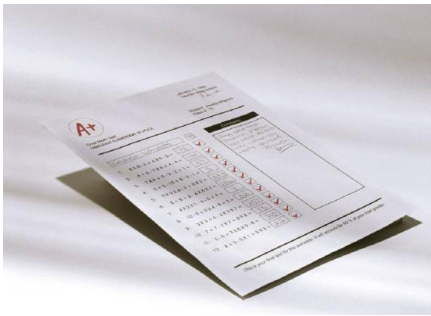


Writing an Effective Cover Letter



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Purpose and Strategies



Your cover letter is more than likely **the first contact you will have with a potential employer**. If it is well written, your letter will lead the reader to your resume. If your letter is poorly written or produced, the employer may not even take time to review your resume and your application has a good chance of ending in the circular file.

When you prepare the cover letter **put yourself in the shoes of the hiring manager**. If you were doing the hiring, what attributes would the ideal candidate for this job possess? You probably would prefer that the person has work experience similar to, or at least applicable to, the position he or she is applying for. You would want the ideal candidate to be ambitious and anxious to contribute his or her energy and skills to the success of your organization. The perfect candidate would demonstrate interest in and knowledge of your particular company or organization. In short, you would want to hire an energetic, dedicated and skilled candidate.

The cover letter affords the opportunity for you to **present yourself as the perfect candidate**. Imagine your cover letter as a marketing tool, much like a television commercial. Effective commercials catch your attention by highlighting only the most attractive features of a product.

Highlight your most attractive features as a potential employee. Remember, employers typically receive hundreds of applications for each job opening. No one is going to waste time reading through a long letter crammed with text. **Be brief**. You should avoid detailing your entire work history. The best way to distinguish yourself is to highlight one or two of your accomplishments or abilities that show you are an above-average candidate for the position. Stressing only a few unique attributes increases your chances of being remembered by the recruiter and getting to the interview stage where you can elaborate on the rest of your accomplishments.

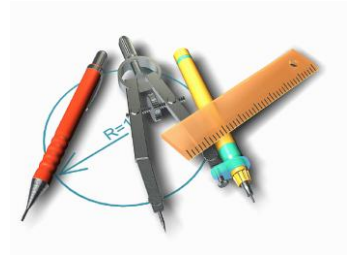
Taking time to **research each employer** promises to be much more effective than sending out hundreds of form letters. In effect, you are saying to employers, "This is where I want to work. I have done my research and I am confident in my decision."



The pages that follow provide additional guidelines and samples for you. Once you have a draft cover letter written, call to set up an appointment with one of the Career Services staff to have it critiqued.



Cover Letter Guidelines



Your Address

Date

Contact Person's Name

Title

Address

City, State Zip Code

Dear Dr. Mr./Ms. _____:

Section 1

The opening paragraph explains why you are writing the letter. State your purpose, identifying the position you are applying for and how you learned about the opening. If you are responding to an advertisement, state the name and date of the publication where you saw the ad. If a well-respected person referred you to the organization, mention the person's name and briefly explain your connection.

Section 2

Here is where you tailor your cover letter to a particular job. Tell the employer why you are a strong candidate for this position by highlighting relevant achievements, skills, and/or experience. A good way to approach this is to select 2-3 skills and/or experiences that directly relate to the position. If you are changing careers, mention this in your letter and emphasize your transferable skills. Show how your past experience has contributed to making you a strong contender in your new field.

Section 3

To demonstrate your motivation, we suggest researching the organization and including your findings in the cover letter. This can include the company mission, special projects, programs or recent news highlights. A line or two about the company is sufficient.

Additionally, this paragraph can be included if there is further information that adds strength to your qualifications and hasn't been mentioned on your resume or needs to be described in more detail (for example, a special project you undertook in a previous job or in your community).

Section 4

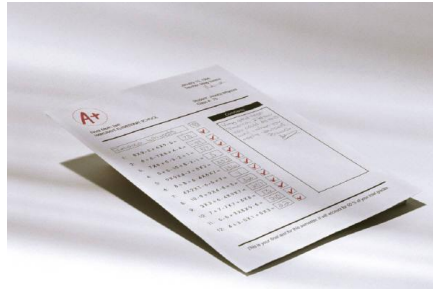
Employers will not automatically contact you once you've sent your cover letter and resume, so be sure to state how and when they may contact you (including phone number and email address). The final paragraph can be action oriented (request an interview). State when and how you may be reached to be contacted for an interview. Finally, thank the person for considering your candidacy and mention that you are looking forward to meeting him or her.

