

Cover Letters

Hi, I'm Jennifer Kaysen Rogers, the Employer Relations Specialist here in the Career Development Center.

Cover letter writing is often viewed as one of the most difficult parts of a job search, but it need not be. A cover letter is simply a common sense, straightforward, brief letter which introduces you and your resume.

The functions of a Cover Letter are to: explain why you are sending your resume, to state your career objective, to introduce yourself by establishing who you are and summarizing your background, to show how you qualify for a particular job, and of course, this is how an employer will assess your writing ability.

You may ask yourself, how do I get started writing a cover letter?

Here are a few essential tips:

A successful cover letter should be specific and personal. Address your letter to a specific person at a specific company.

If you have trouble getting started, try writing down what you would say if you were speaking directly to the person. Then, edit what you've written to make it more concise and businesslike.

The most important point to remember is that you are writing to another human being. The tone of the letter should be somewhat formal and businesslike, but it should not sound like a canned form-letter.

Be brief and straightforward, it is usually more effective than being clever and gimmicky.

Don't repeat everything that can be read on your resume, but instead take what's on your resume and state why that is important. Resumes say what you did, a cover letter should say why that qualifies you for the position.

There is no special trick to writing a cover letter; just keep in mind what the other person needs and wants to hear.

Format of a cover letter

Use the standard layout for business correspondence

Paragraphs should be single spaced with double spacing between each paragraph.

Print the letter on good paper (the same weight and color as that of your resume) and remember to SIGN it before mailing.

Be certain to check for grammatical mistakes, misspellings, and typos.

Proofread more than once. Your letter and resume are a company's first impression of you.

Keep the letter as brief as possible, 3-4 paragraphs, no more than one page. Be sure that all the information you are including is absolutely necessary.

What to include in a Cover Letter

The following instructions will tell you what to include in a cover letter. They are to be used as guidelines for the content; it is up to you to arrange the contents in a readable, logical way.

A basic formula for cover letters is as follows:

Date: the date you are writing is the first item in the top left corner of the page.

Standard business letter address format: place the name, title, company, and address of the person to receive your letter in the top left corner of the page

Salutation (it should be to a real person: take time to know who your target is) If you are addressing the letter to a specific person, start out with the formal salutation: Dear Mr. X, or Ms. Y.

If, through research, you cannot locate the name use: "Dear Hiring Manager"

Avoid using the old standbys "To whom it may concern" or "Dear Sir or Madam."

First paragraph: Why are you writing? To meet that company's specific needs, of course!

The opening paragraph should accomplish a few goals:

It should grab the reader's attention

It should identify the position you are applying for

It should note how you learned about the position

And it should clearly state your Objective: why you are interested in this position, why you are interested in working for this particular organization.

Second paragraph, the body: briefly state two or three top skills, then immediately follow with the benefits these skills (and you as a person) will provide to the company.

The body paragraph should accomplish these goals:

Refer the employer to points in your resume that reflect relevant experience.

Emphasize your strongest qualifications or top selling points and

Clearly identify how these qualifications will benefit the company.

You may provide examples of your achievements that have benefited previous companies or employers.

Be specific in your descriptions.

The Closing Paragraph is not just the ending of the letter, but a "sales closer." You want to show that you are a proactive candidate. Even if you don't hear back from an employer within reasonable period of time, contact them and inquire on the "position status."

Your closing paragraph should accomplish the following goals:

Reiterate your interest and summarize why you are the best candidate.

Indicate that you would appreciate the opportunity to interview for this position.

Use an active ending; in other words, rather than asking them to contact you, tell them you will contact them to follow up on your application.

Give thanks: Be genuine and thank them for their time.

A few last reminders:

Keep cover letters to 3-4 paragraphs in length

Avoid using too many sentences that begin with the word "I".

Spell check, proofread and laser print for best copy results.

Sign the letter and make a copy for your files. That's it!

Samples are available on the Career Development web page. But remember—what is right for one person can sound canned or false for the next. Write this letter in your own words so that it sounds like you-not like something out of a book. Employers are looking for knowledge, enthusiasm, and focus! Take the time to write a basic cover letter structure you feel comfortable with, and then customize it to the specific needs of the job you are applying for.

This slide provides you with a sample format and outline of a Cover Letter.

Once you have developed a Cover Letter, you can make an appointment at the Career Development Center, to have a one-on-one consultation, or you may choose to come in during our drop-in hours for a critique.

Some additional resources available to help you develop a Cover Letter are:

Handouts online and in the career center

The Career Development Center website

Audio Guides available on the Career Development website

Books in the Career Resource Center

Thank you for your attention.

For additional assistance on your search, feel free to call the Career Development Center for an individual appointment.

Best wishes as you continue your job or internship search.