Suggestions for Writing Your Cover Letter

The cover letter is a marketing tool used to capture the interest of a prospective employer. Sometimes, the cover letter will only be read after your resume has been reviewed, if the reviewer liked what he saw. Other times, the employer/recruiter will only move on to your resume if your cover letter catches her attention.

To summarize, then, the purpose of a cover letter is to:
- Catch the reader’s attention
- Get an interview.
- Further explain experience listed on your resume
- Mention something not listed on the resume
- Highlight a particular skill
- Express your interest in the job

Use of specific vocabulary for the industry and careful selection of skills will create a favorable impression by the reader. The cover letter usually includes a minimum of three paragraphs, with each paragraph having a different goal. Remember that cover letters are tailored to the specific position.

Before You Start
Have the ad for the position you’re applying for readily accessible.
- Make a list of the skills, attributes, and tasks the employer wants the candidate to have (research ability, strong computer skills, initiative, etc.)
- Refer to your resume, write down several examples from your background that showcase the skills, traits, tasks you have listed. Consider any coursework, honors, achievements, activities, and/or volunteer work as well as jobs and internships.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What the Employer Wants</th>
<th>What You Have</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proficiency in Microsoft Office</td>
<td>Familiar with Word, Excel, and PowerPoint</td>
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<td>Some teaching experience</td>
<td>Tutored students on calculus and French</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good organizational skills</td>
<td>Created new filing system at internship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time management skills</td>
<td>Worked 15 hours while taking 18 credits</td>
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<td>Knowledge of nonprofit community</td>
<td>Volunteered for Red Cross and Habitat for Humanity and participated in cat rescue</td>
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First Paragraph (Why you are writing)
State immediately and concisely the position you wish to be considered for and what makes you the best candidate for that position. State what position you are applying for, and how you found out about the position. If applicable, be sure to reference the name of the publication and the date the ad appeared. If an individual referred you to a specific position include his or her name. Keep the first paragraph short and hard hitting.

Example: I offer my candidacy for the Registered Nurse position in the Phone Triage department at the Fallon Clinic. Having recently graduated from Becker College with an RN certification, I am confident I can contribute my well-rounded knowledge and practical experience to the facility.

Second Paragraph (Highlights)
Detail what you could contribute to this company, and show how your qualifications will benefit this firm. If you're responding to a classified ad, specifically discuss how your skills relate to the job’s requirements. Remember to be brief! Few recruiters will read a cover letter longer than a page.

Example: The academic program at Becker has prepared me well to work with your scholastic athletes. The curriculum takes a holistic approach to teaching health and wellness techniques. In addition to exercise, I have learned techniques for proper nutrition, stress management, the psychology of sports/exercise, and more. I am CPR certified, and am scheduled to take the Advanced Personal Trainer certification test next month.

Third Paragraph (What happens next/closing)
Describe your interest in the organization. Subtly emphasize your knowledge about this firm (the result of your research effort) and your familiarity with the industry. It is common courtesy to act extremely eager to work for any company where you apply for a position.

Example: I am confident that I am well suited for a Laboratory Technician, and am interested in contributing to a facility with a strong reputation like Charles River Laboratory. I will bring innovative ideas, an open mind, and a strong work ethic. The attached resume includes more information. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to speaking with you further, I will call next Friday to follow up.

The closing should begin two lines beneath the body of the letter (see Sample Cover Letter). Keep the closing simple - Sincerely will suffice. Four lines underneath this, and aligned with the word Sincerely, type in your full name. Don't forget to sign the letter just above the typed name.
Content Tips for Effective Communication of Your Cover Letter

- Use active, not passive verbs. For example: use maintained, provided, arranged etc.

- Avoid overuse of I.

- Your letter will be more effective when addressed to a specific person within an organization. If you don’t know the person’s name, title or gender, call the organization and ask for the correct information. If you are unable to get a specific name, then using To Whom It May Concern or Dear Sir/Madam are acceptable alternatives.

- Each time you submit a resume for a specific position an original cover letter should accompany it.

- A cover letter should express your ambition and enthusiasm. Stress accomplishments by explaining how you have met specific employer needs. Show how accomplishments relate to the position for which you are applying.

- Never express dissatisfaction with a present and/or former job or employer.

- If mailing your documents, print your resume and cover letter on matching stationery and enclose them in a matching envelope.

- Use spell check and have a friend critique your cover letter and resume for grammatical and spelling errors to ensure NO TYPOS!