

COVER LETTERS

What is a cover letter? A cover letter, also called a *letter of interest* or *application letter*, is a letter you write in business letter format to an employer that you send along with your resume when applying for a job.

What's the purpose of it? While employers have different opinions of it and uses for it, more often than not, your cover letter will be read only after they've read your resume and decided they want to know more. Therefore, your cover letter should *supplement* the info on your resume. It gives the employer a chance to get a better sense of who you are. It will also be used to assess your communication skills.

An effective letter should convince the employer of 2 things:

1. That you are a good match with what they're looking for and will add value to their organization
2. That you've done your research and really feel like this job and this organization are the right fit for you

It seems like I'm just repeating what's on my resume. What's the point?

- Your resume just lists qualifications. Your cover letter *explains* how those qualifications have prepared you to do the job you're applying for.
- Your resume focuses on the past – what you have done. The cover letter focuses on the future – what you WILL do for the company.
- Your cover letter directly discusses your interest in the job and the company and the research you've done; your resume does not.
- Your cover letter more clearly demonstrates your ability to communicate effectively (or inability to do so!)

Tips for Writing an Effective Letter

TARGET each letter to each specific job and company. NEVER send out a generic cover letter- there is no point since it won't cover any of the above topics. Remember, this is not just a formality; **you are writing a letter to a person**. Think about if you had the opportunity to be face-to-face with the hiring manager... what would you say to explain why you want the job and why they should want to hire you over someone else?

Focus on what YOU can do for THEM, not what they can do for you. You want to say enough about why you're interested in the job to make them convinced that you really will fit and want to stay awhile, but your *main focus* should be on how you will benefit the company.

Address your letter to a person; only use "To Whom It May Concern" as a last resort. This really matters to employers! Be willing to do some research to find a name. Call and ask, talk to current employees, look for a directory on their website or other info about who is in charge of different departments, or use LinkedIn (see Job Search handout). It doesn't have to be addressed to the first person to read it, but it should be someone logical, like the head of the department this particular position is under.

Keep it to 1 page, between 10 and 12pt font size. In most cases, employers won't want to read a letter that is longer than one page. Use a standard font like Times New Roman or Arial. Adjusting margins is ok.

It must be error-free! Errors in your letter make the employer think you will be careless at work, and having one error can be the *only* reason they need to rule you out. Always proofread carefully, and then have another detail-oriented person check it for errors. It's often hard to proofread your own writing!

Drop names. If someone the employer knows (and likes) referred you to that company or suggested you apply for that job, say so in your letter.

Write professionally and intelligently, but don't overdo it! It is usually obvious if you are trying to write in a way that is much different than how you generally communicate, and your letter will be more likely to sound awkward or contain errors. DO make sure your letter is well written and well thought-out, because the employer WILL use it as a sample of your writing ability!

COVER LETTER WALK-THROUGH

**This page will walk you through the standard business letter format, and what to include in your letter. You don't have to organize your paragraphs exactly as described below, but the format below is the most standard format, and is easy to follow for beginners!*

Your Street Address

Your City, State, Zip Code (You have the option to use your resume header instead of this section)

Current Date (write out the name of the month)

Employer's Name, Title

Department or Division

Company/Organization Name

Street Address

City, State, Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr./Individual's Name OR To Whom It May Concern:

Paragraph 1 (Introduction): Concisely state your purpose for writing the letter. This paragraph is usually only a couple sentences long. Here, you will specify the position you want to be considered for. You can include how you learned about the opening, but this is really the most helpful if you heard of the opening from someone the employer knows, such as a current employee or a contact of the employer. (*A note about name-dropping: This is helpful only if the employer has a positive relationship with the person whose name you drop. So be careful, especially since it is usually impossible to know for sure if the employer likes the person! Also, dropping the name of someone in a higher position than the hiring manager can be seen as threatening, and can hurt your chances.*) You can also include a brief introduction to why you're interested in the position and/or company, or why you're qualified for the position. Just like you would in an essay, you are introducing the ideas you will talk about in the rest of your letter.

Paragraph 2 (Body): Tell the employer why you're the best candidate for the job, and how you will contribute to the success of the organization in this role. Use the job description (or refer to the Resume handout for what to do if there is no job description) to determine what the employer is looking for so that you can align yourself with it. Highlight your strongest selling points, but don't just restate your resume; instead, *explain HOW* your qualifications have prepared you to excel at this job. Consider your education and/or training, experience (paid jobs, internships, fieldwork, volunteer work, extracurricular involvement, etc.), skills and abilities, accomplishments in your field, personal characteristics/strengths, and any other qualifications you may have.

Paragraph 3 (Body): Explain your interest in the position and the company. Just stating that you're interested isn't going to cut it. *It is important to employers that they are able to see that you've done your research on their company and on the position;* this is how they will KNOW you really want this particular job. So, do all the research you can on the company, looking for things like its mission and values, its products or services, its history and its future goals, its accomplishments, performance, reputation, etc., and find things that you identify with. Demonstrate that you've done your research by mentioning *specific* things about the company in explaining why it fits with your interests, goals, working style, values, etc. Don't, however, talk about things that are all about you and not the work, like "this company pays well" or "I wouldn't have to move." Focus instead on aligning yourself with what the company cares about – things like their mission, achievements, initiatives, etc.

