

Cover Letter Basics

A letter of application or letter of inquiry should always accompany your resume. The content should highlight, not duplicate, the data in your resume. It should be brief and direct, focusing on the attributes that are particularly important for the position or organization to which you are applying.

Because of the number of applications received, human resources departments are unable to interview every person who contacts them. Therefore, a screening process is set up to narrow the field. Vague resumes and cover letters are eliminated early.

Write a draft of the cover letter and have someone critique it. You will want your letter to be warm and personal, but business-like.

Always send an original letter. The same advice given for resumes regarding neatness, spelling and professional appearance applies doubly to your letter since the impression created by your letter may determine whether or not the reader gives careful attention to your resume.

Types of Cover Letters

- Letter of Inquiry
- Letter of Application
- Networking Letter (for sending your resume to contacts you know)
- Follow-up Letter (perhaps including additional information you are sending)
- Thank You Letter

What your Cover Letter should include:

- **Opening Paragraph:** Who you are and why you are interested. (2-3 sentences)
- **Body Paragraph:** Why you are qualified (6-8 sentences; can use 2 middle paragraphs)
- **Closing Paragraph:** Call for action (2-3 sentences)

When preparing the cover letter, keep the following in mind:

- Produce it neatly on 8 1/2 x 11 bond paper.
- Whenever possible, address your letter to a specific person by name and title.
- Tell how you learned of the employer, and why you are interested in the organization.
- Tell the employer what you can offer that will be of benefit.
- Let the letter reflect your individuality, but don't appear familiar, cute, humorous, or overconfident.
- You are writing to a stranger about a subject that is serious to you both.
- Remember to close by taking the initiative—asking for a response, or requesting an interview. If the organization is located at a distance, request a preliminary telephone interview, especially if you have to pay expenses.