



WRITING A COVER LETTER

In this highly competitive job market, many employers consider a cover letter to be equally important as a resume. The letter must highlight your experience and training as it relates to the particular position to which you are applying. It should also be an honest expression of your enthusiastic interest in working for the employer.

As a sample of your writing, a cover letter should be concise, descriptive, and persuasive. Ultimately, a cover letter must positively distinguish you from other applicants.

Types of Cover Letters

There are two kinds of cover letters: those in response to a job posting and those that are unsolicited by the employer. In some respects, both types of letters are the same; however, the unsolicited letter requires additional content and action, as noted below.

Structure of a Cover Letter

Every cover letter should contain the following:

- Your Contact Information
- Date
- Reader's Address Block
- Opening Salutation (e.g., Dear Ms. Doe:)
- Introduction Paragraph
- Body
- Call to Action Closing
- Closing Salutation (e.g., Sincerely)
- Your Signature and Name

Format

Your contact information may appear at the top of the letter in the form of a header. Consider using the heading from your resume to give your cover letter the look of letterhead. You should include your mailing address, preferred telephone number, and an appropriate email address.

Always include the date on which the letter was written or intended to be mailed. You should write the date in full (e.g., July 4, 2022).

Whenever possible a cover letter should be addressed to the appropriate person. If you are uncertain to whom to address the cover letter, research the employer to identify the appropriate individual. In general, you should address the reader with Ms., Mr., or Dr., followed by their last name, unless you don't know the reader's pronouns, in which case, address it to First Name Last Name. Always remember to confirm the correct spelling of the person's name! You should never address your cover letter as, "To Whom It May Concern," as there is a chance that a letter addressed to no one will be read by no one; in the case that you do not know exactly to who the letter should be addressed, "Dear Hiring Committee:" is a better option.

Opening Paragraph: Providing Context

The opening paragraph should introduce you to the reader by acknowledging your status as a student or recent graduate. Explain briefly your reason for writing such as in response to a job posting or at the suggestion of an

individual. Indicate your knowledge about the employer by including what interested you about the employer's business or practice areas, commitment to the community, clients, or innovative programs.

You can also acknowledge any previous contact with the reader, with one of his or her peers or colleagues, or why a mentor or colleague encouraged you to contact the reader. If you are applying for a position outside of your current residence, the opening paragraph is a great place to connect yourself to the employer geographically.

Middle Paragraph(s): What Do You Offer?

Your cover letter's middle paragraph(s) are the opportunity to really distinguish yourself from other applicants. You should demonstrate that you have the credentials the employer is seeking, using language from the job posting. If your letter is unsolicited and therefore there is no enumerated set of ideal characteristics, take guidance from the employer's website. Note any similarities between you and other employees and highlight accordingly.

The middle paragraph(s) need to sell your strengths by emphasizing your educational credentials, experience, skills, and abilities using concrete examples. For example, instead of simply indicating that you meet a particular requirement, provide an example from work or school that demonstrates that requirement in action. Every sentence counts.

Last Paragraph: Call to Action

Your cover letter's closing paragraph is your call to action. Thank the reader for his or her consideration of your application. Indicate that you look forward to hearing from him or her. It need not be a long paragraph.

You should always follow up after sending an unsolicited letter, so tell the reader in the final paragraph what your next step will be. For example, "I will contact you in the next two weeks to discuss my interest in working at your practice." If the employer is located outside where you currently live, let the reader know when you will be in the area and that you are available to meet during that time frame. It may seem overly forward or confident, yet it is critically important to be proactive and professional.

Sending a Cover Letter via E-mail

When you email your application materials, make the subject line simple and direct (e.g., "OSU College of Veterinary Medicine Student Seeking Externship"). In the body of the email, include a short paragraph explaining why you are writing (a paragraph similar to the first paragraph in your cover letter) and attach all of the documents to the email. At some point all of your attachments will probably be opened and printed; therefore it is important that they look like a professional document and be named something obvious (e.g., Jane Doe Cover Letter). A PDF is a preferred and safe file type to send to almost any employer.

Helpful Tips

A cover letter must be free of errors, as errors will disqualify you. **PROOF READ CAREFULLY!** This means reading the letter with a critical eye and not relying on Spell Check! Always have someone review your cover letter before you send, and be sure to read the letter out loud to yourself so that you are able to pick up on any awkward wording that you might have missed on earlier reads. The Office of Professional Success is more than willing to help you by reviewing your cover letter.

Remember, your cover letter should not be a rehashing of your resume! Take this as your opportunity to provide insight into your unique experiences and qualifications, and demonstrate their and your value to the employer/company.