Paragraph 4 (Closing): Very briefly summarize the contents of your letter. Then, express your interest in an interview. Indicate how the employer can reach you. Finally, thank the employer for his or her time and consideration.

Sincerely,

(Don't forget to SIGN your name here!)

Your Name Typed

SAMPLE COVER LETTER – For a Post-Graduation Job

123 Jobseeker St.
Boise, ID 83706

January 15, 2012

Amy Jones, Director of Marketing
ABC Advertising
555 Marketing Way
Boise, ID 83706

Dear Ms. Jones:

I am writing to express my interest in the Client Development Specialist position available with ABC Advertising. I was referred to this opening by Mary Smith, Market Research Coordinator for ABC, who suggested that I might be a good fit for this role.

While working towards my Bachelor's degree in Marketing, which I will be completing this May, I have strived to gain as much hands-on experience as possible. Four years of experience in the areas of sales, customer service, and product promotion has given me a solid background and multiple perspectives from which to understand the marketing and advertising needs of clients. Currently, I am interning at Smith and Smith Marketing Associates, for which I actively contribute to the design and development of new campaigns, and work one-on-one with existing and potential clients. In this position, I have played a significant role in recruiting new clients, and in ensuring client satisfaction throughout the development and execution of campaigns. What I feel differentiates me from others with a similar background is my ability to develop new relationships and strengthen existing ones. My experience in sales and customer service has helped me to hone critical skills in working with clients, particularly active listening, needs assessment, and establishing trust. In the current economic climate especially, an agency's success is entirely dependent on its ability to build and maintain relationships; therefore, my goal within this position would be to combine my knowledge of the advertising process with my client development skills in order to bring in new clients and strengthen ABC's relationships with its existing clients.

I first learned of ABC Advertising while researching ad campaigns being designed by agencies in the Treasure Valley. My fascination with your October "Make it Last" campaign led me to begin following your blog, from which I have learned a lot. One of the things I have been consistently impressed by is the transparency you demonstrate, which is something I am looking for in an agency, because it allows me to establish genuine, trusting relationships with clients more easily. In speaking with Ms. Smith to learn more about your future goals, I also learned that you are looking to continue to expand and develop a niche working with "green" companies. Because sustainability is a major interest of mine, I would love the opportunity to work with these clients, and I believe having that common ground would allow me to relate to prospective clients in an even more effective way.

I feel that the broad understanding and background I have in the advertising field, combined with my skills in relationship development, will allow me to successfully grow ABC Advertising's client base and presence in the area. I would love to discuss this with you further, and can be reached at (555)123-4567 or at janedoe@internet.com. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to speaking with you!

Sincerely,

Jane A. Doe

SAMPLE CONTENT – For an Internship

While researching public relations firms, I recently discovered the internship opportunities that Western Public Relations offers. I feel that my qualifications and professional goals are well matched with what you are looking for in an intern.

As my enclosed resume indicates, I am a current student at Boise State University, working towards the completion of a Bachelors degree in Psychology. My professional goal is to apply the knowledge of human perception I am gaining through my degree to the practice of public relations. As I am entering my junior year, I am actively seeking opportunities to learn more about the field of public relations and further develop my skills in a hands-on environment. I believe that I would be a very successful intern and strong contributor. Through my previous work experiences, I have demonstrated the ability to communicate effectively with a wide variety of customers. For example, while working for Sports Authority as a Sales Associate, I had the highest sales within the store for 3 months in a row, which resulted from my ability to assess what information the customer needed to make a purchase, and effectively educate them about their product options.

The internship with Western Public Relations is especially appealing to me because of how diverse your client base is. Since I strive to be the best in all that I do, I am eager to gain as many different experiences as possible so that I can excel in working with all types of clients. I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the continued success of Western while honing these skills. If possible, I would like to meet with you to further discuss this opportunity. I can be reached by phone at (208) 555-1234, or by e-mail at JohnSmith@internet.com.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you.

SAMPLE CONTENT – For a Student Job

I am writing to express my interest in the Filing Clerk position available with XYZ Company. I found out about this opening from an ad you placed on BroncoJobs, Boise State University's job posting system.

I am currently in my first year at Boise State, studying business. Through past experiences, I have developed several skills that I feel would make me very successful as a Filing Clerk. In high school, I was the secretary of our school's Student Event Planning Committee, which developed, planned, and executed social events such as dances, homecoming week activities, and after-hours special events. Through this experience, I developed strong organizational skills that I will bring to XYZ Company. As secretary, it was my responsibility to make sure that accurate records were taken and stored properly. I was responsible for managing documents needed to successfully execute our events, as well as records that had to be kept on file for the school's administration. During the time I was secretary, there was never a document that was lost or misplaced.

Additionally, through my participation in team sports in high school, I developed excellent teamwork skills. I learned how to be a good follower, listen to those in authority and follow directions, and I also learned how to step up and be a leader when appropriate. I feel that I am an excellent team player overall, which will be an asset to me in this position, where I will have to carefully follow instructions from others, but also be able to be self-sufficient in my work.

I feel that my combination of organizational and teamwork abilities make me an excellent candidate for the Filing Clerk position. I would love to have the opportunity to speak with you further about how I could contribute to XYZ Company in this role. I can be reached at (208) 123-4567, or at jan smith@u.boisestate.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration!