



## Successful Cover Letters

Whenever you send a resume or application to a potential employer, you must include a cover letter if the employer requests it.

Cover letters can be put into three categories:

- ✓ Standard cover letter – matches a job description.
- ✓ Cold contact cover letter – no job exists but you write to an employer directly.
- ✓ Networking cover letter – use the name of your contact person in the first paragraph to: A) ensure that the employer will read it and, B) make a positive association between you and the job.

Each cover letter and resume that you send to an employer must be tailored to that specific job. You must deconstruct the advertisement or posting, research the company, and make some educated guesses to determine exactly what employers want. Translate your experience into their language, even using the exact words in the job description (that's right plagiarize, steal, lift key words and phrases). Present yourself in their terms.

### The 4 Steps of Cover Letter Writing

**Step 1:** Before you begin read the job description carefully and look for key words/phrases throughout all parts of the job description and not just under qualifications preferred. Take a moment to visualize yourself in this job.

**Step 2:** Now highlight with a marker all key words or phrases that you will use to construct your sentences OR type them directly onto your computer and highlight them in any color other than black.

**Step 3:** Now take each word/phrase and come up with your best skill match. If they are looking for someone with good communication skills- what specific example can you give from your own work/personal experiences to show (not just tell) the employer you have developed "good communication skills"? Create sentences which showcase your match for every key word/phrase that you have chosen.

**Step 4:** Put those sentences into paragraphs. Your most relevant matches will go into the second paragraph, the next closest into the third and so on and so forth up until one page. You must prioritize your paragraphs according to your most relevant experiences and how they match what the employer views as the most important functions of the job- which you usually have to guess at by noticing how often they use similarly key words.

## The "How To" of Cover Letters

Your Address  
Your Address

Today's Date

Company Name  
Company Address  
Company Address

### The Formatting:

Left hand justified with margins set either 1 inch uniformly or business style of left hand justified at 1.25 inches

Dear (insert the correct contact person's name here or if not available use Dear Search Committee):

### First Paragraph Should:

- ✓ Identify the position you are applying for or purpose of letter if it is a cold contact/internship opportunity
- ✓ State where you saw it advertised
- ✓ Demonstrate your knowledge of the company by including a reference to the organization. By acknowledging their mission/reputation/accomplishments, you form a positive connection from the start
- ✓ Relay your enthusiasm for the job

### Second Paragraph Should:

- ✓ Give specific examples of how your **strongest** qualifications match the position requirements
- ✓ Introduce and sell your relevant skills and experiences
- ✓ Describe how you meet the needs of the employer by providing evidence of your related skills and experiences

### Third Paragraph Should: (Optional, 3-6 paragraphs)

- ✓ Continue to use short narrative examples and showcase how your skills and experience are an excellent match for the position
- ✓ Reinforce qualifications presented in resume
- ✓ Show your strong writing skills

### Fourth (Last) Paragraph Should:

- ✓ Suggest a plan of action (request an interview, indicate you will follow up in some way during a specific time)
- ✓ Thank the employer for their time and consideration given to your application
- ✓ Last chance to highlight key points (but do not replicate your resume)

Sincerely,

Your name signed in pen here if hard copy;  
if e-mailed, just eliminate these three extra spaces

Your Name (typed)

## The Do's and Don'ts of Cover Letter Writing

### Do:

- ✓ Use action verbs and an active voice, less is better than more - be succinct
- ✓ Use technical terms and the jargon of the field to demonstrate knowledge and expertise. If you don't yet know the "insider language" read up in the appropriate trade journals, websites
- ✓ Vary the first word of your sentences. Half your sentences can start with "I", and half should start with another word
- ✓ Tone should be professional, enthusiastic, direct
- ✓ Keep paragraphs short (3 sentences make up 1 paragraph)
- ✓ Tailor each letter to the position you are applying for
- ✓ Keep it to one page
- ✓ Triple check for errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation
- ✓ Have at least 2 other people proof read a hard copy version of it- spell check won't find everything

### Don't:

- ✓ Use one generic cover letter for all jobs
- ✓ Misspell the name of the human resources manager, headhunter, or organization
- ✓ Have a typo of any kind!
- ✓ Try and achieve perfection the first time around
- ✓ Be afraid to ask for help
- ✓ Repeat information or copy exactly what is already on your resume
- ✓ Exceed more than one page in length
- ✓ Include photos, age, height, weight, marital status, number and age of children, race, religion, or the results of your last physical. **These topics are illegal to ask in the U.S.**
- ✓ Use general terminology that everyone uses, like:
  - "a challenging and fulfilling opportunity where a generous salary can be earned while serving others."
  - Most employers, on the other hand, will race to the phone to call a candidate that is "inspired by the opportunity to ensure adequate healthcare for underprivileged children while contributing to the long-term financial sustainability of the organization."