

WRITING PROFESSIONAL COVER LETTERS

What is a Cover Letter

A cover letter is an introduction letter most often accompanied by a resume for job searches, informational interviews and networking purposes. A cover letter conveys your interest in a particular position and/or company and highlights your qualifications, skills, accomplishments and abilities related to your career objective.

Just as the resume is a marketing tool to attract an initial interest, the cover letter serves the same purpose. A professional cover letter is essential because it is the employer's first glance and impression of you as a candidate. A cover letter allows you to introduce yourself and state your objective, personalize your resume and highlight information that addresses the needs and interest of the employer.

A Cover letter focuses on the needs of the employer, not just your own What is the employer looking for and in what ways do I meet these qualifications. Highlights successes, contributions and accomplishments described in your resume but not an exact carbon copy of the resume **Demonstrates your knowledge of the organization, position and field**

A cover letter is a sample of you and your writing style If your cover letter is written sloppy with misspellings and errors an employer will take this as the type of work you will do if hired.

Getting Started

Have you had assignments or papers that were exceptionally difficult to write because you only had a limited amount of space to convey a large amount of detailed information? The same thing can be said about a cover letter. For most people, the most difficult task in writing a cover letter is conveying their interest in the position and unique skills in only a relatively small amount of space. The number one error in cover letter writing is making the letter too long and too boring. What you want is a letter an employer can read fairly quickly and get excited to flip the page to read more in a resume.

Just as with a resume, the first step in writing a cover letter is self-assessment and research. **The more you know about yourself, the position and the company, the more you can tailor and streamline your cover letter to match what the employer is seeking, thus, saving you valuable space**

Research the company's needed skills, Web your matching skills and accomplishments that highlight those skills, and articulate the company's needs with the skills you possess.

Cover Letter Format

Heading:

A cover letter is a business letter, therefore, there are required elements to the heading as well as closing. For your heading, (1) include your name and complete address. Some people choose to add a phone number or e-mail address, which is fine, but optional. Next, (2) list the complete date (do not hyphenate such as 12/13/05). Following the date is, (3) the employer's name and address. List the employer's name, title (if known), department and/or organization (if known) and complete address of organization. The last component to the heading is a greeting. Try to always find a specific name to put in the greeting (Dear Ms. Smith/Dear Mr. Richards). Sometimes it is impossible

to find a name, however, always try to personalize the greeting such as "Dear Selection Committee." Never write "To Whom it May Concern" since this is too vague.

Opening Paragraph: Who You Are and What You Want

Briefly Introduce Yourself: This can include your student status, college or university attended or attending, field of interest and/or expected degree.

State Why You Are Writing: Are you writing to submit a resume for a specific position? Are you writing for a company to consider your resume for future positions? Are you writing for an informational interview?

Reference Your Information: If writing to be considered for a specific position, you can state where you found that listing such as a web classified ad or job posting from a career services center. If the position was referenced by a specific source, i.e., professional colleague, professor, alumni, then reference the particular person. **Why That Company: State why you are choosing that particular company or organization.** Does the mission of the organization match your values? Does it consistently hire graduates with your major and background? Even if the initial interest came from a personal reference source, a good

candidate will do some background research on the organization to show a "good fit" when submitting a cover letter and resume.

Research: What is the company's mission Statement, and goals for the future...
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Middle Paragraph(s) - Summarization of Qualifications

This paragraph can be one large paragraph or broken into smaller paragraphs. **The purpose of this section is to showcase highlights from your resume that would be of great interest to the organization and create the idea of a "good fit."**

This section is not a carbon copy of your resume. However, this section can expand on content from your resume. For example, don't write down every single job listed on your resume, but focus on one or two listings that showcase your experience and knowledge of the field. **Include specific details or examples that demonstrate your abilities.** If the job posting identified several essential skills and qualifications, you can write how you meet them in this section. For example, if the job posting mentions a specific software program required, and you have experience in that software program, you can provide more detail about your experience and knowledge working with the software in your cover letter. You can also include "Why That Company" in this section rather than the first paragraph depending how the information flows.

