



Cover Letters: Why So Important?

A cover letter is your first opportunity to sell yourself.

Cover letter vs. résumé.

A well-written cover letter is your first chance to promote yourself, create an impression, and put yourself ahead of the competition. It introduces you and your résumé, as well as helps the employer determine if you're worthy of an interview. Some employers won't even look at a résumé without a cover letter.

If you already have a résumé, great – but to be clear, you also need a cover letter. Your cover letter explains why you think you're a good fit for the position, while the résumé shows how qualified you are through your skills and experience.

One page to make your case.

Your cover letter puts your abilities into context for the employer. It is where you have the recruiter's full attention to briefly explain how everything in your résumé makes you the best fit for the company above all other candidates.

Your tone should be professional, yet appealing and eager. Get right to the point after the greeting: State why you are writing, the job you're interested in, and what makes you the best candidate. Incorporate how you heard of the position, add your degree and school, and, where appropriate, your current position and additional activities. Close with a "thank you" and a request for an interview.

Looks count, even on paper.

Your cover letter should be pleasing to the eye. Use a simple font – such as

Helvetica, Arial, or Times – in size 10 or 12. Don't use all boldface, all italics, or all capital letters. Use black ink on high-quality white or ivory stationary that matches your résumé.

Place at the top left your full address, contact info, the date, another line space, the employer's name, company, and full address, another two lines of space, and salutation. Follow that with another line space and then the body of your letter. Leave a line space in between paragraphs and don't use indentations. Conclude your letter with "Sincerely" on a line of its own, and sufficient space for your penned full signature above your typed name.

When possible, address your letter to a specific person, not "To Whom It May Concern." If addressing a John Smith, use "Dear Mr. Smith:" or "Dear Sir:" with a colon being proper punctuation here. When addressing women, it's safest to use "Ms." when the marital status is unknown.

If you can't address a specific person, say "Human Resources Director" or "Director/Manager of [specific department]" or "Dear Recruiter."

It's all in the details.

Research all companies you're applying to so each cover letter you write is company-specific. Use straightforward, businesslike language; active, not passive words; good grammar; and correct spelling. Never use slang, texting abbreviations, or any other symbols.

Simply put:

Cover letters are crucial, so be sure to make yours count:

- Use high-quality stationary that matches your résumé.
- Address the specific position and give relevant qualification details.
- Emphasize major points – don't repeat your résumé.
- Be direct, relevant, and concise.
- PROOFREAD for typos, grammar, accuracy, and spelling.
- Include a "thank you" and request an interview. Follow up within a few days.

Read your letter through for clarity. Have at least one other person read through your letter before mailing it out – a fresh pair of eyes will often catch something you've missed. Keep in mind, you're selling "You," the brand, and only have a few paragraphs to do so.

Sharpen each sentence to make every word count. You need to make sure you can hold the prospective employer's attention. Avoid generic sayings such as "I like working with others."

When you're confident in how your cover letter came out, place it on top of your résumé and mail them together unfolded in a high-quality 9 x 12" envelope.

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