

COVER LETTERS

The purpose of a cover letter is to encourage an employer to interview you. As with all written material that you send to an employer, a cover letter should be persuasive and present you in a positive light. A cover letter also functions as a writing sample, so it is important that it is engaging, convincing, professional in appearance, grammatically correct, and free of typos.

Narrowly tailor your cover letter to each job for which you apply. Mass mailings using generic language are ineffective. Tailoring each cover letter will require researching both the job and the employer. Your cover letter can illustrate that you understand the position's required qualifications, duties and responsibilities. Once you have a clear understanding of the position, use your cover letter to explain how your experience and education will **benefit the employer**.

Your cover letter should **highlight** the strengths and abilities listed on your resume. Most employers who are reading resumes have their regular jobs to perform. Your cover letter should highlight the one or two items you hope they will see on your resume in the short time they have to glance at it. If your resume is particularly thin, you may use a specific example to illustrate a skill, but always be selective and concise. Anything mentioned should relate to the desired position.

Always include a cover letter when you send a resume to an employer about a posted position. Below are guidelines to assist you in drafting a targeted, convincing cover letter. Use the mail unless email is requested. Avoid communicating via texting.

BASIC COVER LETTER REQUIREMENTS

A cover letter should follow traditional, conservative formatting for business correspondence: select the same resume-quality, white, off-white, or beige paper for all submissions, including your resume and envelopes. Be especially careful if you use a local and permanent address on your letterhead or resume for some applications and not others. Hard copies of your resume and cover letter should be printed using a laser printer.

Mail your letter with any requested enclosures in a standard, 4"x10" business envelope with the mailing and return addresses laser-printed directly on the envelope. If your mailing is too thick for a standard envelope, use a 9"x12" envelope with the mailing and return addresses laser printed on labels. Check that there are no typographical, punctuation, capitalization, or grammatical errors. Ensure you have indicated an enclosure or enclosures after your signature. Hand edit your cover letter to ensure that it is absolutely accurate and honest. If submitting material electronically, convert each document into a PDF file. The file name should include your name and the contents of the file only ("John Doe -Cover letter" or "John Doe - Resume").

COVER LETTER CONTENT

A cover letter should be concise. A **one-page**, single-sided letter consisting of three short paragraphs is ideal. YOUR COVER LETTER SHOULD BE AS SHORT AS POSSIBLE BUT AS LONG AS NECESSARY TO COVER THESE THREE POINTS: (1) WHO I AM, (WHY I STAND OUT), (2) HOW I CAN ADD VALUE, (3) HOW YOU CAN REACH ME. Be brief. Potential employers will spend seconds on your resume and even less time on your cover letter. A lengthy letter increases the likelihood the potential employer will not read the letter at all. Do not waste their time with a lengthy cover letter.

Your opening paragraph introduces you to the employer, including who you are (e.g., a senior at UC San Diego, a recent graduate, high rank in classes or school, high GPA) and the position you seek. If someone has referred you to the employer, mention his or her name. Also be sure to use the correct term for the target employer (if you are applying to a firm, use the term "firm," and if you are applying to a company, use the term "company," etc.). This should include detailed reference to the position, including the correct job title and company name.

In your second paragraph, relate your experience to the position for which you seek an interview. Show how you can add value for the employer in your desired position, drawing connections between your experience, skills, interests, and the job requirements. Give the employer strong reasons to want to interview you, while not overwhelming them with information so they do not feel there is anything left to learn about you. If you are applying for your first job, or for an area in which you have no experience, demonstrate through examples that you are a motivated self-starter. Volunteer experience is still experience. You can include specific facts about yourself and your coursework to illustrate these attributes. Rather than stating: "I have a strong work ethic," you can discuss a situation that provides a concrete example of that attribute: "While working at X, My supervisor often complimented me on my timeliness, quality work product, and positive attitude." Do this concisely.

In your final paragraph, request an interview, state if and how you will follow up, and thank the employer for his or her consideration.

