

# Cover Letters

**Mission:** While there are a variety of cover letters, the objective is the same: to get an interview and get hired. An effective cover letter introduces you to the reader and provides insight into your qualifications, experience and motivation. It is also an opportunity to demonstrate your writing and communication skills. Keep in mind that it is your first impression on the organization and so the cover letter should be your best writing.

## **Step One: Research**

Unlike a resume, each cover letter targets a specific organization. Before you even start writing, do some research about the organization. Find out about the organizational structure, the sector it is or target population it works with and who related organizations are. Have there been any recent developments in the news relevant to the organization? Has the organization made any dramatic changes recently or have there been budget cuts?

Also, remember the research the position. What does the position entail? What are the necessary skills? Think about how these skills fit in with yours. You can also get a feel for the culture of the organization by talking with past and present employees, reading publications, evaluating recruitment materials or attending information sessions when available.

## **Step Two: Writing the Cover Letter**

- Address the cover letter to a specific person. Extra phone calls are worth the effort.
- Verify the spelling and gender of the addressee.
- If it proves impossible to get a name, then address the letter to “Dear Sir or Madam.”
- A colon is appropriate for a salutation. For example: Dear Ms. Zoller:
- Keep it brief. A cover letter does not need to be more than 3-4 concise paragraphs adding up to about three quarters of the page.
- Be sincere in expressing your interest in the position and include relevant information from your research
- Identify your unique qualifications and areas of interest that make you a great candidate.
- Know your reader and keep him\her in mind while writing.
- Allow your letter to communicate your confidence and professionalism by being enthusiastic and focused.
- Proofread and proofread again. Don’t rely on the computer to do this for you. Try reading it backwards to help avoid skimming.
- Demonstrate your writing skills as well as your qualifications. Employers may be judging your writing style. Use parallel sentence structure and correct grammar.
- Try to avoid beginning every sentence with “I.”
- Remember to sign the letter.
- Include a cover letter even if it is not specifically requested.

# General Cover Letter Format

Your name  
Your street address  
City, State Zip Code  
Your email address  
(Area Code) Phone Number

Month Date, Year

Mr./Ms./Dr. First and Last Name of Person  
Position or Title  
Employer Organization's Name  
Employer Street Address/PO Box  
City, State Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. Last Name of Addressee:

Paragraph 1: Tell the reader who you are and why you are writing them. If someone referred you to the reader or you saw a job listing, say so here. Be enthusiastic about your interest, as you want to reader to continue.

Paragraph 2: Tell the reader why you are a good fit with their organization. Demonstrate knowledge of the organization and state why this position is interesting to you. Add in some of the research that you have done about the organization. If you are making a career change, explain it here, with an emphasis on why this particular change makes sense for you.

Paragraph 3: Tell the reader what you have to offer them and their organization. Be careful not to retell your resume. Emphasize your skills and accomplishments that are relevant to the position or define your work style.

Paragraph 4: Express interest in arranging an interview. Be proactive and say that you will follow up with a telephone call to discuss the next step, do not say that you will wait to hear from them. Calling is useful to verify that they have received your information. Even a negative is better than no response so that you can move on with your search. Close with a positive statement and thank the reader for their time.

Sincerely,

(4 spaces, sign name in this space!)

Your Name Typed

Enclosure