

COVER LETTER TIPS AND SUGGESTIONS

Your cover letter is a potential employer's first impression of you and can be the most vital part of the application packet. A well-written letter entices the employer to read your resume. A poorly constructed cover letter may doom your resume to the "No Need to Read" pile. The same can be said for a college or scholarship application that includes an introductory letter. It is important to highlight your skills, knowledge, and experience. These will indicate what you can contribute to the company or school. Effective cover letters must convey a sense of purpose and project enthusiasm. A "form" cover letter rarely does this. Researching the employer, college, or scholarship prior to writing the cover letter will give you the opportunity to effectively personalise your letter.

1. **Always include a cover letter when mailing your resume.** A letter of introduction will prove useful when applying to colleges. It may act as the basis for a college essay or it may be a useful addition to an application packet.
2. Unless the advertisement specifies "no phone calls please" and the name is not given in the ad, **find out the name and title of the individual who will be receiving your letter.** Make sure you spell the name properly and get the proper abbreviation (Mr., Mrs., Ms.).
3. Do not use "form" letters or photocopies. **Personalise each letter.** If possible, explain why you want to work for the organization or attend the school.
4. **Use a proper business format for your letters.**
5. Make sure the letter is **PERFECT! Spelling, punctuation, and grammar** count. Have someone proofread the letter before mailing it.
6. **Create the letter on a computer word processing program** (Microsoft Word, WordPerfect, etc.) and use a laser printer, if possible. **Use good quality paper.** Cheap, flimsy paper makes your application seem very ordinary. However, do not use flashy colours!
7. Utilize a one-inch **margin** on all 4 sides. This white space draws the reader to the body of the letter.
8. **In the opening paragraph, tell the reader the purpose of the letter.**
9. **Use "I" statements and action verbs** when describing your experience.
10. **Get to the point!** Employers do not have the time to read lengthy letters. A cover letter should never exceed one page.
11. **Focus on the specific skills and interests you possess** that you can offer the employer or college. Concentrate on skills which match the advertised employment qualifications or the desired program of study. **Stress what you can do for the company or college,** not what the company or college can do for you. Sound upbeat and confident. Sell yourself!
12. **Don't mention salary expectations unless the advertisement specifically requests it.** In that case, the best strategy is to give a range. For example, "My earnings have ranged from \$7.00 to \$10.50 per hour in the various sales positions I have held."
13. **End by thanking the reader and stating that you look forward to meeting with them.** Make a specific suggestion for the next step of the process and follow up as promised.

CHECKLIST:

Before mailing a cover letter, can you answer the following questions with a "Yes"?

- Is it clear? Does it state exactly what I want it to state?
- Is it concise? Does it state what I want it to state in the fewest possible words?
- Is it well organized?
- Am I projecting to the employer or college the contribution I can make?
- Have I stressed areas in my experience and/or education that are relevant to the person reading it?