

COVER LETTER RESOURCE GUIDE



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COVER LETTER RESOURCE GUIDE

What is a cover letter?

A cover letter is a professional business letter that provides a potential employer with important information about you and your background. The objective is to demonstrate why you are a perfect match for the position you are applying for and why the employer should interview you. A cover letter emphasizes your skills and abilities and provides an opportunity for you to highlight one or two of your professional accomplishments.

Although cover letters typically accompany each resume you send out, the letter should complement, not duplicate, your resume. Your cover letter may make the difference between obtaining a job interview and having your resume ignored, so it makes sense to devote the necessary time and effort in writing effective cover letters.

Are there different types of cover letters?

Yes! There are three general types of cover letters:

- 1. Application:** An application letter is written in response to a specific job opening or vacancy notice. 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.
- 2. Prospecting:** A prospecting letter is written to inquire about possible job openings, to promote your resume, and to generate interviews. Prospecting letters are used for long distance searches or when you have targeted an organization that is not currently advertising job openings. The prospecting letter is similar to the application letter, but the focus is on matching your qualifications to the broader occupational area and the organization, rather than to a specific person.
- 3. Networking:** A networking letter is written to approach individuals in your industry 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 describing who you are and the intended purpose of your visit.

Who needs a cover letter?

Everyone who sends out a resume does! Even if the cover letter was not mentioned in conversation or in an advertisement, it is expected that you will write one. The cover letter gives you another chance to emphasize what you have to contribute to the company or organization. Don't give the person screening resumes a second to entertain the thought: "*But how can this person help US?*" Your cover letter will answer that question in your own words.

What is the format for a cover letter?

A good cover letter, tailored to address specific employment circumstances, will do three things: it will answer the question, “Why should we interview you?” it will explain to the employer why you want to work for them; and it will convince them to call you. Your cover letter should follow the basic format of a typical business letter and should address the three general issues:

1. **First paragraph: *Why you are writing?***

Reveal your purpose in writing by identifying the position for which you are applying (if an open position currently exists) and how you found out about the opening. People often include a statement about why they are interested in the organization.

2. **Middle paragraphs: *What you have to offer?***

Share with the reader “what sets you apart” by outlining your strongest qualifications that match the position requirements. Mention aspects of your work experience, extracurricular activities, course work, or personal achievements that are relevant to the position. Convince the employer that you have the qualities and motivation to perform well in the position. Sell yourself!

3. **Concluding paragraph: *How you will follow up?***

Show appreciation to the reader for their time and consideration. Suggest an action plan by expressing your interest in obtaining a personal interview and indicate that you will be calling back to check the status of your application.

What makes a good cover letter?

- **No spelling or typing errors.** Not even one.
- **Address it to the person who can hire you.**
- **Write it on your own words.** Use natural language and avoid using slang terms, jargon, or exaggerating when writing your cover letter.
- **Be specific when describing abilities, skills, honors, activities, and experience.** Use examples when necessary.
- **Show that you know something about the company and the industry.**
- **Avoid mailing the same letter to multiple employers; tailor the cover letter to each employer.**

GENERAL OUTLINE FOR AN APPLICATION LETTER

Student's/Applicant's Address

Date of Letter

Employer's Name

Employer's Title

Employer's Address

Dear (Mr., Ms., Dr., To Whom It May Concern):

Opening Paragraph: State the reason for the letter, name the specific position or type of work for which you are applying, and indicate from which resource (newspaper, website, friend, etc.) you became aware of the opening.

Middle Paragraph(s): Explain why you are interested in working for this employer and specify your reasons for desiring this type of work. If you have had relevant work experience or related education, be sure to point it out, but do not reiterate your entire resume. Emphasize skills or abilities you have that relate to the job for which you are applying. Be sure to do this in a confident manner and remember that the reader will view your cover letter as an example of your writing skills. If you are a recent graduate, explain how your academic background makes you a qualified candidate for the position. Refer the reader to the enclosed resume that summarizes your qualifications, training, education, and experiences.

Closing Paragraph: Wrap up the cover letter by stating when you will be available for work, and the best time and place the employer can reach you. Thank the reader for his or her time and consideration of your candidacy for the ____ position. Provide a phone number where you can be reached to answer questions or to schedule an interview.

Sincerely,

Your name typed

Enclosure ("Enclosure" indicates that you have included your resume with this correspondence)

SAMPLE APPLICATION LETTER

123 Main Street
Louisville, KY 40201

January 9, 2005

Mr. Andrew Smith
Human Resource Director
KYANA Computers, Inc.
1234 Gold Lane
Louisville, KY 40206

Dear Mr. Smith:

I am writing to apply for the Computer Systems Analyst position advertised on January 4, 2005 in the *Courier Journal*. Because this position appears to fit very well with my education, experience, and career interests, I have enclosed a copy of my resume for your review.

With a major in management information systems, I have training on mainframes, minicomputers, and microcomputers, as well as with a variety of software programs and applications. My practical experience in my university's computer center as a programmer, and as a student consultant for system users, gave me valuable exposure to complex computer operations. I worked as a cooperative education student in computing operations for a large bank, where I gained knowledge and understanding of financial systems. I believe these experiences, as well as my educational background; provide me with a solid foundation to be a successful Computer Systems Analyst.

I appreciate your consideration of my candidacy for the position of Computer Systems Analyst. I can be reached at 502-123-4567 (home) or 502-213-457 (cell). I am interested in learning more about this opportunity and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

John Walters

Enclosure

GENERAL OUTLINE FOR A PROSPECTING LETTER

Student's/Applicant's Address

Date of Letter

Employer's Name

Employer's Title

Employer's Address

Dear (Mr., Ms., Dr., To Whom It May Concern):

Opening Paragraph: State why you are writing, identify the position for which you would like to be considered, and indicate how you heard of the position. (If you are sending a letter of interest that is not in response to a specific job opening, simply indicate the type of work you are seeking). Be specific.

