



# Cover Letter Writing Tips

A cover letter is a one-page business letter that expands upon relevant experiences and skills, demonstrates writing skills and clarifies any issues (experience, GPA, etc.) that may need to be addressed. It answers two questions: 1) Why are you interested in this job? 2) Why are you qualified for this job?

## COVER LETTER CONTENT

### Header

Create a “letterhead” that matches your resume, setting margins and type to match so you present a packet of information that goes together. (Please note that some people may prefer a traditional business letter format.)

### Salutation

Address your letter to a person. Call and ask for correct spelling and title or research online (e.g.: Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. LastName). Address to “Hiring Manager for [position]:” if you cannot identify a specific person. Use “To whom it may concern” as a last resort. If you do not know the gender of the recipient, use first and last name instead of a title.

### First paragraph should include...

- The job for which you are applying.
- How you learned about the position/company.
- Attention getting summary of your personal traits and skills that make you a fit for the position and organization.
- If a senior, include education and graduation date.
- If applicable, include the name of a person who referred you.

Include a company fact if it is something you have been following or mention how their mission/value statement is significant to you. Do not educate them on the organization/position.

### Second paragraph should include...

- Three (just a suggestion) skills listed in the job description.
- Examples of how you have demonstrated selected skills in the past through previous work, volunteer or leadership positions.
- Focus on your past successes and outcomes.

This section should expand on what is listed on your resume; do not reiterate your resume or direct them to your resume.

### Third paragraph should include...

- Appreciation of the reader’s time and attention.
- What you want the next step to be: 1) How and when you will follow-up or 2) Your hopes for them to follow-up.
- If applicable, share your availability and flexibility in geographic location.

### Closing

End the letter with Sincerely, three spaces and your name. Don’t worry about signature if you are submitting online.

Have someone else (family, friend, advisor, faculty member or CPAD staff) review your cover letter. Computer spell/grammar checks do not catch everything. Remember, potential employers take cover letters very seriously.

## ATTACHING COVER LETTER/RESUME TO EMAIL

Many of your communications with potential employers will likely be via email. To utilize email to its full potential, do the following:

- Type the position title in the subject line.
- Check to make sure attachments are attached before sending.
- Don’t include email address, date or employer’s address in the email body as that is transmitted electronically.
- Don’t leave spaces between the closing and the typed name as there will be no signature.
- Do follow-up initial email with brief email asking if attachments were received and readable. Gracefully, let the employer know you will resend attachments as needed.

## TYPICAL COVER LETTER MISTAKES

- Sending resume without a cover letter
- Appearing lazy, failing to address letter to a specific person
- Focusing on what you want from the employer instead of what you can do for them
- Appearing generic, not tailoring how your skills/experience match the specific needs of the job/company
- Allowing misspellings or incorrect grammar/punctuation
- Rehashing your resume
- Rambling, focusing on your whole story instead of just the relevant part—you have the interview to expand
- Using qualifiers such as “I feel” or “I believe”—simply and confidently state your skills and what you offer
- Leaving the ball in the employer’s court—state that you will follow-up if possible

Use simple and straight forward sentence structure, but avoid starting every sentence with “I” or “my.” The reader should reach the end of your letter thinking, “This person would be a great asset to us and the position!” because you used the language from the job description and confidently and succinctly told them that you are the match.



OFFICE OF CAREER PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

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# COVER LETTER FORMAT & EXAMPLE

## COVER LETTER TIPS

FirstName LastName

City, ST ZIP | phone number | email address

May 20, 20XX

Mr. U. R. Employer  
Director, Personnel Department  
We Have Lots of Money, Incorporated  
Martin, TN 38237

Dear Mr. Employer:

**Introductory Paragraph:** Grab the reader's attention by sharing applicable personal traits and skills to gain the reader's attention. Then, state why you are writing; name the position or type of work for which you are applying; and mention where you learned of the position or organization. Give specific dates if you have had specific conversations with a person, and include this personal reference as it may attract more attention.

**Body:** The next one or two paragraphs should be your sales pitch. Explain why you are interested and how you best fit this position. "Tease" the reader enough to read your résumé. Emphasize particular skills or duties that are part of the job description. As a recent graduate, you may want to use a paragraph to address academic qualifications and another paragraph to highlight experience and skills. Illustrate in this section that you have knowledge of the company's needs and of the position to demonstrate you have done your "homework." Be confident!

**Closing Paragraph:** Be short and to the point. Indicate what steps you would like to happen next—if you want an interview, ask for it! *Passive Approach:* Results from you saying, "I look forward to hearing from you," and places responsibility on the employer to make the next move. *Active Approach:* Puts you in the position to initiate contact with the employer. State a specific date in the near future when you will verify receipt of the letter and/or seek to arrange an appointment. If you say you will contact them, do! Finally, thank the employer for his or her time and consideration.

Sincerely,

**SIGN NAME IN BLUE OR BLACK INK**

FirstName LastName

## COVER LETTER SAMPLE

IMA SKYHAWK

Martin, TN 38237 | 270.123.1234 | imaskyhawk@ut.utm.edu

January 24, 20xx

Ms. U. R. Employer  
Director, Personnel Department  
We Help Others, Incorporated  
123 12th Street  
Martin, TN 38237

Dear Ms. Employer:

Passionate about utilizing my interpersonal and counseling skills to help at-risk juveniles, I am excited to apply for the Assistant Director position posted on your website. In addition to the Bachelor of Science in Social Work I will complete at the University of Tennessee at Martin in May, I have three years of experience working with juveniles as well as supervisory, management and marketing experience.

