

Cover letters

A letter of application, also known as a cover letter, is a document sent with your resume to provide additional information on your skills and experience.

A letter of application typically provides detailed information on why you are qualified for the job you are applying for. Effective application letters explain the reasons for your interest in the specific organization and identify your most relevant skills or experiences.

Your application letter should let the employer know what position you are applying for, why the employer should select you for an interview, and how you will follow-up.

Purpose

Your cover letter and resume usually provide all the information which a prospective employer will use to decide whether or not you will reach the next phase in the application process: the interview.

While your goal is an interview and, ultimately, a job offer, the more immediate purpose of your cover letter in some cases may simply be to gain an attentive audience for your resume.

Audience

A cover letter provides, in a very real sense, an opportunity to let your prospective employer hear your voice. It reflects your personality, your attention to detail, your communication skills, your enthusiasm, your intellect, and your specific interest in the company to which you are sending the letter.

Employers do manage to reduce the pool of cover letters and resumes to a manageable number. How they do it can give you some insight in to how to write cover letters that will make the cut. Because, if your cover letter doesn't pass muster, your resume won't even get a look.

If your cover letter and resume aren't perfect they most likely will end up in the reject pile. And perfect means perfect - there should not be any typos or grammatical errors.

Employers typically won't even consider a candidate that they cannot see is qualified at first glance. That first glance at your cover letter is your one opportunity to make a good impression and make it to the next round.

Content

When writing an application letter you should include:

- **First Paragraph:** Why you are writing - mention the job you are applying for and where you found the listing.
- **Middle Paragraph(s):** What you have to offer the employer - mention why your skills and experience are a good fit for the job.
- **Last Paragraph:** Say thank you to the hiring manager for considering you and note how you will follow up. (How You Will Follow Up: Remember, it is your responsibility to follow-up. State that you will do so and provide the professional courtesy of indicating when; one week is typical.)

You want the reader to know:

- why you want to work at that specific company,
- why you fit with that company
- how you qualify for the position to which you applying.

In addition to tailoring your application to a specific job with a specific company, the cover letter should also:

- highlight the most important and relevant accomplishments, skills, and experience listed in your resume
- point to the resume in some way (as detailed in the enclosed resume")
- request specific follow up, such as an interview.

Format

A cover letter should be in paragraph form (save bulleted lists for your resume) with a conversational, though formal, tone.

The body of your letter should consist of one to three longer paragraphs in which you expand upon your qualifications for the position. Pick out the most relevant qualifications listed in your resume and discuss them in detail, demonstrating how your background and experience qualify you for the job. Be as specific as possible, and refer the reader to your resume for additional details.

The concluding paragraph of your letter should request an interview (or some other response, as appropriate). State where and when you can be reached, and express your willingness to come to an interview or supply further information. Close by thanking your reader for his or her time and consideration.

Targeted Cover Letters

It's certainly easier to write generic or blanket cover letters than it is to write a cover letter specifically targeted to each position you apply for. However, if you don't invest the time in writing cover letters you're probably not going to get the interview, regardless of your qualifications.

Make a Match

This one takes some time and effort and it's not always easy, but, it's important. Take the job posting and list the criteria the employer is looking for. Then list the skills and experience you have. Either address how your skills match the job in paragraph form or list the criteria and your qualifications.

EXAMPLE: Sample Job Posting

BOX OFFICE MANAGER. Conduct, oversee subscription and ticket sales for events. Generate and maintain reports, perform accounting activities related to box office revenue, oversee operations. Requires customer service skills and accounting experience.

Cover Letter Example 1: Paragraph format (preferred)

As Box Office Assistant for the Light Opera Company I was responsible for customer service, ticketing patrons, and generating and maintaining box office reports. In addition, I maintained records and accounting reports for all box office transactions.