Sincerely,

Your signature

Your full name (typed)

Cover Letter Tips



- **Never** send out a resume without a cover letter.
- Address your cover letter specifically to the person by name and title who will most likely be interviewing for the job you have in mind.
 - Call the employer's switchboard to ask for this information.
 - If you are answering a blind newspaper advertisement- one in which the employer is not specified- you can address your letter "Dear Search Committee", "Dear Human Resources" or "Dear Hiring Manager."
- The cover letter should be neat, contain no typos, misspellings or errors in grammar. Employers judge you on your ability to communicate and your ability to manage the presentation of information. A cover letter does both.
- Use 8 1/2 x 11 paper allowing a border of at least one inch. This allows space for the reader to make notes.
- Use the same quality paper as your resume. Use a matching envelope as well.
- Use a clear type face large enough to allow easy reading. Avoid script and other exotic typefaces. It is best to match your font size and type to that of your resume.
- Individualize your cover letter. Each cover letter you write will have a somewhat different slant, depending on what skills are important to the needs of the particular employer.
 - Whenever possible, do some research on the organization or company before you write your cover letter.
 - Read annual reports, product brochures or contact people in the organization.
- Keep it to three or four paragraphs and no longer than one page.
- Always close your cover letter with a request for an interview.
 - "I am eager to discuss this opportunity with you further in an interview."
 - You can also suggest a specific time or reason, such as: "I will call you the week of May 22nd to discuss the interviewing process and your timetable for hiring."
- Make a record and keep a copy of each letter and resume you send.

What the Experts Say...

"...you need to make it easy for the employer to buy. You need to clearly state when you will be available to talk to the employer. Be specific: give telephone numbers where you can be reached both at work and off work. You could have a tremendous background and see yourself very well, but if the employer can't reach you, everything could be lost."

-Lola M. Coxford, from *Resume Writing Made Easy for High-Tech*

"Mention projects under development, recent awards, or favorable comments recently published about the company. You can find such information in the business press, including the business section of local newspapers and the many magazines that are devoted to particular industries."

-Neale Baxter, from *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*

"Because you can use your cover letter to highlight certain aspects of your resume, the same resume can be used to pursue different job opportunities. The beauty of the cover letter is that you can gear it to each particular company that is the recipient of your resume by stressing your most important qualification."

-Adele Lewis, from *The Best Resumes for Scientists and Engineers*

"No cover letter should carry the salutation, 'To whom it may concern.' It will concern no one if you don't personalize it. The surest way to get the information is to find the name in trade journals or in *The Standard & Poor's Register*, *The Dun & Bradstreet Directory*, or other directories. Failing all that, call the company and ask for the name of the appropriate person."

-Kenneth and Sheryl Dawson, *Job Search, The Total System*

"Poor grammar, bad punctuation, and misspelled words suggest that the applicant is either poorly educated or simply doesn't care about the impression created... The chances are unusually high that the employer is going to forgo reading the accompanying resume and quickly move on to the next job applicant."

-Richard H. Beatty, from *The Perfect Cover Letter*

"If there is a catch-22 situation in job hunting, it involves the cover letter. Even in situations where it is not requested, you should attach a cover letter to your resume. However, a review of the cover letter is one of the most common methods by which candidates are eliminated from the process. The cover letter is rarely anything but a liability, but you must include it because its absence is worse."

-Jeff B. Speck, from *Hot Tips, Sneaky Tricks & Last Ditch Tactics*

Sample Cover Letter 1

123 Fairhaven Way
Lexington, MA 02072

May 15, 2009

Ms. Colleen Gramacki
Human Resources Manager
McKeith & Company, Inc.
One Preston Park Plaza, Suite 2000
Boston, MA 02101

Dear Ms. Gramacki:

Recently I spoke with Mr. John Edison from the Finance Department of McKeith & Company. He strongly recommended that I submit my resume for the position of Financial Analyst. Knowing the requirements of the position he suggested, I would be an ideal candidate for your consideration.