Closing Paragraph - Next Step

Thank the employer for consideration and his or her time. Let the employer know what you would like to see as the next step. Typically, this is an interview. If you like, you can initiate the next step by letting the employer know when you will be in contact. For example, "I will be in the Denver area the week of March 14th and will give you a call that Monday to arrange an interview." If you give a specific date and time you are obligated to that time. Not following up on a stated time shows a lack of professionalism. If you can't guarantee that you will follow-up, then don't write it in the cover letter. You can always end with, "If you have any additional questions please feel free to contact me at _____, and give a phone number and/or e-mail.

Closing First, (1) have a professional closing such as "Sincerely" or "Thank You."

Then, (2) type out your full name leaving space between the closing and your typed name for a handwritten signature. Also, don't forget to write, (3) "Enclosure" or "Enc" after your typed name. As a business document, anytime you are enclosing material, i.e., your resume, references, application, you need to add this piece at the end of the document.

Cover Letter Appearance Checklist

Page Length - Only one page.

Adequate Margins - Typically one inch.

Font - Between 10 and 12 point for readability. Also use a traditional business font style such as Times, Times New Roman, Palatino, Arial and other book print fonts. It is best to **keep the cover letter and resume font style the same.**

Absolutely No Misspellings - Proofread for spelling, grammar and typographical errors and don't rely only on a computer spell check system. (See "Ode to a spell checker")

Clear and Concise - Delete unnecessary words, sentences and irrelevant information.

Consistent - Review dates and numbers for accuracy on the cover letter but also against your resume. Also pay attention to paragraph transitions (think back to your writing classes).

Explain Specific Information - Departments, program names, acronyms or any type of information that only people familiar with the project or organization would understand.

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I really need to send a cover letter with my resume?

YES! Every time you submit a resume, or any type of application materials, you should have a cover letter accompany it. A cover letter is another professional element to your application. Also, sending a cover letter is in your best interest since it provides another mechanism to convey your interest in a particular position and/or company, your qualifications, skills, accomplishments and abilities related to your career objective than just submitting a resume alone.

Do I have to address a cover letter to a specific person?

YES! A cover letter addressed to "Whom it May Concern" automatically has a carbon copy feel. It is your responsibility as a professional candidate to make an effort to find a personal contact. Even if you can't find a specific person after you have done some research, still try to have a more specific general contact such as "Dear Human Resource Manager," "Dear Hiring Committee" or "Dear Search Committee."

Do I address salary or visa issues in the cover letter?

NO! Just as with the resume, the cover letter is one of the first samples of you and your work. You want an employer to get an initial interest, and preferably, do an interview, before sensitive questions or information are brought up.

Is a cover letter the same as a personal statement or letter of intent?

NO! Sometimes student confuse a cover letter with a letter of intent or personal statement, however, these are two separate documents. Remember, a cover letter is an introduction to your application package, which can include a personal statement, letter of intent or any additional materials requested.

Are cover letters only used for job applications?

NO! Anytime you submit professional materials you should attach a cover letter. Examples include applications for scholarships, fellowships, admittance into degree seeking programs, just to name a few.

COVER LETTERS

The cover letter that accompanies your resume is perhaps one of the most important letters that you will ever write. Other than your resume, it is the single, key document that will introduce you to a prospective employer. Thus, it is important to take time and care when preparing your cover letter and tailor it to the specific position for which you are applying. Do some research on the company and get a specific name when possible. Grammar, spelling, content, layout and overall presentation may be the factor that gets you that all important interview.

- **Don't overuse "I"** – The focus should be on the employer's needs, not on your life story!
- **Address a person, not a title** – whenever possible, find out the name of the person who will be doing the hiring...remember to treat receptionists with respect!
- **Don't omit your top selling points** – A cover letter is a sales letter that sells you as a candidate! It should be compelling and give the main reasons why you should be called for an interview.
- **Don't make it too long or too short** – You want it to contain enough key information to sell you effectively, but not over one page long, you may be putting readers to sleep!
- **Don't repeat your resume word for word** – Reword your cover letter statements to avoid dulling your resume's impact.
- **Don't be vague** – If you are replying to an advertised opening, reference the specific job title on your cover letter. The person reading your letter may be reviewing hundreds of letters for dozens of different jobs. Make sure all the content in your letter supports how you will meet the specific needs of the employer.
- **Don't forget to customize** – If you are applying to a number of similar positions, chances are you are tweaking one letter and using it for multiple openings. That is fine, as long as you customize each one.
- **Don't forget to sign the letter** – It is proper business etiquette to sign your letter. However, if you are sending your letter and resume via email, a signature is not necessary.
- **What does your reader need to know?**