Cover Letter Example 2: List format

My Skills and Experience:

- Box office management including ticketing, maintenance of records and ticket database management
- Maintain and generate reports
- Box office accounting transaction and reporting
- Customer service, seating, and ticketing patrons

As you can see, in both cases, the candidate has written a detailed cover letter that should pass the first screening. In order to pass that screening, you must specifically address the job ad and state why you are qualified for the position.

Given this competitive job market, it is critically important to target your cover letter and your resume. That way the employer knows exactly why you are qualified for the position and why they should consider you for an interview.

The Right Stuff - Or Not? What to do if you don't have the right stuff? It's a certainty that the person with ten years of child care experience, and no computer experience, who applied for an Oracle programmer position at a colleague's company won't get an interview. I hate to sound pessimistic, but, if your qualifications don't come close to matching the criteria for the job, I would save your time and the company's time and not apply. In most cases, there are too many qualified candidates whose cover letter and resume will make the cut.

Instead, focus on applying for jobs you do qualify for and spend some time gaining the additional skills or education (volunteer, take a class, etc.) you need to prepare to apply for positions that are a rung or two up the ladder.

Before you send your cover letter, review this checklist to make sure that you have covered all the basics and are sending a perfect cover letter to your prospective employer.

Cover Letter Checklist

- The contact name and company name are correct.
 - The letter is addressed to an individual, if possible.
 - Letter mentions the position you are applying for and where it was listed.
 - Your personal information (name, address, home phone, cell phone, email) is all included and correct.
 - If you have a contact at the company, you have mentioned him or her in the first paragraph.
 - Cover letter is targeted to the position you are applying for.
 - Letter is focused, concise, clear, and well organized.
 - If you have a gap in your employment history you have explained it in your cover letter.
 - Font is 10 or 12 points and easy to read (Times New Roman or Arial, for example).
 - There are no spelling, grammatical or typographical errors.
 - You have read the cover letter out loud to make sure there are no missing words.
 - You have kept a copy for your records.
 - Letter is signed if you are mailing it.
 - Resume and letter are mailed flat in a business envelope (first choice) or neatly folded into thirds with the resume on top of the letter.
 - Cover letter is printed on good quality bond paper that matches your resume.
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Sample Cover Letter #1:

Date

Name

Title

Organization

Address

City, State, Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms. Last Name:

I am interested in the assistant position advertised in XXX. I am currently employed as Legislative Director for Assemblywoman XXXX, Chairperson of the NYS Assembly XXX. I accepted this position because of the emphasis on the writing and research skills which are applicable to your requirements for an author's assistant. My experience in the NYS Assembly has afforded me the opportunity to become familiar with the consolidated and unconsolidated laws of the State of New York. I also have extensive experience in legal and policy research.

In my position as Legislative Director for Ms. XXX, I prepare her personal legislation which deals with issues relative to her position as Senior Member of the NYS Assembly Standing Committee on XXXX. In as much as she is Chairperson of the XXX Committee I am, of course, heavily involved in the current welfare and medicaid reform movement.

In response to your search for a part-time assistant, I believe my experience in the Legislature, and my research and writing skills qualify me for consideration. If you would like, I can provide with current samples with my work.

To further acquaint you with the specifics of my background I am enclosing my resume. I hope you will consider me for this position. I look forward to meeting with you and discussing my qualifications in more detail.

Sincerely,

Your Signature

Your Typed Name

Sample Cover Letter #2:

34 Second Street
Troy, New York 12180
October 4, 2009

Ms. Gail Roberts
Recruiting Coordinator
Department DRR 1201
Database Corporation
Princeton, New Jersey 05876

Dear Ms. Roberts:

Your advertisement for software engineers in the January issue of the IEEE Spectrum caught my attention. I was drawn to the ad by my strong interest in both software design and Database.

I have worked with a CALMA system in developing VLSI circuits, and I also have substantial experience in the design of interactive CAD software. Because of this experience, I can make a direct and immediate contribution to your department. I have enclosed a copy of my resume, which details my qualifications and suggests how I might be of service to Database.