My professional and educational experiences have enabled me to develop and utilize administration, leadership and marketing skills. In my current position supervising 10 telecounselors, I assess their performance, providing ongoing training and feedback to improve services. My leadership skills were challenged and honed through leading the admissions office at Three Springs, an outdoor therapeutic program for troubled teens. It took patience and firm resolve to work with the family members, professionals and agencies in order to create a balance of satisfaction on their part while looking out for the interest of the organization. Utilizing marketing skills to effectively tell the story of organizations is something I have done in multiple roles through both print and digital media. Please see my portfolio here: [www.LinkedIn.com/ImaSkyhawk](http://www.LinkedIn.com/ImaSkyhawk).

The opportunities that We Help Others, Inc. provides are exciting, and both my skills and personal traits will allow me to make an immediate and positive impact on your team. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

Ima Skyhawk



## OTHER LETTERS TO SEND

Here are other types of letters used in the job search to network or follow-up. These letters should follow business letter format, be limited to one page, error-free, timely and honest.

**PROSPECTING LETTERS** are used to market yourself, let the employer know you have qualities they need and suggest an action plan such as an interview. Use when there is no job posted.

I read about your company on the University of Tennessee at Martin's Handshake site, and I would like to inquire about employment opportunities in your management training program. Specifically, I would like a retail management position in Nashville area after graduation.

Not only will I complete a degree in marketing in May, but I also have three years of experience working in retail establishments. My communication, organizational and problem-solving skills are complimented by a strong work ethic. Whether establishing rapport with customers or speaking to a group, my communication skills receive positive feedback. It is also a natural task for me to organize displays creatively and assess and monitor inventory. In my last position, one irate customer challenged me to use patience and problem solving skills, and I can report that she left a satisfied customer.

On your home page you communicate a strong focus on ethics and serving the community. These are values I possess and ones that make me a natural fit for your company. I will call you the week of March 15 to discuss employment possibilities. In the meantime, please contact me at imaskyhawk@gmail.com or 731.123.1234 to further discuss my qualifications.

**NETWORKING LETTERS** are used to make a connection between you and the reader (e.g. an alum, mutual acquaintance or similar interest or background). Do not pressure the reader but let them know what kind of job you are seeking; request a meeting that is at a mutually convenient time, and indicate that you will call to make those arrangements.

Dr. Really Awesome, Professor of Marketing at the University of Tennessee at Martin, suggested that I contact you. He thought that, as an alum, you would be an excellent person to assist me with a career decision.

As a marketing major, I am exploring which career path to pursue. Retail management and wholesale sales both sound interesting to me at this point, but I want to go into my campus interviews next semester with a clear sense of direction. I would like to get your advice on the long-term career implications of each path as well as a better understanding of the day-to-day activities of a buyer.

I will call you next week to see if I can arrange a brief meeting at your convenience. Thank you for your time.

**THANK YOU LETTERS** are used to highlight key strengths and remind them who you are and why you should be hired. Personalize the company information and your specific fit. Make your letter unique. If someone spends more than ten minutes assisting you in any business situation, send a thank you letter.

**Thank You for Interview:** Indicate your appreciation for their time and the opportunity to speak with them on (date) and at (location). Stress the importance of learning the information provided and your interest in the possibility of using your background, education and experience (give specific examples based on the interview conversation) for the position discussed.

Indicate that you will furnish any additional information or are including requested information. Restate personal qualities which make you uniquely qualified for the position and which may or may not have been discussed in the interview. Encourage them to let you know if further information is needed, and that you look forward to hearing their decision.

Thank you very much for interviewing me yesterday for the marketing position with XYZ Engineering Systems, Inc. I enjoyed meeting you and learning more about your company and the Marketing Department.

Meeting with the other staff members was especially enjoyable as was seeing that their projects are in line with the type of work I have done in the past. My education, skills and experience fit nicely with the job requirements, and I am certain that I could make a significant contribution to your company over time.

You provide the kind of opportunity I am seeking, and I want to reiterate my strong interest in the position and in working with you and your staff. Please call me at 270.123.1234 if I can provide you with any additional information.

Again, thank you for the interview and your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

**Thank You for Plant/Office Visit Invitation:** Thank them for the invitation to visit them and confirm availability (list date/time). Indicate what materials you have enclosed or the company has requested. Indicate your appreciation for the opportunity to visit and reinforce your interest in a position with the company.

**Thank You for Plant/Office Visit:** Thank them for the time and opportunity to visit their plant/office on (date). If applicable, thank individuals for their special efforts. Mention meals, airfare, accommodations or other expenses paid. Include any receipts needed for reimbursement. Express your interest in the company. Re-emphasize what you can offer to fit their needs.

**LETTERS OF ACCEPTANCE** are used to indicate your pleasure in having received the company's offer. Include your understanding of the offer: position, location, starting salary, bonus, starting date and relocation expenses. Mention enclosures included, plans and anticipated arrival date and communicate enthusiasm.

**LETTERS REQUESTING MORE TIME** are used to acknowledge receipt of the offer on (date). Express appreciation and continued interest and indicate reasons for time extension needed (if possible) and request any information you lack. Specify when you will make your decision. This situation usually requires a prior phone conversation, but always follow up with a letter to verify.

**RESPONSE TO LETTERS OF REJECTION** are used to thank them for informing you and for considering you. If you are still interested, state you would like to be considered for future positions.

**LETTERS REJECTING OFFER** are used to communicate that you have sincerely considered the offer but will not accept as outlined in their offer (date). Indicate that it has been a difficult decision. Thank them for their time, effort and consideration. Let them know that their confidence in you was appreciated, and mention aspects of the position or company that were appealing to you.