WHEN TO SEND A FORMAL COVER LETTER VS. AN INTRODUCTORY EMAIL

You should submit a formal cover letter when applying for a position that has been advertised. Follow the instructions listed in the job posting or on the employer's website regarding the preferred method of submitting your application materials. If the instructions request applications sent via email, attach your cover letter, resume, and any other requested application materials to a brief email in which you introduce yourself, express your interest in the position, and quickly highlight your most relevant skills and experiences. When crafting the email, use the same care and candor put forth in your formal documents. Attach the documents to the email first; you do not want to risk having to send a second email because you failed to attach the appropriate documentation (or worse yet, never realize you failed to include the attachments and forgo the job opportunity). Draft the email in Word and check it carefully for spelling and grammatical errors. The email should consist of no more than 2-3 sentences. If an employee at the firm referred you to the position, state that in the email.

If you are following up with a networking lead regarding a prospective opening, you should send a brief email introducing yourself, explaining your relationship to a mutual contact (whenever applicable), expressing your interest in learning more about the employer's business, and suggesting a brief meeting (i.e., informational interview). You should not include a copy of your cover letter in this instance. Instead, attach a PDF copy of your resume for the individuals "reference." Ensure the tone of your email is not rude or presumptive.

THANK YOU NOTES

Always send a prompt, sincere thank you note to someone who takes the time to interview you, including at an on-campus interview, informational interview, or mock interview. Send a thank you letter whenever someone extends you the courtesy of reviewing your resume. If you met with several people at a company, compose a unique thank you for each person. Be careful to spell the individual's name correctly, and do not forget any of the interviewers. A thank you note shows appreciation and consideration for the other individual's time afforded to you. You never know who might later pass your name along to a prospective employer. If possible, send the thank you note via regular mail, not email. Under no circumstances should you text a thank you note.

A thank you letter has the most impact if it is sent within twenty-four hours of your meeting. Do your best to send the thank you letter as soon as possible, but remember that a late thank you is better than no thank you at all. In addition to acknowledging the time and consideration of the person with whom you met, a thank you letter reminds the recipient that you are a candidate and confirms your interest in the position. Use the opportunity to recall a discussion you had, a qualification you possess, or provide additional information that you did not raise in the meeting. However, be concise, do not try to continue the interview or qualify any of your answers. The contents of the note should only serve to reiterate your interest in the position.

WRITING AFTER A REJECTION LETTER

Receiving news that you are not being offered a position or interview that you were interested in is disappointing. Take heart, "no" is only "no" at one point. Consider sending a follow up letter after receiving notice that you have not been selected for a position or interview. The selected candidate might decline, withdraw acceptance, or leave shortly after starting the position. Other positions could open. By corresponding with an employer that has passed on your candidacy, you are able to state your continued interest in future opportunities. However, do not ask details about why you were not selected. The follow-up should only express gratitude for consideration and interest in alternative positions. Keep the note short, open-ended, and positive.

REFERENCES

Only provide references after the prospective employer requests them. Do not include the phrase "References available upon request" in your cover letter, resume, or email. Providing references is an opportunity to inform a potential employer about your accomplishments and attributes.

Unless otherwise requested, select three or four references who will speak glowingly of your professional or academic qualities. If you have multiple references to choose from, choose individuals with the most senior titles or individuals who work in the same industry as the industry of the job you are targeting. List the most senior individual first. Generally, personal references are not helpful to employers. It is best to approach former supervisors or individuals who instructed or mentored you in a formal capacity. You should also include a phrase or two explaining your relationship on a line directly below their contact information. One sentence is sufficient. References lists should be printed on paper and using the same formatting as your cover letter. Most often, you send references later in the process. You should do this with a brief, appreciative cover letter.

Always contact your potential references and ask whether they are willing to speak positively and enthusiastically on your behalf. Take the opportunity to update them on your education, accomplishments, and goals and to ask them about themselves. Ask them for their permission to be contacted in the near future by your potential employers. Do not assume each person will be willing to serve as a reference. Not all employers are authorized or comfortable providing feedback on employees. Watch for social cues: if the person seems hesitant to speak on your behalf, do not list them as a reference. Wait for confirmation from the individual before giving out their contact information.