



Cover Letters

Tips for Writing and Sending Cover Letters

Although the Internet has dramatically changed the way you send your résumé to employers, there are still occasions when a cover letter is required. Any time you mail or fax your résumé to an employer you **must** include a cover letter, personally written to the **specific** employer regarding the **specific** job. Follow these tips to write effective cover letters...

Sell, Don't Tell

There is an advertising term to keep in mind when writing your cover letters—**Unique Purchase Appeal**. When companies are trying to market a product, they focus on the Unique Purchase Appeal (UPA), the one thing that makes that product different than any other.

Think about your **UPA**. What is the one thing that makes you better than any other candidate applying for a similar position with this company? What can you offer that no other applicant can? What is the one reason the employer should want to hire you above all the other candidates? If you can determine your **UPA** and express it in your own voice, you will have a real advantage in creating a dynamic cover letter.

Get a name...

"To Whom It May Concern" leaves the reader cold. If you have a company phone number, call and ask, "*To whom do I address a letter of application?*" (and be sure to get the correct spelling of the name!)

- No phone number? Check the Yellow Pages or call Directory Assistance.
- No company name? Be creative... Do you have a mailing address and can you identify the company's product or service? Try locating the company in the Yellow Pages under the product. Is there an e-mail address? Send a request by e-mail. Web site? Visit them online!

- No contact information given, only a PO Box or fax number? **Proceed with caution...** do you really want to send all this personal information to someone who won't even identify who they are? Unless the job announcement contains enough details about the position to make it sound legitimate, it may be a good idea to move on.

Besides your UPA, keep these tips in mind for writing winning cover letters:

- **Do** use action verbs; a bulleted list can improve the appearance and readability of your letter.
- **Do** keep a copy of every cover letter you write, and attach to it a copy of the job lead, if applicable.
- **Do not** repeat what is on your résumé. Instead, respond to the specific qualifications and requirements included in the job announcement.
- **Do** address your letter to a specific individual. **Don't** ever address it to "sir" or "madam."
- **Don't** ever send a cover letter or résumé that contains typos, misspellings, incorrect grammar or punctuation.
- **Do** invest in quality copies of your résumé and cover letters. **Don't** send cover letters or résumés that have been photocopied—send the original to each employer.
- **Do** keep it brief. Never more than one page for a cover letter.
- **Don't** make the employer dig through the cover letter and résumé trying to decipher what job you are seeking.
- **Do** use specific examples to better illustrate your work experience.
- **Don't** tell the company what they can do for you; rather, tell what you can do for the company.
- **Do** be pro-active and request an interview.
- **Do** be sure the employer can reach you; include sufficient contact information in the letter.

Cover Letter Format

A professional cover letter follows the format of the traditional business letter but should reflect your personal style. Begin by entering the date on the left margin, below your professional letterhead. Enter two hard returns, then key the employer contact information (name, company name and address). Enter two hard returns again, and key the Greeting. (If you do not have a name “Dear Hiring Manager:” is an acceptable Greeting.) Finally, enter two more hard returns and begin the body of the letter:

The first paragraph of a cover letter should **ignite interest** and **spark enthusiasm** from the reader. You can accomplish this by:

- **Promising a benefit:** “In the last three months, I generated \$25,000 worth of new business.”
- **Identifying a need:** “With demands for increased development in the Pine Hills area, the diverse interests of various constituencies need to be reconciled. I would bring over 10 years of negotiation and mediation experience to the position of...”
- **Being timely:** “The November issue of American Demographics magazine reports a renewed and consistent interest in motorcycles. March marks the beginning of the prime sales season. As an experienced sales professional, and motorcycle owner for over 10 years, I can help you increase your market share.”

Once you have the employer’s attention, reference the job for which you are applying and where you saw it advertised.

The second paragraph should promote your value by providing an overview of your skills, abilities, and credentials and how they relate to the job. Take note of the **specific** requirements mentioned in the job announcement and illustrate how you have demonstrated the required skills in your current and/or previous jobs by giving the employer one or two examples. In your own words, tell the employer a “story” using the following formula:

- **P** . . . state a **Problem** or challenge you faced on the job
- **A** . . . tell what **Action** you took to solve the problem and
- how you used some of the specific skills mentioned in the job requirements
- **R** . . . tell the employer the positive **Results** that came about because of your actions

The final paragraph instructs the reader about **future action** and **closes** the letter. Be sure to include contact information in the final paragraph and **ask for the interview**.

For example: “I’ll give you a call on the 18th. In the meantime, you may reach me at (301) 555-1212. Thank you for your consideration.”

Finish with two hard returns, type a closing (“Sincerely” works fine), add four hard returns and then key your name. **Don't forget to sign it** above your keyed name.

Some Final Tips

- Write the way you speak. The cover letter should provide the employer with a “window” to your personality.
- Keep a copy of every cover letter you write. Although each letter should be personalized to the job in question, you can rephrase content and use it in other letters.
- Reread your cover letter before you attend the interview—the employer will!—and take a copy with you to the interview.

Remember This!

Before you begin... **DO YOUR HOMEWORK!**

Research the company and tailor each and every letter to addressing the **employer's specific needs**.