

## **COVER LETTERS**

*There are two types of cover letters – those that draw the reader in and entice him or her to read your resume, and those that eliminate you from the running before your resume gets read.*

The cover letter serves as the introduction to your resume. While your resume can remain the same for every company to which you apply, the cover letter should be created separately and individually for each position for which you express interest.

The letter must be brief, yet informative. The letter should have the three recognizable parts:

- The opening, which explains why you are writing.
- The main body, which lists two-three of your major accomplishments and gives the reader a good reason to want to interview you.
- The closing, which expresses a desire for future communication.

### **General Guidelines for Cover Letters:**

- Always direct your letter to a specific person, preferably an individual with hiring authority. This information is often available through one call to the organization's receptionist. Be sure to spell his/her name correctly and use the proper title.
- Tailor your letter to the specific job and organization. Avoid using a non-personalized form letter.
- Get a job description so that you can address the specific qualifications that they are looking for. Connect selected points on your resume to the job description. Expand on these points by giving details or examples.
- When answering an advertisement, cover all of the points requested in the exact order outlined.
- Identify particular qualities you possess that the company is seeking and give examples of how you have demonstrated these qualities.
- Convey enthusiasm for the position and set a positive tone.
- Use simple and direct language. Be as concise as possible. Refrain from using slang and abbreviations.
- Use self-descriptive action words that personalize the picture of you painted by your resume.
- Include your objective in the letter.
- Have several people proofread your letter for grammar, punctuation, spelling and typographical errors. One error could mean elimination.
- Use conventional business letterform on standard size (8.5"x11") and make sure that the paper matches your resume (white, cream, off-white or pale gray).
- Since your cover letter is written by you and for the job that you want, it is a common mistake to spend a lot of time talking about you and your skills/qualifications. It is important to put the emphasis where it belongs – on the employer and his/her needs.

☺ *Example:* I am enclosing my resume for your review because I am interested in obtaining a full-time position as a Financial Specialist at Wells Fargo.

☺ *Example:* I am applying for the position of Financial Specialist where my combination of finance training and high-tech experience will add value to your operations.

## Types of Cover Letters

### **Letter of Inquiry**

Since you are not applying for a specific position or known opening, this letter is a general one. Nevertheless, it must highlight your specific skills and/or experience. You may choose to include or not include a resume with your letter of inquiry. If you include a resume, your letter may be brief – in effect, a “cover letter” for your resume; if you do not, you will want to write a longer, more detailed letter. An inquiry letter should not exceed one page, however, and it should have generous margins and short paragraphs. Direct your letter to the hiring official or personnel director *by name* whenever possible. In your concluding paragraph, tell the employer that you will call them to discuss opportunities with their organization.

### **Letter of Application**

This type of letter is written to a potential employer for a specific position for which applicants are sought, or for an unadvertised position or area of employment which you are interested in or qualified for. The letter of application should include more information than the letter of inquiry. In the first paragraph, state why you are writing, name the position you are applying for, and indicate how you heard about this opening. The following paragraph(s) should explain your interest in the particular job and how your education and experience fill the requirements for this type of work. In a later paragraph, you may refer to the attached resume. In your concluding paragraph, request an interview at the convenience of the employer.

### **Suggestions:**

- Use paper that matches your resume. White paper is preferred, but off-white and pale gray are acceptable as well.
- Your letters should be carefully tailored to each different position or employer. If you individualize your letters, the reader will know that you have taken the time and effort to write them specifically. This speaks positively for you!
- Proofread, proofread, proofread. Have someone else – a teacher, friend or parent! One error could mean elimination!
- Include all possible telephone numbers in your return address even if already listed on your resume. Include dates if you will be changing numbers.
- Do not use letterhead stationary.
- Remember to sign your name!
- Keep a record of copies of all correspondence sent to employing officials, dates, names, addresses, etc. This will help you to remember what you have and have not shared with a specific employer.
- If you state in your letter that you will call them, call them.
- Include the following notations when enclosing items: Enclosure, Encl., or Enc. If more than one enclosure is included, specify the number (2).

### **“Thank You for the Interview” Letter**

Immediately after you have had an interview, it is important to send a brief thank-you to the potential employer. Many employers expect to receive thank-you letters within a couple of days of the interview. Note: Thank-you letters should always be sent, even if you do not expect to receive a job offer or if you have decided that you are no longer interested in the position for which you interviewed.

#### **Suggestions:**

- Express appreciation for their time and consideration.
- State the position for which you interviewed, the interview date and location and include some reference to your conversation.
- Reaffirm your interest; mention any important items that you forgot to mention in the interview and include any additional qualifications or work experience not mentioned on the resume.
- Mention your availability for an additional interview.
- Close with a feeling of enthusiasm for the position and the organization.
- If you interviewed with more than one person, do not send a thank you to each person. Send one to the person who arranged the interview or to the other key individuals who will be making the hiring decision.
- If you are no longer interested in the position, thank the employer for their time and ask that your application be withdrawn.

### **Follow-up Letters**

Some reasons for follow-up letters include acknowledgement of the offer, acceptance of the offer, declining the offer, restate interest in the organization, to send a new resume for consideration because of a change in qualifications or address, etc. In an *acceptance letter*, you review your understanding of the details of the agreement and express your appreciation for being hired. In a *letter of declination*, you indicate why you are writing and express appreciation for the offer.

**Sample Cover Letter on Next Page**

# Sample Cover Letter

← 4-8 line space

P.O. Box 1584 (Your Address)  
Moorhead, MN 56562 (City, State, Zip)  
(218) 299-2129 (Your Phone – Optional)

← 2-4 line space

Date

← 2-4 line space

Mr./Ms. Employer Name, Title (*It is critical to address your letter to the appropriate person*)  
Department/Organization  
Address  
City, State, Zip

← 2-4 line space

Dear Ms./Mr. XXXXXXX:

**Opening Paragraph:** Your opening paragraph should be creative and catch the employer's attention. State why you are interested in the employer and the position for which you are applying. Indicate how you learned about the position. Demonstrate your knowledge of the employer – show them that you have done your homework!

**Middle Paragraph(s):** These should stress what you can contribute to the organization. Highlight your particular experiences and abilities (not just responsibilities) that relate to the position for which you are applying. Do not duplicate the specific information already outlined in your resume. For a **letter of inquiry**, mention your interest in specific types of positions or discuss the skills that you possess that you would like to utilize within this organization. A **letter of application** should indicate your knowledge of the job description and illustrate that you meet the qualifications.

**Closing Paragraph:** This paragraph should serve as a summary of the letter, a call to action (i.e. a request for an interview), and a "thank you" to the employer. Inform the employer of any of the following if they apply to your situation: you will be in the area on a certain date or if you will be away for an extended period of time and you will need to be contacted at a different location (always make it easy for an employer to contact you). If appropriate, request the necessary application materials from the employer.

**Complimentary Close** (Sincerely, Sincerely yours, etc.)

← 4 line space (sign here)

**Your Name**

**Enclosures** (Enc., Enclosures (2), etc.)