Your Name
Your Address
City, Province
Postal Code

Your Contact
Information

Month, Day, Year (Date you are sending the letter)

Employer Name
Employer Title
Business Name
Business Address
City, Province, Postal Code

Employer Contact
Information

Tips:

Resumes and Cover Letters should be in standard business format.

The formatting should be consistent for both, so ensure you use the same font, font size, the same margin size etc.

RE: (Position/Competition # if applicable)

Dear Mr. or Ms. (Person's last name only):

Salutation

Introductory Paragraph: State immediately the position you are pursuing and how you came to know of the opening. If you have a contact at the company, you can mention it here (with the contact's permission). Tell the employer why you are interested in the position in one or two sentences.

Sell your skills paragraph: Explain the skills, background, attributes and experience you have that will make you successful in the position. You do not have to have directly related experience, but think about the skills you have from all your experience and how those relate to the duties of the position you are applying for; show that you have a number of the skills they highlight in the job ad.

Additional, value-adding skills paragraph: Demonstrate that you have done some research about the company. Go to their website, read articles about them in the news or in journals, talk to other contacts from the organization. This research will show that you have taken time to think about this position and put some effort into this letter. Show how you have what it takes to contribute to their company based on what you learned in your research.

Conclusion: State that you would welcome an interview to further discuss the opportunity and repeat the telephone number where you can be reached. You could mention that you will contact them to see where they are in the process if you do not hear from them within a week after the deadline (but be sure to follow through if you state this). Finish by thanking them for their consideration of your application and express a desire to meet them sometime in the near future.

Sincerely,

Closing

Your Signature (Leave 4 lines for this)

Your printed name (typed)

Cover Letter Rubric

Superior		Value
Focus	The first sentence or two states clearly who you are and why you are writing the letter - to apply for the position.	3
	The Second paragraph sells your preparation (Skills, Aptitude, Attitude, Experience, eagerness etc.) for the position - using power words and clear declarative sentences.	3
	The third paragraph summarizes your skills/experience and shows your research about the company and the position.	3
	Concluding Paragraph states your thanks, and asks for an interview, and may state what you will do to follow up.	3
Format	Cover Letter is no longer than 1 page, is formatted in standard business format, includes 2 addresses, a date, a competition # (if required), 4 paragraphs, and your signature. Letter is addressed to the correct person (not to whom it may concern). All Sentences are declarative and focused, makes use of power words to sell myself for the position.	5
Mechanics	The letter is free of grammatical and spelling errors and use declarative statements and power words that highlight my skills that the employer is looking for. Font size is 11 or 12.	3






Total ___/20

Note:

Remember, Your cover letter is your first introduction. It must interest the employer immediately, and make them want to read your resume and contact you for an interview. You should expect nothing less than perfect for your cover letter. The employer will only interview the best candidates, so you need to make sure there is every reason to call you for an interview. This rubric only shows the superior class, because I will accept nothing less than the employer. We will work on this until we all achieve a successful superior cover letter!



Cover Letter Tips

-  **Do some research on the company.** Find out the name of the hiring manager so you can address them in the letter. A personalized letter always gets more attention than “Dear Sir/Madam” and it insures that the right person is receiving your resume. A simple call asking to whom you should address your application is sometimes all it takes.
-  **Is my letter too long or too short?** Unless you are applying for an academic position, in which case it can be longer, one page is more than enough. Address some of the employers’ needs and show how you meet them – without starting every sentence with “I”.
-  **Customize your letter!** A generic cover letter to every employer is easily spotted by recruiters and hiring managers. It can show a lack of interest in the employers’ specific needs or that you don’t care whether you work for them or some other company.
-  **Review, review, review!** Proofread your letter for spelling, grammar, repetition. Don’t rely on spell check because it doesn’t catch everything. Ask a friend or colleague to help proofread and offer feedback.
-  **Don’t forget to sign your cover letter if you are sending a hard copy.**



COVER LETTER

Your resume should always be accompanied by a cover letter. A cover letter is communication tool designed to personalize the resume, add more information, and build a bridge between you and the recruiter or hiring manager. Properly used, it can get your resume read with serious attention and support your resume's story by revealing additional information about the professional behind it.