Middle Paragraph(s): Your goal here is to show how you can be useful to this particular company or organization. Describe what strengths you have to offer this employer. You might use one of the following approaches:

1. Illustrate the relationship between your skills and experience and the position for which you are applying.
2. Describe your previous accomplishments as they relate to the position.
3. Identify three reasons for the employer to consider you for the position.

Refer the reader to your enclosed resume for additional information.

Closing Paragraph: End your letter by clarifying what will happen next and how he or she can most easily reach you. Whenever it is possible, you want to take the next step yourself. You might say, "I look forward to meeting with you to discuss my qualifications in more detail. I will call you on _____ to arrange a time."

Sincerely,

Your name typed

Enclosure ("Enclosure" indicates that you have included your resume with this correspondence)

SAMPLE PROSPECTING LETTER

1657 Evans Avenue
Louisville, KY 40202

January 10, 2005

Mrs. Emma Williams
Director of College Recruiting
Southern Services Company
Indianapolis, IN 47025

Dear Mrs. Williams,

I read your company's description in *NACE's Job Choices*, and would like to inquire about employment opportunities in your management training program. I want to work in sales management, and would like to relocate to the Indianapolis area after graduation.

I shall receive my Bachelor of Science Degree in Management this May. My interest in sales started in Junior Achievement while in high school, and developed further through a variety of sales and retail positions during college. My internship with a large equipment distribution company convinced me to pursue a career in technical sales. When I researched the top equipment sales in Indianapolis, Southern Services Company emerged as having a strong market position, an excellent training program, and a reputation for excellent customer service.

My resume is enclosed for your consideration. My education and skills match the qualifications you seek in your management trainees. I have the interpersonal skills and motivation needed to build a successful career in sales.

I know how busy you must be during this time of year, but I would appreciate a few minutes of your time. I shall call you during the week of February 2nd to discuss employment possibilities. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Jeff Wilson

Enclosure

GENERAL OUTLINE FOR A NETWORKING LETTER

Student's/Applicant's Address

Date of Letter

Employer's Name

Employer's Title

Employer's Address

Dear (Mr., Mrs., Ms., Dr., To Whom It May Concern):

Opening Paragraph: A networking letter is used to communicate to your network that you are seeking employment. When writing your letter, try to include your contact's name in the opening paragraph to attract the reader's attention and add some credibility. For example: "Your name was given to me by Phillip Jones at the Chamber of Commerce meeting, as someone who could perhaps help me break into the healthcare industry."

Middle Paragraph(s): After the introduction, it is important that you describe your skills, what types of positions or opportunities you are looking for, and specific firms you would like to work for.

Closing Paragraph: Close the letter with a paragraph explaining that you have enclosed your resume and that you will call the following week to see when you can meet. Explain that you would greatly appreciate any insight or guidance.

Sincerely,

Your name typed

Enclosure ("Enclosure" indicates that you have included your resume with this correspondence)

SAMPLE NETWORKING LETTER

524 State Street
New Albany, IN 47150

January 10, 2005

Ms. Anna Richards
AB Business, Inc.
3986 Hill Street
Louisville, KY 40203

Dear Ms. Richards:

I am writing at the suggestion of our mutual friend, David Stone, who suggested that I contact you for some assistance on a personal matter. I am looking for a job in the business industry, and David thought of you as a good person to contact for information.

I recently graduated with an Associate of Applied Science degree in Business Administration from Jefferson Community College, and I am ready to apply my knowledge to the business field.

Although I realize that your agency is not hiring at this time, I would very much welcome your assistance and guidance in my job search. As a respected leader in the business industry, perhaps you have professional acquaintances who know of a suitable opening. I am hoping to locate other professionals who might help me learn more about business administration.

I will call you in the next few days to see if we can arrange a meeting.

Thank you in advance for your help.

Sincerely,

William Henson

GENERAL OUTLINE FOR A THANK YOU LETTER

Student's/Applicant's Address

Date of Letter

Employer's Name

Employer's Title

Employer's Address

Dear (Mr., Ms., Dr., To Whom It May Concern):

Opening Paragraph: Start by thanking the interviewer for taking the time to talk with you. Cite the day on which you interviewed and express your appreciation and interest. If you were interviewed by more than two people, you should write individual – and different - notes to each of them.

Middle Paragraph(s): Use this paragraph to make one, possibly two, final points about your qualifications and interests based on what you learned through the interview. Do not rehash your cover letter's middle paragraph. Do one of two things:

- Underscore one or two of your most relevant skills or experiences which show your ability and/or potential to do the job. Briefly focus in on the areas in which the interviewer(s) were most interested.
- Highlights skills or experiences which you did not focus on during the interview (for what ever reason), but what you know will be key consideration factors. You must be brief and to the point!

Closing Paragraph: Close the letter with another word of appreciation, an offer to provide more information and a statement that you look forward to hearing from them.

Sincerely,

Your name typed

SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER

17 Winway Court
Jeffersonville, IN 46129

January 4, 2005

Mr. Stan Weatherby
Kentucky Investments
25 Grandview Street
Louisville, KY 40208

Dear Mr. Weatherby:

Thank you for taking the time to discuss the insurance broker position at Kentucky Investments with me on January 3, 2005. After meeting with you and observing the company's operations, I am further convinced that my background and skills coincide well with your needs.

In addition to my qualifications and experience, I will bring excellent work habits and judgment to this position. With the countless demands on your time, I am sure that you require people who can be trusted to carry out their responsibilities with minimal supervision.

I look forward to hearing from you concerning your hiring decision. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ann Littleton