

The Cover Letter - - - Quick Guide

Make Sure that Your Resume Gets Noticed

The cover letter is a business communication and your introduction to a potential employer. It serves to grab the reader's attention by briefly highlighting relevant skills and experience. One of the goals for this letter is to create enough interest in you to make the reader want to review your resume and call you for a meeting.

As a marketing tool, the letter is an opportunity to point out how your competencies match the stated job criteria. **Customize each letter making it relevant and responsive to the reader's needs.** Keep in mind the following questions:

"Why will they be interested in me?"

"What value can I add to their bottom line?" and "What contribution can I make?" When responding to an advertised position, make sure that all relevant points from the ad are covered.

E mailing, faxing or mailing your boilerplate "Cold-Call" or "Direct Marketing" letters addressed "Dear Sir or Madam" or "To Whom It May Concern" may well be discarded by the recipient and thus provide low response return. Most letters and resumes are screened before they reach the hiring person. They are often rerouted to entry level clerical staff who may not be aware of an available job opening and therefore rejection results.

PRESENT A PROFESSIONAL FORMAT

- Use the **same letterhead** as on your resume and check all information.
- Date your letter.
- A header serves as routing information that allows the reader to immediately know who the intended recipient is. Direct all correspondence to a **specific individual** and state their correct title. Do not be too informal or casual. State the **company name and address** in full.
- Some people send their resumes to a department; however, it is best to secure a company representative's name so the resume can be forwarded. Without specific direction, the resume may end up in the recycling bin.
- Use the person's first name in the **salutation** if they are a friend, a well-known acquaintance or a colleague. In the first paragraph, use a referral name from your network if appropriate. Salutations include "Mr.", "Ms.", "Mrs.", or "Dr." and the family name. Do not assume - - - and avoid "To Whom It May Concern".
- The letter usually contains three or four short, well-organized paragraphs. The **introductory statement** tells why you are writing. Target your resume; let the recipient know what position you are applying for. Anything that captures the reader's attention in a positive way will keep him/her reading on.
- The **content section** offers an overview of your educational and career history. The introduction immediately informs the reader of the purpose. Briefly indicate your title, function and a summary of your background. A few accomplishments can be bulleted and some personal qualities, skills and abilities reviewed.
- Begin sentences in a variety of ways. Choose **words that have impact**. Avoid phrases that are long-winded or run-on.
- Watch also that words are not repeated unnecessarily or used incorrectly.
- Ensure that all information is **accurate**.
- Don't use the word "I" too often.
- Don't mention salary requirements unless specifically requested. If required, you might quote the widest acceptable range. Make sure you can live with the figures stated.
- Review to make sure that the **phrases are clear** and not open to misunderstanding.
- Make your mailing and E-mailing as focused as possible, based on your Internet, directory, personal network and library research. Keep the message upbeat without being perceived as pushy.
- If mailing the letter and resume, use quality paper - same stock as your resume. If e-mailing, you might add the cover letter to the beginning of the resume and provide a brief introduction on the e-mail.
- **Arial** and **Times New Roman** are easily read fonts and 11 or 12 point are the preferred font sizes for a letter.
- The format used is very similar to any other **business letters**. Use left justification.
- Choose a first class envelope with correct postage. Make sure your resume is attached. When corresponding with larger numbers of companies, check to ensure that each letter and resume are enclosed with the correct envelope or that the E-mail addresses are correct. **Keep a record** of all letters for your callbacks.
- Do not print "Personal & Confidential" on your letter unless there is a real reason why someone else should not open it.
- The **closing** signifies your wishes and indicates your follow-up action. Complete the letter with "Sincerely", or "Yours truly". Leave a few spaces and type your name. Remember to **sign the letter**.