I would like very much to meet with you to discuss your open positions for software engineers. If you wish to arrange an interview, please contact me at the above address or by telephone at (518) 271-9999.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Very truly yours,

Joseph Smith

Sample Cover Letter #3:

January 30, 2010

Mr. John M. Curtis
HAL Corporation
55 Washington Avenue
New York, New York 10081

Dear Mr. Curtis:

As an experienced computer programmer who recently earned a Bachelor of Science degree in electrical engineering at Rochester Polytechnic Institute, I am writing to apply for the advertised job of software designer with the HAL Corporation. I am interested in a position that will allow me to combine the talents I have developed in both computer programming and electrical engineering. As you can see from the attached resume, I have extensive experience in many related fields, and I would enjoy the opportunity to join your team.

I am proud of the fact that I have financed my entire education through scholarships and summer jobs directly related to my field of study. This work experience has enhanced my appreciation for a career in software design. I have learned as much from my summer jobs as I did from my academic studies. For example, during the summer of 1986, while working for IBM in Boca Raton, Florida, I gained a great deal of practical experience in the field of electronic circuit logic and driver design. When I returned to school in the fall and took Computer Hardware Design, I found that my experience with IBM had thoroughly prepared me for the subject. Likewise, I hope the experience and education described in my resume suggest how I might be of service to HAL.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss with you how I might best assist HAL in fulfilling its present corporate needs. I look forward to hearing back from you soon regarding your decision. I intend to follow-up on the status of this application next week.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Signature

Joan Doe

Sample Cover Letter for Graduate School Admittance:

Date

Graduate Program

University Name

Address

City, State, Zip Code

Dear Graduate Coordinator (get the name so you can make the letter more direct),

I am very interested in pursuing a masters degree at the University of UNIVERSITY NAME in Cardiac Rehabilitation (or the area you are interested in). From my review of graduate programs, and discussion with other professionals and students in similar programs, it is very evident that the University of UNIVERSITY NAME Exercise Science Program has an excellent Cardiac Rehabilitation program.

I am completing a very comprehensive Undergraduate Program in Exercise Science at the University of New Mexico. As you can see by my resume, this program has prepared me well for the graduate education challenges I now wish to pursue. I hope that the skills and knowledge I obtain from this graduate degree will give me the opportunity to seek a challenging opportunity within a dynamic rehabilitation setting.

I have enclosed all materials required for acceptance into the masters program. Thank you very much for your consideration of my application.

Sincerely,

Signature

Your Name

Sample Cover Letter for PT School (From Lynette Ewer)

December 4, 2009

Kathy Dieruf
Admissions Chairperson
UNM School of Medicine
HSSB Room 204

Dear Ms. Dieruf,

I am very interested in the physical therapy program at the University of New Mexico. I volunteered over 220 hours at the Veterans Administration Hospital (2008- 2009), which gave me the opportunity to experience and enjoy several different aspects of the physical therapy field. I am currently completing my undergraduate degree in exercise science, which I feel will enhance my abilities as a therapist.

My volunteer background has included the following: wound care, rehabilitation exercise programs, and spinal cord injury and mobility impaired patients in the therapy pool. I also gained experience in patient rehabilitation in the areas of knee and hip replacement surgery.

My bachelor's Degree in Exercise Science has provided me with the knowledge of exercise testing, EKG interpretation, fitness assessment and prescription, anatomy, and kinesiology. I have also taken courses that involved special populations, such as people with disabilities and the elderly.

The UNM physical therapy program came highly recommended by graduate students and physical therapists that I have talked with, and that the curriculum is outstanding. Through my research on deciding which school to attend I found that the New Mexico School of Medicine is one of the top in the nation. I would be proud to be a student in the UNM physical therapy program.

Through my volunteer work at the VA Hospital I have developed a compassionate approach and commitment to assisting people with medical and physical disabilities I would enjoy becoming a physical therapy student and look forward to speaking with you in the near future. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Signature

Lynette Ewer
