## **Cover Letter**

A cover letter is a document that accompanies a resume when a job seeker applies for a job. The cover letter has a unique role in that it helps the job applicant express their interest and qualifications for a position in a way that a resume is not able to do. Cover letters allow the job seeker to write in their own voice and provide information that is not easily found in a resume. In fact, some recruiters claim that they would prefer to have an applicant's cover letter instead of a resume as they can gather much more information about the person. Since the cover letter is in your own voice, it is important to put in a lot of effort and have somebody else read it and give you feedback.

I can tell you that as someone whom has worked as a Recruiter and as a Hiring Manager, I always insist on the applicant sending a cover letter along with their resume. It allows me to see what their writing skills are like. It also gives insight as to how an applicant can follow directions.

### **Formatting a Cover Letter**

It is important to use the standard style of writing a business letter when you reach out with a cover letter or request for an informational interview. These guidelines have been put together for you to follow. Always proofread your letter, or better yet, have someone review it for you. Do this before sending it out. Make sure to look for spelling, grammar, and formatting errors. Some assistive technology products offer features for looking for inconsistencies in the document. Consult your product’s online resources for additional information.

The most common format is referred to as Block style. All information should be left justified and single spaced. Use an easy-to-read font like Times New Roman, Courier New, or Arial in 12-point font. Even better, try to use the same font as your resume. Avoid using bold, italics, or underline in your letter. Margins should be one inch all around. This is the default on most word processing programs. In between sentences, it is not necessary to press the space bar twice. It is a good idea to skip one line between paragraphs. It is not necessary to indent the first line of a paragraph.

### What to Include in the Document

# Sender’s Address

This information should be included unless you are using letterhead that already has the sender’s address.

* Start at the top of the document
* Include the street address, city, state and zip code
* Do not include your name, title, email address, or web site (You can place it in the body of the letter or beneath the closing signature)
* Date

The date should follow the sender’s address. Skip one line after the sender’s address. For companies in the United States, use a standard format:

* Write out the name of the month, e.g., August
* Use a numerical value for the day such as 12 followed by a comma
* Finally, the year written out numerically as well

Example: 04/22/2019

# Inside Address

The inside address is the recipient’s address and should come after the sender’s address and date with one line in between. Ideally it is best to write to a specific person. You can always research the organization online to find a staff directory or a page describing the leadership team if you are looking for a name.

* First comes the person’s first and last name including their title
* If known, use the appropriate title such as Mr., Mrs., Dr., etc.
* For women, if you are not sure which title they use, use Ms.
* The next line should be the full name of the company
* The next two lines should be the street address and city, state, and zip code
* Use the organization’s standard business address. It is preferable to use the company's headquarters address rather than a satellite office
* Write the city followed by a comma and the abbreviation for the state and then the zip code
* For international addresses, write out the name of the country in all capital letters on the last line

Example:

Ms. Linda Melendez

National Federation of the Blind, New Jersey Affiliate

P.O. Box 185

Keyport, New Jersey 07735

# Salutation

After typing the address, insert one line between the address and the salutation.

* Use the same title for the recipient as in the inside address plus their last name
* If you are unsure of the recipient’s gender, you can write out their first and last name without a title

Example Chris Johnson or Pat McDonald

* Only use first name if you are on a first name basis with the person and only in exceptional cases
* Pro tip: This should be avoided when possible. Keep it formal.
* The name should be followed with a colon and not a comma

Example:

Dear Ms. Melendez:

Dear Pat McDonald:

# Body

After you have created the salutation, skip one line before beginning the body of the letter. It is important to keep the body of the letter concise and on point. Do not write one large paragraph, instead break up the body into three or more paragraphs. Remember to put a blank line in between each paragraph for easier reading. It is not necessary to indent the paragraphs.

* It is okay to be friendly but keep the tone formal and limit the length of any friendly gestures
* Do not write anything that would sound like an email to a friend, a text message, or a post on social media
* Be sure to give the reader a clear understanding of why you are writing to them in the first paragraph
* Identify the job title, job location if there are multiple job sites, requisition number if available, and where you found the posting
* If you are being referred for a position, be sure to include the referring person’s name (the referring person may earn a monetary bonus for the referral. So, it is imperative to mention them by name
* The first paragraph should highlight why you are an excellent candidate for the position identified
* Use the second and third paragraphs to support your first paragraph and be sure your support aligns with the job posting
* The last paragraph should restate the intent of the letter including a “call to action”
* It is okay to insert your phone number, email address, and availability for an interview

# Closing

After the last sentence of the body paragraph, insert a blank line.

