

COVER LETTERS

What's the point of a cover letter?

- *To customize your background for a specific job.* It guides the reader by summarizing the skills and experiences relevant to a particular opportunity.
- *To demonstrate your research, writing, and analytical skills.* It allows you to communicate your knowledge of the employer, industry, and career field.
- *To convey your motivation and professionalism.* It reflects your personality, enthusiasm, and interest.

Do letters need to be customized?

Yes. Effective cover letters are marketing tools for your job or internship search. Since marketing is about understanding and meeting the needs of a specific audience, your letter should focus on the needs of a specific employer. These needs or requirements are typically described in a job posting, which can help you tailor your background to fit each opportunity. The quality and customization of your writing will impress an employer and distinguish you from other candidates. Tempted to use a generic letter? *Consider this:* Recruiters say they typically spend less than 30 seconds skimming a candidate's correspondence. Distinguish yourself with carefully crafted and compelling communication.

Since recruitment is done online, you'll most likely send your cover letter as an attachment, preferably PDF. Your letter should be one page in length and maintain the same formality and quality as if you were turning in an important term paper.

Address a specific person. A quick telephone call to an employer can help determine the name and correct spelling of your recipient. If you can't get this information, address the letter to "Dear Hiring Manager" or "Dear Human Resource Manager." Another suggestion is to use a subject line in place of the salutation (e.g., Application for Research Analyst Position). Avoid salutations such as "Dear Sir," "Dear Madam," or "To Whom It May Concern." Do not use the term, Mrs., when addressing a woman. There is no need to use a first name in the salutation: Dear Ms. Smith, not Dear Mary Smith.

Keep it brief. A cover letter is intended to complement your resume, not repeat its content. Limit the letter to one page.

Match yourself to the opportunity. Effective cover letters are accomplishment-oriented and focus on specific skills and abilities. Avoid saying you're "responsible" for a task or project; instead, cite what you achieved and how it relates to the demands of the position.

Demonstrate your interest. Show what you've learned about the organization and/or industry. This is where your research and networking will pay off. Where appropriate, use the vocabulary of a specific discipline or industry.

Write in your own style. You can adopt a conversational tone as long as your writing is flawless and grammatically correct. Avoid bland, overused statements such as "Enclosed

please find my resume for your review" and "Please do not hesitate to call me." Use active voice and powerful verbs for lively communication.

Put yourself in the reader's position. Count the number of sentences that you began with the word, "I." Then, do an edit. Avoid "I" and "me" and focus instead on the reader by using the word "you" as often as possible. Communicate what you can *contribute* to the reader's organization, rather than what you expect to *get*.

Pay attention to detail. Employers value effective and careful communicators, and your writing skills are displayed in your cover letter. Grammar, spelling, or typographical errors will send you to the 'discard' pile. Ask an expert to proofread your letter for content, clarity, and correctness.

First impressions count. The average employer receives thousands of letters annually from job applicants. Make yours visually appealing.

- Use the same font as your resume. Keep it simple (e.g., Times New Roman, 12 point).
- If you're using a hard copy, print it on the same paper stock as your resume. White or cream color is preferable.
- Sign a hard copy letter with blue or black ink.