

The Cover Letter

Part of selling yourself to a potential employer is developing a catchy cover letter that will engage a hiring manager and encourage him or her to read your résumé. Use these tips and techniques to develop your sales letter that is designed to sell you!

Types

There are basically three types of cover letter you will write and each one has a slightly different purpose.

- The solicited cover letter: Responds to a posted position and is expected by the hiring company.
- The unsolicited cover letter: This is a “cold call” in which you’re sending a cover letter and résumé to an employer in which you’re interested and hoping it’s catchy enough to gain interest and maybe a follow-up call.
- The referral letter: This is where someone you know and who knows the hiring company suggests you send a résumé. You mention that person’s name in the cover letter, again hoping it will catch the hiring manager’s attention and result in a follow-up call.

Format

The basic format of most cover letters is three paragraphs.

- The first paragraph should accomplish the following: Note the position for which you’re applying, provide a short sentence or phrase that highlights your most marketable skills (as it relates to the posted position) to “hook” the reader, and share one or two points you know about the company (that you’ve learned through your research) and why this is important.
- The second paragraph is where you expand on your key qualifications, specifically noting what you can do for the company. Do this through using factual information about your professional experience, noted in a few key benefit statements.
- The third paragraph is where you note the action you will take. Indicate that you will follow up, or be in the area, or would like to schedule time for an interview. Note one final reason why the match between you and the hiring company is the ideal relationship.
- Close with “Sincerely,” as anything else may be too insincere or familiar.
- Allow for four spaces (for your signature) and then type your name.

Other Tips

- Although many hiring managers may first skim your résumé, the majority do expect and read the cover letter, too, so don’t skip on this!
- Keep it brief and focused. This is not the place to share your life story or unhappiness with your past.
- This may be the appropriate place to briefly address any employment gaps or something unusual about your career. Check with your career coach to determine the best approach for sharing this information.
- Remember, just like a sales letter is designed to engage you, promote a product and convince you to buy it, a cover letter is your sales letter and you’re the product.