

Career & Employment Center

The Cover Letter: A Personal Introduction

A cover letter is an important employment application document that should accompany your résumé. Research has indicated that cover letters are just as important as résumés when applicants are making initial contact by mail. The cover letter allows you to personalize your application documents in response to advertisements or to inquire about possible positions within a company. The cover letter gives you an opportunity to express your personality, demonstrate your communications skills and organizational ability, and express enthusiasm for the company and the position.

The cover letter should be brief (generally kept to only one page), highlight your qualifications, and draw attention to specific points in your résumé. While résumés can only tell employers what you have done, cover letters allow for more elaboration and detail such as why you became involved in particular activities, what you gained from the experience, and why the employer should consider you for the position. A well-written cover letter commands the reader's attention; it stimulates interest in you and your résumé.

Do not address the letter to "sir," "madam," or "director of personnel." It is best if you can find out who is responsible for hiring and direct the letter to that individual. Cover letters should always be tailored to each specific company and position for which you are applying. If it is not possible to know who to direct the letter to, address it to the Human Resource Specialist, Human Resource Manager or Recruiter.

The cover letter should be written on good quality stationery, preferably white bond paper, which matches your résumé. The heading should include your name and contact information that is identical to the heading on your résumé. The quality of writing in cover letters and résumés is important. Be careful to use good grammar and correct spelling. Write clearly and concisely.

The primary purpose of the cover letter is to acquaint the prospective employer with your unique talents and skills, and arrange an interview to discuss employment possibilities.

General Guidelines

- A cover letter should be in paragraph form (save bulleted lists for your résumé) with a conversational, professional tone.
- A cover letter should demonstrate your interest in the company and why you should be considered for the position.
- Use good quality stationery preferably white bond paper.
- Use terminology specific to your field, but avoid jargon and trite language.
- Use good grammar and make sure you have no spelling or typing errors.
- Proofread and have others proofread your cover letter.
- A cover letter should always be typed unless the employer asked for a handwritten cover letter.
- Individualize your cover letter. Write it in your own words so that it sounds like you, not something you copied out of a book or off the Internet.
- Show enthusiasm for the position.
- Communicate ambition.
- Accentuate accomplishments.
- Communicate something personal.
- Keep your cover letter to one page but do not use a typeface that is too small and difficult to read in order to keep your letter to one page.
- Write short, brief paragraphs.
- Address the letter to a particular person by name. Avoid “To whom it may concern” by calling the organization and asking for specific information.
- Research the company prior to sending your résumé and cover letter.
- Be sure you have the correct spelling of names. If necessary, call to verify the correct spelling of the name and other details before you send the letter.
- Don’t overuse the word “I.” Avoid starting every sentence with “I.”
- Never include negative information about yourself or previous employers.
- Use active, not passive, verbs.
- Answer the question “Why should I see you?” Tell the employer why he or she should consider you for the position.
- **Always ask for an interview.**

A well-written cover letter reflects your personality, unique qualification and motivates an employer to read your résumé and interview you.

Organization of a Cover Letter

The cover letter should contain a reference line and four paragraphs.

Reference line: Identify the position you are applying for and how you learned of the position.

Example: RE: Administrative Assistant to Marketing, *Press Democrat*, July 24, 2005.

1. **Introduction** – Take time to think of an interesting first sentence. Avoid over-used first sentences such as “This is in answer to your advertisement,” or “I am graduating from Santa Rosa Junior College.” Reference any personal contacts (after securing their permission) you have in the company. It is also valuable to state the reasons for your interest in that particular employer. At the end of the first paragraph, make a statement that says you are a strong candidate because of your qualifications. This will lead the reader to the second paragraph. The first paragraph is always short.
2. **Second paragraph** – Draw attention to your résumé. Explain how your qualifications (your skills, education and experience) match the employer’s requirements. Be as specific as possible. Identify relevant qualifications and accomplishments that may uniquely qualify you for the position. Highlight and draw attention to points in your résumé, summarizing relevant information.
3. **Third paragraph** – Always request an interview. State where and when you can be reached. Indicate that you will call the employer if you do not hear from them.
4. **Fourth paragraph** – Closing statement. Thank the reader for his or her time and consideration.

The purpose of the cover letter is to turn your résumé message into an individualized communication, explaining the particular way that you could benefit the needs of that employer.

Cover Letter Sample

Betty Hernandez
123 Santa Rosa Street
Santa Rosa, CA 95404
(707) 555-5555

April 4, 2007

Katherine Yu
HR Director
ABC Law Firm
15 State Street
San Francisco, CA 95444

Re: Legal Secretary, *Press Democrat*, and February 1, 2007

Dear Ms. Yu:

It was with great interest that I learned of your current opening for a Legal Secretary with ABC Law Firm. Mary Brown, my instructor in the Santa Rosa Junior College Legal Program, spoke highly of your firm and encouraged me to apply. Having graduated in the top ten percent of my class I believe my background and skills are a good match for the position.

My ten years experience as an administrative assistant for Bethards Scientific gave me an excellent foundation to pursue my lifelong interest in the legal field. I enrolled in the SRJC Legal Program and completed the requirements for an Associate in Arts degree and Legal Secretary Certificate in December 2006. The program included a three-month internship with the Henry Fields Law Office where I had the opportunity to work with three partners handling several major cases. This was a great experience for me and reinforced my interests in the area of business law. After graduating from SRJC with honors, I am eager to put my newly acquired skills to work at a top Sonoma County firm.

I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss my qualifications and the requirements of the position. I am available for interviews any afternoon next week and can be reached at (707) 555-5555 or by e-mail at jobseeker@hotmail.com.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely yours,

Betty Hernandez

Enclosure

Comments: Employer letter for advertised opening.

Cover Letter Sample

Joe Black
1501 Mendocino Ave.
Santa Rosa, Ca 95401
(707) 123-5678
Jblack@hotmail.com

January 23, 2008

Robert Malle
Marketing Manager
405 Guerneville Rd.
Santa Rosa, Ca 95403

Dear Mr. Malle:

After reading an article about Fleur De Lys Winery in the North Bay Business Journal I became interested in possible employment with your company. I have always been impressed by your wine and wine labels and have some creative ideas that may benefit your marketing effort. I graduated with my Associate in Arts degree in Graphic Design from Santa Rosa Junior College in December. As part of my training I completed two semesters of internships at several wineries.

My enclosed resume provides details on my internships and employment. During my internship at "Cake bread Cellars" I was fortunate to work with a leading graphic designer for the wine industry who provided me with many new learning opportunities. I assisted him with introducing a new product line that generated \$10,000.00 in sales during the first month. In addition to my education and training in graphic design I have a background in sales with a track record of consistently exceeding sales quotas.

I would appreciate an opportunity to discuss potential employment with your company and will call you next week to follow up. Should you wish to contact me, my home phone is: (707) 123-4567, or Cell (707) 456-7891 or my e-mail at Jblack@hotmail.com.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Joe Black

Enclosure

Comments: Employer contact letter with "no advertised" opening. Unsolicited

Revised: 2007