

# Cover letters

## What is it and how to write one?

### What is a cover letter and why is it important?

A cover letter is a one-page business letter that you send to a potential employer when you submit your résumé. The letter introduces you, explains which job you are applying for and why you think you would be a good candidate for the position. A cover letter is important because it gives you the opportunity to talk more in depth about the skills and experiences on your résumé that are applicable to the job for which you are applying. You can use a cover letter to discuss some important experiences that may not have a place in your résumé. It reflects your personality, your attention to detail, your communication skills, your enthusiasm, your intellect and your specific interest in the company to which you are sending the letter.

### The Four Parts of a Cover Letter

Writing a cover letter can seem a little overwhelming at first, but it is helpful to think of it as four separate sections:

- 1 Introduction and announcement of the job you are applying for
- 2 Description of your skills
- 3 How your skills apply to the job posting
- 4 Closing and thank yous

The first section should be just a few sentences that state which job you are applying for and where you heard about the job (i.e. a specific Web site or newspaper). It can be helpful to

open the letter with a catchy line that will grab the reader's attention, but make sure it is appropriate for a professional letter.

The second and third sections go hand in hand, and it is a good idea to brainstorm these at the same time – then go back and separate what you want to say in each section. When thinking of what to write, look over the description of the job you are applying for and find the most important traits and abilities the organization is looking for. Next, think of ways your skills and experience match with the organization's needs. Come up with specific examples of how you have used your skills. This is a good section to discuss skills

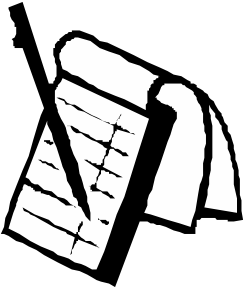
developed from non-traditional work. Any specialized equipment or programs you may know how to use could be mentioned in the second or third paragraph.

For the second section, you can talk about any specific accomplishments or skills you have. In the third section you should mention a few of the traits the employer is looking for and how the information mentioned in the second section displays that you have these traits.

The final section should provide the reader with information on contacting you, as well as make a statement on what you expect from the reader. This would be the section where you could say, "I am available for an interview at any time." By stating that you are available for an interview you are showing that you are confident that you are a right match for the firm. Finally, a short thank you is an important way to end.

The format of the cover letter should be standard business letter format, with your name and address at the top and the recipient's information below that. The letter should be addressed to the specific company and the specific individual who will process your application. You can usually find this through research or simply by calling the company to find out to whom your letter should be addressed.

## Cover letter Tips



- 1** Use the sample cover letter included in this tip sheet as a guide. Try to stick as closely as possible to the basic cover letter format. Employers want to know about you in a short amount of time.
- 2** Find the name, title and address of the contact person at the organization. It is important to send a personalized letter and not a generic "To Whom It May Concern." By putting the correct contact person you are showing you are serious about the job and not just sending blanket cover letters to everyone.
- 3** Think about the employer's needs and wants as you write. Use your letter to highlight ways you will fulfill these needs and wants.
- 4** Fit your cover letter onto one page. Say what you mean in brief, direct sentences, using well-chosen and specific words. Keep your paragraphs relatively short.
- 5** Describe your accomplishments and skills using powerful, action-filled words. Try words like "direct," "analyze," "manage," "examine" and "develop."
- 6** Tell the truth. Making false claims on your cover letter can only hurt you.
- 7** Use the same professional looking, easy to read type style you used for your résumé. Arial, Garamond, Times New Roman type styles are all good choices.
- 8** Do not use the same words over and over. Think of other words that have similar meanings. Check out the free online dictionary at [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com) and thesaurus at [www.thesaurus.com](http://www.thesaurus.com).
- 9** Tailor your cover letter for each organization, using the same basic format. You can emphasize experiences and skills relevant to each organization. Tailoring your cover letter will show you've done your research and understand their organization.
- 10** Keep it simple. Many cover letters are submitted through the Internet and companies will scan the text into their system. Too many bolds, italics, or underlines may not scan as you want.
- 11** Proofread! Check over your cover letter many times, looking for spelling and grammar errors. Make sure you have used the same type style and formatting throughout.
- 12** Have a close friend or relative look it over for you. He or she might find mistakes you missed.
- 13** Print your finished cover letter on high quality paper that matches your résumé, if you are mailing it to the employer. Select an 8-½" x 11" paper that is a bit heavier than standard paper, weights between 20 pound and 50 pound are usually used. White, beige and gray are common choices since neutral colors communicate a professional tone. This paper can be bought at a bookstore or an office supply store. You can also photocopy your cover letter onto nicer paper at a copy store and usually you can buy matching envelopes.



**EXAMPLES:**

Other examples can be found on the internet by searching under the words “sample cover letters” or in job search books at libraries and bookstores.

Susan S. Smith  
123 J Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20000  
202-555-5555  
susan.smith@domainname.com

September 25, 2005

Ms. Delia Doe  
Director of Human Resources  
Capital Corporation  
1515 Presidents Avenue NW, Suite 1500  
Washington, DC 20000

Dear Ms. Doe:

Working in an administrative capacity brings out my best qualities. I have developed a capacity for office leadership and administration working more than fifteen years as an office manager and administrative assistant for several Washington, DC area companies. Filling the Capital Corporation’s Corporate Office Manager position, which was listed in the Washington Post, would allow me to exercise these abilities even further, while improving the efficiency of the Corporate Office.

As the Office Manager for Johnson, Jones & Associates Law Firm in Washington, DC, I currently manage a staff of ten paralegals and administrative assistants. I direct office affairs and scheduling and frequently arrange events for up to 30 participants. My enclosed résumé details my accomplishments with this firm and my previous positions.

The Capital Corporation’s unique work with the public sector is an area that has always interested me. My extensive experience working for professional Washington, DC firms will easily extend to the Corporation’s expansive work environment. My organizational and administrative skills will contribute to the productivity and success of the Corporation’s many projects and undertakings.

I am extremely interested in becoming Capital Corporation’s Corporate Office Manager and am available to come to your offices for an interview at your convenience. If you have any further questions, please contact me by phone at 202-555-5555 or email at susan.smith@domainname.com. I look forward to hearing from you and hope to meet with you in the next few weeks.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

*Susan S. Smith*

Susan S. Smith

## Basic cover letter format

**Here is the format that Susan used to write her letter. The letter is broken down into four clearly defined paragraphs.**

Your Name – Slightly Bigger font than the rest of the letter

Your Address

Your Phone Number

Your E-mail

*Space*

Date

Mr./Mrs./Ms. Contact Person

Title

Organization

Address

Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms. Contact Person: (use a colon)

Explain which position you are applying for , what you know about the company or how you heard of it, and give a brief personal background.

Describe the talents, skills, and experiences you have that will benefit the company and will make you a good candidate for this position.

Tell what you plan to do next, such as contacting the person by phone or email, calling to request an interview, etc. Give a firm date when this will happen. Also, provide contact info for yourself.

Thank the contact person.

Sincerely,

*YOUR SIGNED NAME*

YOUR PRINTED NAME