

WHAT YOU MUST KNOW ABOUT WRITING EFFECTIVE COVER LETTERS!

A cover letter introduces you and your résumé to employers. It is the first document an employer sees, so it is often the first impression you will make. Every résumé should be accompanied by a cover letter.

Your cover letter:

- Tells the employer what type of position you are seeking.
- Entices the reader to learn more about you by reading your résumé.
- Provides or expands your résumé objective and/or job-search goal.
- Shows how well you express yourself.
- Provides a sample of your written communication skills.
- Allows you to go in-depth about important experiences/skills and relate them to the job requirements.
- Gives you an opportunity to impress employers by showcasing your knowledge about the company and/or industry.

MAKE A GOOD IMPRESSION!

A cover letter is the first document an employer sees, so it is often the first impression you will make.

A cover letter, just like a résumé, is a marketing tool that should be customized to the employer and clearly sell them on what you can bring to their organization. Effective cover letters are personalized and demonstrate that you have taken the time to research the company.

TYPES OF COVER LETTERS

Cover letters serve different purposes. The most common types of cover letters include:

Application cover letter

An application letter is written in response to a specific job opening. This letter is used to formally apply for the position, and show the employer how your qualifications match what the position requires. Use the position description and your research about the organization to compose your letter.

Prospecting cover letter

A prospecting letter, also known as a letter of inquiry, accompanies your résumé when you'd like to apply to a specific company and do not know if they have any current openings. These letters are structured similarly to the application letter, but focus on how your qualifications match the work environment rather than focusing on a specific position.

Networking cover letter

A networking letter is written to approach individuals for career information, advice, and referrals. Networking letters are used to generate information interviews, not job interviews. Your letter must express your sincere interest in meeting with a specific individual, and describe who you are and the intended purpose of your visit. *Additional Resource:* Northwest Michigan Works! Job Search Guide: NETWORKING.

Referral cover letter

A referral cover letter is used to mention a mutual connection when you are applying for a job. When you have been referred to a potential employer by a colleague, friend or acquaintance it's important to mention this mutual contact, by name, in the first paragraph of your cover letter.

COVER LETTERS (continued)

COVER LETTER STRUCTURE

Introduction - The Grab

The first or introductory paragraph presents the reader with immediate and focused information regarding the position you are pursuing and a few core competencies that demonstrate your strength. If you are applying for a particular position, identify both the position for which you are applying and the source from which you learned about it. When writing a prospecting letter indicate the type of position you are seeking, and inquire about similar opportunities within the organization. This is also a good place to show off your knowledge about the organization and point out why you are interested in that particular organization.

Body - The Hook

Take your knowledge of the organization and match it with your interests, skills, and experience. In an application letter, explain why/how your qualifications fit the position description. If you are inquiring about possible opportunities, concentrate on your qualifications for the position you desire as well as your interest in the field in general. In both types of letters, extract a couple of examples from your résumé to support your statements. Use aspects of your experience, volunteer work, and education that would be of interest to the company. Refer to your résumé, but do not repeat details from your résumé.

Based on your experience and qualifications, briefly state what contributions you can make to the company or what qualities you bring into the workplace. Also, provide a couple of specific reasons for your interest in working for this particular organization. Use reasons based in your research of the organization rather than simply stating that you want to work in the field. Relate yourself to the company, giving details why you should be considered for the position. Continue expanding on your qualifications while showing knowledge of the company.

Closing

Finally, you will want to request an interview and indicate your availability. While many people state that they are looking forward to hearing from the organization, it is a good idea to suggest that you will contact him or her within one or two weeks to set up a time that is convenient. This allows you to be responsible for following up rather than leaving it to the employer.

Keep these tips in mind when writing your cover letter:

- Use the same paper stock for the cover letter as your résumé.
- Be sure to address the letter to the person who could hire you. If you do not know the name, call the company and ask for the name of the hiring manager. It is important to show that you care enough about the job to do some research.
- Show that you know a little about the company—that you are aware of their current situation, interests, or priorities.
- Express your enthusiasm and interest in the company and position.
- Project warmth and friendliness while still being professional. Avoid any generic phrases such as, "Enclosed please find..."
- Set yourself apart from the crowd. Identify at least one thing about you that is unique—something that distinguishes you AND is relevant to the job.
- Be specific about what you are asking for and what you are offering. Make it clear which position you are applying for and what experience or skills you have that relates to that position.
- Take the initiative about the next step whenever possible, and be specific.
- Proofread!