Cover Letters

A cover letter (also known as a letter of application) is a formal letter of introduction that accompanies a resume when you are applying for a job. A cover letter should always be sent with a resume unless an employer instructs otherwise, as it is an opportunity for you to send a personalized message to the employer that communicates your interest in the position and describes what you are able to contribute to the company.

Cover Letter Content

Heading

Be sure to include your contact information at the top of the cover letter. Your contact information should match the contact information heading on your resume and list of references, in order to maintain the stylistic impression made by those documents.

The information must include:

- Your return address
- The current date
- The employer’s address
- A salutation to a specific individual (If you do not know a specific individual, do research to find out who that person might be. DO NOT address the letter to “Dear Sir or Madam.”)

Example:

JOHN MATICS
500 Tech Avenue, Bloomington, IN 47408
jmatics@indiana.edu | (812) 555-5555

August 22, 2015

Ms. Rachel Recruiter
Recruiting Coordinator
Company Awesome
1000 Indianapolis Avenue
Indianapolis, IN 46201

Dear Ms. Recruiter:
Introductory Paragraph
• Explain who you are and why you are sending a resume: “I am writing to apply for…”
• State the specific job title of the position for which you are applying, and mention specifically how you learned about the position or the organization (e.g., SoIC Careers listing, a listserv email, a friend at the company). If you learned about the position from a personal contact, mention that individual by name if they are in good standing with the company and have given you permission to do so – personal referrals carry a lot of weight for employers.
• Indicate some knowledge of and/or interest in the organization to show that you have done some research.

Body Paragraphs (1–2)
• Describe how your skills, education, and/or experience are relevant to the position and how they coincide with the organization’s needs. Be sure to include terms they use in the job description.
• Highlight your strengths and qualifications without repeating your resume. Use specific examples to provide evidence of skills, experiences, and accomplishments that fit with what they are seeking.

Closing Paragraph
• Reiterate your interest in the position and refer them to your enclosed/attached resume.
• State that you would like an interview and indicate follow-up intentions, either actively or passively.
  - Active: “I would like the opportunity to meet with you in person to discuss Position Y, and I will contact you in two weeks to follow-up on my application.”
  - Passive: “I appreciate your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you.”
• Express your appreciation for the employer’s time and consideration.
• Provide your phone number and email address to make it easy for them to contact you.
• If you are sending a hard-copy, be sure to sign the letter after the valediction (e.g., “Sincerely”).
• Always indicate whether there are enclosures included (e.g., resumes, transcripts, etc.) by writing the word “Enclosure” below your name.

Cover Letter Tips
• Use block or modified block business letter format, and keep the wording professional.
• Individualize the letter by incorporating information you have acquired through researching the company.
• Write a different letter for each company/application. Form cover letters are NOT acceptable.
• Do not address the letter to just a title or a department. If you do not have a contact name, investigate the company website and other online resources for contacts and addresses, or call the company and request the name of the person responsible for hiring college graduates in your career area.
• Your cover letter SHOULD NOT be a repetition of the wording on your resume.
• Write multiple drafts. DO NOT write it in one sitting and send it. Come back to it after a while and make sure you are happy with it. Schedule an appointment with a career advisor to have it reviewed.
• Don’t apologize for any shortcomings (e.g., “While I don’t have the required experience…”). The cover letter is for you to promote yourself!
• Proofread your letter to ensure it is error-free, and then have two or three other people edit and proofread the letter before you send it. Grammatical errors and misspellings will hurt you!
• If sending a hard copy, laser print the letter on high-quality paper that matches your resume.
• When sending a resume by email, you may follow the cover letter format to introduce the attached resume, or you may draft a brief email and attach both documents.