QUALITY CONTROL CHECK LIST

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|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|--|
| <input type="radio"/> | Correct name, title, company, address, and postal code. | <input type="radio"/> | Consistency of format, centred on the page. |
| <input type="radio"/> | E-mail, telephone, and fax numbers confirmed. | <input type="radio"/> | Quality white paper selected if it will be mailed. |
| <input type="radio"/> | Date. | <input type="radio"/> | Word-processed, laser printed, signed. |
| <input type="radio"/> | Company names (Inc., Ltd., Limited, etc.) confirmed. | <input type="radio"/> | Enclose your resume. |
| <input type="radio"/> | Add information to a database. | <input type="radio"/> | Is it too long or too wordy? One page is standard. |
| <input type="radio"/> | Spelling, especially the recipient's name. | <input type="radio"/> | Do you like it? |
| <input type="radio"/> | Grammar. Uniform tense (past, present). | <input type="radio"/> | Coherent. Information is specific and brief rather than vague and wordy. |
| <input type="radio"/> | Punctuation (properly used commas, colons, etc). | <input type="radio"/> | Are you comfortable with the letter and the message? |
| <input type="radio"/> | Expand technical abbreviations. | <input type="radio"/> | Does it market you? Is it accurate? |
| <input type="radio"/> | Choose the style and variety of words carefully. | <input type="radio"/> | Will it interest the reader? |
| <input type="radio"/> | Accurate and targeted information. | <input type="radio"/> | Does it cover relevant points? |
| <input type="radio"/> | Organization. Laid out well and easily scanned? | <input type="radio"/> | Will it be received prior to the closing date? |
| <input type="radio"/> | Spacing, margins, centering, and white space. | <input type="radio"/> | Is the job posting number clearly placed |
| <input type="radio"/> | Lettering (font, size, bolding, and capitals). | | |

OPENING AND CLOSING SENTENCES

The first sentence of your cover letter serves two purposes: to clearly introduce you and disclose why you are writing, and to gain the attention of a prospective employer. There is no need to be wordy or descriptive in this paragraph. In fact, offering a long-drawn-out first paragraph can detract from the impact you want to make. The statements below in 'Sample Openings' are by no means exhaustive and are presented to illustrate that there are many effective ways to begin a letter.

You will notice that the 'Sample Closings' below are likewise simple and straightforward. Many state a callback time while others are understated in requesting an opportunity to meet.

As with all communications, each person must feel comfortable with the approach taken but remember, if you state that you will call, call at the time or date specified.

SAMPLE OPENINGS

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ This letter and the enclosures will serve as a follow-up to our telephone conversation pertaining to my inquiry regarding a <job> position at your firm. ■ The attached resume will provide you with a general outline of my experience to support my application for a position as <job> with <firm>. ■ Please accept the enclosed resume as an introduction and an expression of interest in a <job> position with your company. ■ The enclosed resume offers a brief overview of my skills and accomplishments as a <job>. ■ This is an expression of interest in a <job> position with your firm. My resume is enclosed for your review. ■ From my research, I know that your company is a leader in the <industry> field. I believe my expertise can be of value to your firm in the area of <job>. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ This is an introduction to my experience and expertise in the field of <job>. ■ My career in two words: successful achiever. ■ As the enclosed resume indicates, for over < # > years, I have been actively involved in <job> and seek the opportunity to transfer these skills to your firm. My resume is attached for your review. ■ Recently, I had a conversation with <name> of your firm and he/she recommended that I send a resume for your review. ■ This letter is in response to <advertisement> for a <job> position as advertised in <news outlet> or <web site> on <date>. ■ My enclosed resume denotes areas that may be of interest to your firm in the area of <job>. ■ My goal is to secure a <job> position with your firm and my resume is enclosed to begin the process. |
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SAMPLE CLOSINGS

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ I look forward to the opportunity meet you to discuss your needs and my abilities in greater detail. ■ I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss in detail how my expertise may be of use to <firm>. ■ I will call you next <day/date> to pursue an opportunity to meet with you. ■ It would be a pleasure to meet with you to discuss my qualifications and other areas of interest in detail. ■ I look forward to meeting you, <name> and will follow up this letter with | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a telephone call next week. ■ In order to pursue an opportunity with your firm, I will call you early next week to seek an appropriate time to meet with you. ■ I look forward to meeting with you soon to discuss potential employment opportunities with your firm. ■ I look forward to hearing from you and would appreciate your contacting me to arrange a convenient time to meet. |
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Willis M.L. Newton

"Willis has a reputation for building strong, confidential client relationships based on trust and mutual respect."

"I found Willis to be a client-oriented professional and trusted coach."

"As head of W.N. Associates, Willis delivers results for complex and involved assignments."