Collectively my academic and employment experiences have prepared me well for a career with McKeith & Company. My challenging and competitive academic program has included a strong foundation in auditing, capital budgeting, financial analysis, risk management and investments. I have developed keen quantitative, analytical and problem solving skills in both the classroom and on the job.

In addition to my classroom experience, I have worked in the field of banking and tax preparation. My knowledge includes familiarity with the environments of a large diversified financial services company and a small Certified Public Accounting firm. Customer service and relationship building have been key components of my employment. I have a proven record of addressing the client's needs, while achieving company goals.

As I was doing research off of your website, I came across your Summer 2008 newsletter and was impressed to learn that McKeith is expanding its operation to three new locations in New England. I would like to be part of the "McKeith Team" and be a member of your organization that is growing and prides itself on "superior customer service".

Enclosed is a copy of my resume highlighting in detail my education and work history. I would like to meet with you, at your earliest convenience, for an interview appointment. Please feel free to contact me at (508)111-1234 if you need any further information regarding my candidacy.

Sincerely,

Your signature

Christina Michaels

Enclosure: Resume, References

Sample Cover Letter 2

2728 Lindenshire Road
Apartment 231
Taunton, MA 02780

April 14, 2009

Ms. Melissa Stephens
Human Resources Director
Community Care Family Services
111 Main Street
Norwood, MA 02062

Dear Ms. Stephens:

Your advertised position of Mental Health Counselor, which I learned about through the Career Services Office at Bridgewater State College, intrigued me. Enclosed is my resume for your consideration.

I will be graduating in May from Bridgewater State College with a Bachelor of Science degree in Social Work with a minor in Criminology. Having successfully completed four years in a rigorous curriculum and having worked in a mental health setting before, I am confident that I will succeed in the position of Mental Health Counselor. While at Bridgewater State Hospital, I instructed patients on proper personal hygiene and organized recreational and educational activities. In addition, I observed individual and group therapy sessions and supported medical and correctional staffs. I am certified in CPR and have completed two self-defense courses.

Currently, I am working in the Girls Secure Detention Unit at the Old Colony YMCA where I provide a secure environment for twenty-two residents ages 11-18. On a daily basis I assist residents in developing important life skills and act as a positive role model. This position allows me to further develop my counseling and interpersonal communications skills.

As I was researching your organization, I was impressed with the variety of programs that you provide to the local community. I am especially excited about the opportunity to work with your afterschool program for at-risk youth which has been providing excellent mentorship opportunities to young adults for years.

Please feel free to call me at 508-824-7894 if you have any questions about my candidacy. I appreciate your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Your signature

Elena Martinez

Encl: Resume

Sample Cover Letter 3

MARK JONES

22 South Street, Bridgewater, MA 02324 • (508) 555-1212 • mjones@aol.com

March 15, 2009

Mr. Francis J. Smith
Superintendent of Schools
Braintree Public Schools
124 Washington Street
Braintree, MA 02345

Dear Mr. Smith:

Please accept the enclosed resume for the position of first grade teacher at the Braintree Elementary School. I learned about this opportunity in the March 14, 2009 edition of the *Brockton Enterprise* and I am excited to learn more about the position.

My educational background, volunteer work and student teaching experience would make me an excellent addition to your teaching staff. Bridgewater State College has prepared me well with a strong understanding of cognitive development in children. Teaching in diverse school settings such as urban, multi-cultural, and multi-lingual classrooms has exposed me to variety of learning styles and techniques. Student teaching allowed me to bring together the theoretical and the practical in a dynamic learning environment.

While at Central Elementary School, I developed a thematic unit on Native Americans incorporating hands-on activities. The class was of diverse ethnic backgrounds and levels of ability challenging me to be innovative in meeting the needs of all students. One of the highlights of my student teaching experience was my involvement in the after-school program. As a committee member, I offered creative ideas for developing activities for this state-funded enrichment program. As a program volunteer, I assisted students with homework assignments and self-esteem building activities. It was rewarding for me to be an organizing member of this valuable program.

The Braintree Elementary School's interest in addressing the issue of after-school programming is a subject I would like to pursue. I welcome the opportunity to discuss how my qualifications would benefit the Braintree School District. I will call you in two weeks to discuss the interviewing process and your timetable for hiring. If you have any questions regarding my application before then, please feel free to contact me at 508-555-1212. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Your signature

Mark Jones

Enclosure: Resume, Transcript, Letters of Recommendation