

Cover Letter

The cover letter is a marketing tool used to capture the interest of a prospective employer. It is an opportunity to mention an experience not listed on your resume or to highlight a particular skill. Clearly expressing your uniqueness and how you will contribute to their organization will make a strong impression. Remember that cover letters are tailored to the specific position. The tone used in describing your experience must be persuasive and confident. Understanding your strengths and accomplishments are the keys to composing a concise and powerful cover letter.

To summarize, then, the purpose of a cover letter is to:

- Highlight selective aspects of your background which best match the employer's needs.
- Command the readers' attention.
- Stimulate interest in you and your resume.
- Reflect your interest in the job and/or the organization.

Use of specific vocabulary for the industry and careful selection of skills will create a favorable impression by the reader. A well-thought out message will highlight the important aspects of your credentials, and emphasize them to the prospective employer. The cover letter usually includes a minimum of three paragraphs, with each paragraph having a different goal.

First Paragraph (*Why you are writing*)

State immediately and concisely the position you wish to be considered for and what makes you the best candidate for that position. If you are responding to a classified ad, be sure to reference the name of the publication and the date the ad appeared. If an individual referred you to a specific position include his or her name. Keep the first paragraph short and hard hitting.

Example: Having majored in Mathematics at Salem State College, where I worked as a research assistant, I am confident that I can be a very successful research trainee in your Economics Research Department.

Second Paragraph (*Highlights*)

Detail what you could contribute to this company, and show how your qualifications will benefit this firm. If you're responding to a classified ad, specifically discuss how your skills relate to the job's requirements. Remember be brief! Few recruiters will read a cover letter longer than a page.

Example: In addition to my strong background in mathematics, I also offer significant business experience having worked in a data processing firm, a bookstore, and a restaurant. My courses in statistics and computer programming will prove particularly useful in the position of research trainee.

Third Paragraph (*What happens next/closing*)

Describe your interest in the organization. Subtly emphasize your knowledge about this firm (the result of your research effort) and your familiarity with the industry. It is common courtesy to act extremely eager to work for any company where you apply for a position.

Example: Your recent rapid growth and the superior reputation of your Economic Research Department attract me to City Bank. After studying different commercial banks, I have concluded that City Bank will be in a strong competitive position to benefit from upcoming changes in the industry, such as the phasing out of Regulation Q.

The closing should begin two lines beneath the body of the letter (see Sample Cover Letter). Keep the closing simple - Sincerely will suffice. Four lines underneath this, and aligned with the word Sincerely, type in your full name. Don't forget to sign the letter just above the typed name. As silly as it sounds, people often forget to sign their cover letters. This creates the impression that you don't take care with your work.

Content Tips for Effective Communication of Your Cover Letter

- Use active, not passive verbs. For example: use arranged..., devised..., evaluated..., instead of was responsible for arranging... or duties included.... (See the Action Words handout for a list of action verbs).
- Avoid overuse of I. Remember that your cover letter is an example of your writing ability, so take the time to create a well-formulated letter.
- Your letter will be more effective when addressed to a specific person within an organization. If you don't know the person's name, title or gender, call the organization and ask for the correct information. If you are unable to get a specific name, then using To Whom It May Concern or Dear Sir/Madam are acceptable alternatives.
- Research the organization before you write the cover letter. Ideally, every cover letter is unique and targeted to a specific position. Use the information you have uncovered to demonstrate that you know something about the company. Each time you submit a resume for a specific position an original cover letter should accompany it.
- A cover letter should express your ambition and enthusiasm. Stress accomplishments by explaining how you have met specific employer needs. Show how accomplishments relate to the position for which you are applying. The reader will judge you on how well you write so do your best to make the words come alive.
- Never express dissatisfaction with a present and/or former job or employer.
- For a professional image, print your resume and cover letter on matching stationery and enclose them in a matching envelope.
- Use spell check and have a friend critique your cover letter and resume for grammatical And spelling errors to ensure NO TYPOS!

Sample Cover Letter

Return Address:	37 Loring Avenue Salem, MA 01970
Date:	May 27, 20xx
Inside Address:	Ms. Barbara Butler Personnel Director Blue Hilltop Center Bethel, ME 03156
Salutation:	Dear Ms. Butler:
Body:	<p>I am applying for the position of Health Management Assistant recently advertised in the May 24th edition of The Boston Globe. As my resume indicates, I am presently enrolled in the Sport and Movement Science Program at Salem State College. I have completed many courses related to my major, including Anatomy 101, and Design and Evaluation of Fitness/Wellness Programs 350.</p> <p>Your advertisement specified a need for someone with experience working with the elderly. For the past two summers, I have worked as a Residential Care Assistant at the Devereaux House in Marblehead. My primary responsibilities included programming, as well as providing support and advocacy for residents. The position required patience, strong organizational skills, and an understanding of issues facing the elderly. I will be able to use these skills in working with the elderly at the Blue Hilltop Center.</p> <p>I am looking forward to talking with you further about the position of Health Management Assistant. I will call you on Friday of next week to arrange a mutually convenient time to meet. Thank you for your consideration.</p>
Closing:	Sincerely,
Your Signature:	
Your Name Typed:	Adria L. Dumont
Enclosure Line:	Enc: resume

Example Phrases:

OPENINGS:

As a senior preparing for May graduation, I have been researching the local _____ industry. Your organization is consistently mentioned as a top performer that is committed to on-going training for their employees.

I am writing to express an interest in a staff accountant position with your company. I believe you will find my background and career goals an asset to your organization.

I enjoyed speaking with you recently about the _____ position currently vacant in your company.

WRITING AS RESULT OF A REFERRAL:

Our mutual colleague, John Miller, suggested I contact you feeling that my skills and abilities would be valuable to your company.

The manager of your San Francisco branch, Pamela Bronson, has suggested I contact you regarding the opening for a _____.

WRITING AS RESULT OF AN ADVERTISEMENT:

I read your advertisement for a staff accountant in The Daily Gotham on October 6th, and after researching your company, felt I had to write.

I am responding to your advertisement in the September 5th edition of The Boston Review for the _____ position.

TRADITIONAL PHRASES:

Please consider me as a candidate for a _____ position.

I have enclosed a resume for your consideration.

I would like the chance to put my energy and drive to work for a company such as yours.

CLOSINGS:

I would like an opportunity to discuss my qualifications with you further.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope to hear from you shortly.

It would be a pleasure to give you more information about my qualifications and experience.

I will contact you the week of _____ to discuss the status of my inquiry.

* For more information on writing cover letters, visit the Career Services Office and/or check out our website: www.salemst.edu/careersvs for additional resources.