accomplishments and gives the reader a good reason to want to interview you; and the closing, which expresses a desire for future communication. Be sure your letter draws a connection between the needs of the current job opening and the skills you can bring to the position.

## Suggestions for an effective cover letter:

1. Always **direct your letter to a specific person**, preferably an individual with hiring authority. If you do not know to whom you should write, call the company/school/agency operator for the name of the appropriate person to contact. Be sure to spell his/her name correctly and use the proper title.
2. **Tailor your letter for the specific job** and organization. **DO NOT** use a non-personalized form letter.
3. **Use simple and direct language**. Be as concise as possible. Avoid sounding aggressive, humorous, or too informal. Refrain from using slang and abbreviations. Avoid flowery language.
4. **Do not exaggerate** your accomplishments, but be positive about your qualifications and talents. Whenever possible, provide specific examples to support and illustrate your qualifications.
5. Keep your cover letter to **one page** of three **short** paragraphs.
6. When answering an advertisement, **cover all of the points requested** in the exact order outlined, since some prospective employers use those directions to test the applicant's ability to follow instructions precisely.
7. **Have several people proofread** your letter for grammar, punctuation, spelling, and typographical errors. Do not rely on the spell check feature of your word processor (“manger” is a word). Your letter must be neat and absolutely error-free. Realize the reader will view the cover letter as an example of your written communication skills.
8. Do not reproduce your cover letter. **Each letter should be uniquely tailored** to the employer and printed on a laser printer for every application you submit. An employer wants to think his/her organization is the most important one in your search.
9. **Use conventional** business letterform on standard size (8 1/2" x 11") **bond paper** that matches your résumé. Observe margins and spacing and *remember to sign your letter*.
10. **Edit** your cover letter **carefully**. Is it interesting and persuasive? Does it include important aspects of your college experience, your pertinent qualifications and skills, and a bit of your personality? Re-read it from the employer's perspective; does it answer the question, "Why should I hire you?"

# Generic Cover Letter Template

Your Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Date of Writing

Mr. or Ms. Employer  
Title of Employer  
Organization  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Mr. or Ms. Employer:

1st Paragraph: **WHY**. Your opening should invite and entice the employer. **State why you are writing**, usually to apply for a position. If you heard about an opening through a personal reference, tell the employer about it immediately; your reference's name should be the first word of your first paragraph. If you are writing an unsolicited letter to an organization with no announced openings, be as specific as possible about the type of job you are seeking. **Tell why you are particularly interested in working for the organization**. Do some research to find out the organization's mission, recent history, services, and news and why you believe you fit with their philosophy or culture. **Do not restate the company mission, website or prospectus – they already know it!**

2nd Paragraph: **YOU**. **Present your strongest and most relevant qualifications** for the job, in decreasing order of importance. Keep the employer's perspective in mind! Succinctly expand on information presented in your resumé; do not merely repeat it. Use an example of how your listed skills/qualities tie into the company's culture, or ways they meet the job description.

3rd Paragraph: **CONTACT**. Close by making a **specific request for further contact**. Make sure your contact information (e-mail, cell phone number) is accurate. Keep your tone confident! Remind the reader that you are willing and able to be of service to the organization. Thank the employer for any consideration he/she may give to your application. It is appropriate to state that you will be calling within a short period of time to "answer any questions" they may have.

Sincerely,

(Your Handwritten Signature)

Your Typewritten Name  
Enclosure: resumé

*Your cover letter should be concise and should focus on the employer's needs, rather than what you want from the employer. If you have a job description, use specific words and phrases from the description to demonstrate how qualified you are. And most importantly, do not write a generic cover letter—each letter must be tailored for the specific employer and position.*

# Sample I Cover Letter

Jonah Wales  
1234 Brown Lane  
Wheaton, IL 60187

March 8, 2008

Ms. Elizabeth Simons  
Director of Human Resources  
Patmos Travel Services  
999 Island Way  
Brownsville, IL 76543

Dear Ms. Simons:

I would like to be considered for the Marketing Intern position posted on your website. Patmos has an excellent reputation for customer service, and I am eager to be part of a team that seeks to provide a product to a customer that surpasses the customer's expectations.

I am currently a junior at Forrest University and have created all of the marketing materials for Forrest's Environmental Club for the past two years. I recently finished the marketing campaign for our year end banquet. The event drew 200 students and community members, a 50% increase from the previous year. I have taken Graphic Design I & II and am experienced with Microsoft Photo Editor and Publisher.

Thank you for your consideration of my qualifications. I am available to interview at your convenience and may be reached at (630) 752-5047 or by e-mail at [jonah.wales@gmail.com](mailto:jonah.wales@gmail.com).

Sincerely,

Jonah Wales

Enclosure: résumé

# Sample II

## Personal Lead Cover Letter

Daniel Lyons  
4321 Main St. Apt 12  
Wichita, KS 12345  
Daniel.Lyons@den.com

March 8, 2009

Ms. Deborah Judge  
Director of Human Resources  
Sailboats, Inc.  
123 Water Ave.  
Oceans, KS 45678

Dear Ms. Judge,

Professor Peter Rock at Gibraltar University recently informed me of your opening for the position of Sales Associate. As a Communication major who is graduating in May, I am especially interested in the presentation skills this position requires. I have been an active participant on Gibraltar University's Speech Team for two years and excel at giving informative and persuasive speeches to a wide range of audiences.

Dr. Rock mentioned the importance of Hebrew fluency at Sailboats, Inc. I have studied Hebrew for six years and was chosen among several of my peers to lead an after school program that teaches children Hebrew. I am eager to apply my Hebrew abilities to a new position and welcome the opportunity to provide you with a written sample of my work.

I have enclosed my résumé for you to review. I am available for an interview at your convenience and may be contacted at (123) 456-7890 or by e-mail at dan.lyons@den.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration of my qualifications.

Sincerely

Daniel Lyons  
Enclosure: résumé

# Sample III

## E-mail Cover Letter

Dear Mr. Paul Thorne,

Please consider me for the Marketing Associate position as posted on your website. I am interested in the Damascus Company's groundbreaking work in light bulb technology and appreciate your consideration of my attached résumé.

I look forward to discussing my qualifications with you at your convenience. I may be reached at (123) 456-7890.

Priscilla Aquilla  
[p.aquilla@gmail.com](mailto:p.aquilla@gmail.com)