



How to Make Your COVER LETTER Stand out from the Pack

PURPOSE

- **Highlights Experience:** Brings the employer's focus to selective aspects of your background that best suit the employer's needs. It expands on your skills and experience mentioned briefly in the résumé and explains how those aspects make you a great candidate for the job.
- **Captures Attention:** A well-written cover letter commands the reader's attention and stimulates the employer's interest in you as a potential candidate.
- **Demonstrates Interest:** It shows your enthusiasm for the specific job opportunity or the organization as a whole.
- **Secures an Interview:** Clinching the opportunity to interview is the ultimate goal of your cover letter.

GUIDELINES

- **Instructions:** Make sure you follow the employer's instructions for submitting your application materials. If submitting your materials electronically, save the documents into the format the employer requests.
- **Research:** Research the organization before you write the cover letter. Each cover letter should be unique and targeted to the specific position. Use the information obtained through research to demonstrate that you know something about the company. Each time you submit an employer focused résumé for a specific position it should be accompanied by an original (not reused) cover letter.
- **Business Professional Format:** Be sure to use an acceptable business format (see sample). Select a sans serif font (like Calibri, Corbel, or Helvetica) as they are easier to read on a computer screen.
- **Salutation:** Your letter will be more effective if you address it to a specific person within the organization than if you write a general greeting. If you don't know the person's name or title, call the organization and ask for the correct information. If you are unable to get a specific name, "Dear Search Committee" or "Dear Human Resources Department" are acceptable alternatives.
- **Accomplishments:** A cover letter should communicate your ambition and enthusiasm about the industry through discussion of your work. Show how previous accomplishments relate to the position for which you are applying and how your skills will meet the employer's needs.
- **Employer Focused:** Don't overuse personal pronouns like "I," "me," and "my" as this may cause you to come across as self-centered. It's better to talk about the results and outcomes of your work and how they can benefit the employer than to say, "I did..." this or that.
- **Active Language:** Use active verbs instead of passive language. For example, use "arranged...," "devised...," "evaluated...," instead of "was responsible for arranging...," "...devising...," "...evaluating..." Also, the reader will judge you on how well you write, so do your best to make the words come alive!
- **Stay Positive:** Never express dissatisfaction with a present or former job or employer. Be sure to avoid discussing any negative reasons for leaving your last job. Never mention that you can't do something. Instead, focus on the skills and abilities that make you unique and set you apart from the pack!
- **Appearance:** Keep in mind that the professional image you want to give to the prospective employer includes a neatly typed and grammatically correct letter. No typos! The letter should also be well organized and visually appealing.



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BREAKDOWN

A cover letter usually includes four paragraphs. Each paragraph serves a different purpose.

FIRST PARAGRAPH

The Greeting: This opening paragraph should grab the reader's attention and explain why you are writing the letter. State your purpose by identifying the position for which you are applying and how you learned about the vacancy. Here are three possible techniques:

- A Personal Contact: "Margaret Hamilton suggested I contact you regarding ..."
- Specific Company Knowledge: "I read the article concerning Champion Corporation's use of modern organization..."
- A Sincere Compliment: "A colleague of mine has told me of your excellent reputation..."

SECOND PARAGRAPH

Knowledge of Employer: Research the company and discuss your interest in the company. Exemplify how their goals and mission align with your own.

- "Your company interests me because ..."
- "Your company's efforts to _____ attracted me because ..."

THIRD PARAGRAPH

Your Skills: It is within this paragraph that you tailor your cover letter to a particular job. Tell the employer why you are a strong candidate for this position. Use the job description to assist you by highlighting relevant achievements, skills, and/or experience. Be sure to mention the most interesting points on your résumé. Explain how you intend to help the employer and contribute to the organization.

- "The position of _____ would allow me to _____."
- "My qualifications and experience include ..."
- "The experience I have gained in the accounting field ..."

FOURTH PARAGRAPH

The Closing: This paragraph should be action-oriented by proposing the next point of contact between you and the employer. Express your interest in connecting with the employer to further discuss the position and/or your skills. Also, be sure to state how and when they may contact you. Do not assume an employer will contact you once you have sent your cover letter and résumé. It is your responsibility to follow up. Finally, thank the individual and mention that you are looking forward to meeting them.

- "I look forward to discussing my experience and qualifications with you."
- "I look forward to meeting with you to discuss how I can contribute to your organization."



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SAMPLE COVER LETTER

Lester Woodman
Portland, Maine
LesterW@gmail.com
(207) 780-5555

Use the same contact information that you have on your résumé

May 14, 2018

If you do not know if the contact's prefix (Mr., Mrs., Dr.) use "Dear [their full name]:"

Mr. John Hanover, President
WindPower Environmental Corporation
618 Snowy River Road
Caribou, Maine 04002

If you absolutely cannot find a name of the person, use "Dear Hiring Manager:" or "Dear Selection Committee:"

Do not use "To Whom It May Concern:"

Dear Mr. Hanover:

Greeting

In a recent conversation with Sam Smith, the Director of Operations at Windpower Environmental Corporation, I learned about the company's impressive sustainable energy initiatives and of an employment opportunity. I am writing to express my interest in the Assistant Director of Operations position at your company. Given the responsibilities of the job, this position would be an opportunity to utilize my education, skills, and professional experience within a respectable company whose mission aligns with mine.

Knowledge of employer

After researching WindPower Environmental Corporation, it is clear that your immediate goal is to improve business performance and establish key benchmarks within the sustainable energy industry. Your recent work with turbine efficiency as a means to that end was fascinating to learn about. Given my background in energy efficiency along with my professional experience, I am in an ideal position to assist you quickly reaching your goal, expanding your business, and making a difference in this important industry.

Your skills

The enclosed résumé outlines my two years of experience as a Coordinator of Volunteer Recruitment at the Maine Audubon Society and my five years of volunteerism with the Appalachian Mountain Club. My responsibilities at the Audubon Society involve managing our 40+ volunteers and their day-to-day tasks. I also undertake fundraising efforts and publicity releases focusing on environmental issues. In addition to my jobs, I am presently pursuing a Bachelor's of Science degree in Business Administration with a concentration in Sustainable Business at the University of Southern Maine and plan to graduate in May 2016. Taking courses in management while working in an administrative position has provided an excellent balance of practical experience and educational training.

Closing & call to action

I welcome an opportunity to meet and discuss more how my passion in this field motivates me. Please feel free to contact me at (207) 780-5555 if you have any questions about my resume and/or qualifications. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Use your actual signature (scanned) vs. a typed one, if you can

Lester Woodman
Enc: Résumé



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