* Capitalize the first word only and follow with a comma
* Use conservative closings like Best regards, Thank you, or Respectively
* Do not use casual closings such as Later, Thanks, Cheers, Cordially, or Warmly

Examples:

Thank you,

Best regards,

* Skip four lines and type out your name
* This allows you a space to sign the letter if it is printed
* Optionally, you can include your contact information such as phone number and email address

# Enclosures

Note that this practice has been falling out of favor and you may want to consider not including it in your cover letter. However, if you do want to include it, follow this direction. If you are planning to include additional documents, you can write Enclosures and optionally list them.

Skip one line after your closing and then type Enclosure

Write “Resume”

Write “References”

Write “Work Sample”

If you attach either of these enclosures with your cover letter, list them as noted above.

**Why I Care More About Your Cover Letter Than Your Resume**

I’ve probably sorted through the materials of thousands of job applicants over the years. Sometimes it’s for full-time work; sometimes I’m looking for a contractor. Sometimes the position is challenging and complex; sometimes the tasks are basic. But no matter what the nature of the hiring may be, one thing remains the same: if your cover letter doesn’t impress, I won’t even look at your resume. So, take your time and write a quality letter.

Every job posting I’ve ever written has made it clear that I require a cover letter. I even go so far as to tell them what I’m looking for in that cover letter: an explanation of why their experience and skills makes them a good fit for the opening. There should be no opportunity for confusion.

And yet sadly, if I had to estimate a guess, I’d say that more than 60% of applicants don’t include a cover letter at all. Another 20% include a cover letter that simply informs me they’ve attached their resume. Another 10% include a cover letter that is clearly a template they use for any old job application. Only 10% of the total applicant pool takes the time to actually write a cover letter that answers the questions I’m asking. In other words, the best candidates customize the cover letter for this specific job at this specific company. I know that because they address why they are a good fit, and they share their relevant experience. These applicants may share information that demonstrates they have researched our company and mention a tidbit or two about the company’s accomplishments or goals for the coming year.

That means that 90% of the people who want me to hire them are not submitting a cover letter that will help them secure an interview. Talk about a terrible first impression.

If your cover letter leaves much (or everything) to be desired, I don’t care if your resume is dozens of pages of awards and sheer greatness. You’ve lost me. Why?

* If your cover letter is nonexistent or messy and uninformative, I’m not sure I believe a word of your resume.
* If you can’t follow simple instructions in the application process, I have little to no faith in your ability to take direction on the job.
* If you cannot communicate why your experience and skills are relevant to the job, I’m not sure you understand what the position entails, or that your background brings all that much value to the table.
* If your cover letter could be used to apply to anything, anywhere, it tells me that you didn’t care enough about the opportunity to convince me you’re the person for this specific job.
* In the body of your cover letter, target one or two job requirements and state how your skills address those specific job requirements. As an example, “*Your requirement says you should have 4 years as a Photographer.* Write something like, “*I have worked as a Sports Photographer for 7 years documenting high school and college football, track, and basketball games with pictures that told a story*.” Or “*I have provided photographs of my client’s weddings with the types of photos they told me they desired prior to their wedding date. I have done this for over 15 weddings successfully over the last 7 years.*”

A solid cover letter, on the other hand, makes me want to schedule an interview immediately. In most cases. It can even help you overcome deficiencies in your resume or a lack of experience. I would rather have a determined, passionate individual with a strong work ethic on my team than one with an Ivy League degree without tenacity every single time. Your pedigree is not as important as your *ability* to do the work.

So, the next time you go to apply for a job, think about whether it’s one you really want. If you do, take the time to write a custom cover letter that will grab their attention and clearly articulate why you’re the candidate they’ve been looking for all along. It may be the difference between getting dismissed or landing the interview.

NOTE: The company doesn’t care as much as to why you *want* or *need* the job – but they care more about *what you can do for the company*. How can you increase revenue, decrease turnaround time, or solve their problem? So, sell yourself as a problem solver that addresses their need. That is more likely to get you hired.