Your Name
Your Address
City, Province Postal Code

Month, Day, Year (** date you are sending the letter*)

Employer Name
Employer Title
Business Name
Business Address
City, Province, Postal Code

RE: (*Position/Competition # if Applicable*)

Dear Mr. or Ms. (*person's last name only*):

Introductory paragraph: State immediately the position you are pursuing and how you came to know of the opening. If you have a contact at the company, you can mention that here (with that contact's permission). Tell the employer briefly why you are interested in this position (one or two sentences).

Sell your skills paragraph: Explain the skills, background, attributes and experience you have that will make you successful in the position. You do not have to have directly related experience, but think about the skills you have gained from what you have done and how those could relate to the duties of the position you are applying for; show that you have a number of the skills they highlight in the job ad.

Additional, value-adding skills paragraph: Demonstrate that you have done some research about the company. Go to their website, read articles about them in the news or in journals, talk to other contacts from the organization. This research does not have to be extensive, but it shows that you have taken some time to think about this position and put some effort into this letter. It makes a good impression on employers by demonstrating that this is not a form letter that you send out to every employer. Show how you have what it takes to contribute to their company based on what you learned in your research.

Conclusion: State that you would welcome an interview to further discuss the opportunity and repeat the telephone number where you can be reached. You could mention that you will contact them to see where they are in their process if you do not hear back from them within a week after the deadline (but be sure to follow through if you do state this). Finish by thanking them for their consideration of your application and express a desire to meet with them sometime in the near future.

Sincerely,

Your Signature (leave 4 lines for this)

Your printed name

Cover letter example

Malcolm J. Mulligan
50 A. Ferris Street
Fredericton, NB.
E3A 5R2
malcolmmulligan@rogers.com

November 7, 2006

Kathy Walker
kathy.walker@gnb.ca
Human Resources Officer
School District 18
1135 Prospect Street
P.O. Box 10
Fredericton, NB
E3B 4Y4

RE: Competition Number 18-LTS-060729

Dear Kathy Walker,

I am applying for the Grade 7 math and Language Arts Long Term Substitute teaching position available at Albert Street Middle School. I am confident that my experience and skill sets would be an asset to the learning and development of the students at Albert Street Middle School. I hold a New Brunswick Teacher's Certificate V with a major in Social Studies and English and I am currently employed as a supply teacher and approved for long term substitutions for School District 18. Last year I worked more than 127 days and 29 days so far this year supplying in a number of subject areas mostly at the middle school level. I am keenly interested in working at Albert Street Middle School as I did my internship there for a grade 7 English Language Arts class. I am familiar with the staff, administration and students at the school as well as the curriculum and teaching methods.

I think I can make a positive contribution to Albert Street Middle School and district 18. My previous experience as a sales manager, trainer, and supervisor combined with my degree courses and the past year as a supply teacher has prepared me for the challenges of the classroom. I think a positive learning environment needs to be created in which students can have an environment of learning, where life long learning can be modeled. This environment needs to be created through caring policies and well planned lessons where the focus is on the students and their learning. Positive learning environments require students to respect the rights of other learners and take responsibility for their own learning. Through the use of well planned lessons, research based teaching methods and clear expectations students are able to reach higher academic goals than they would set for themselves and thus achieve success.

As a teacher I aim to aid students in their personal development by creating an environment of trust where students test their learning and stretch their limits beyond their comfort levels.

I would be pleased to meet with you at your convenience to discuss the possibility of my working for your students, school, and district.

Sincerely,

Malcolm Mulligan

