

## Cover Letters- Purpose and Tips

- There are three basic cover letter types: job application, informational/prospecting and referral.
- The most familiar is the job application document that tells a prospective employer, in a clear and concise manner, why you are a **great** candidate for a particular position.
- The informational/prospecting type is for job seekers wanting to introduce and market themselves to a company for which specific job openings may not be posted. It is also useful for students who have not yet graduated but would like to start a conversation with prospective employers.
- The referral cover letter is sent after being referred to a particular job opening by someone else. It is important that the applicant mentions the name of the person who gave the referral, who that person is with respect to the company (Human Resources Director's brother, present employee, head of a particular department, etc.), and the relationship of that person to the applicant (friend, past coworker, someone met at a recent job fair, etc.).
- A cover letter can expand your profile by highlighting several key talents or abilities necessary for a position not necessarily shown on your resume.
- It is a marketing tool **and** a sales tool. It should introduce you as a viable candidate to a prospective employer and pique that person's interest toward reading your attached resume.
- This letter sets the tone for conversation between you, the job seeker, and the employer. In many cases, this **is** the first impression you will make on a prospective employer. **Remember: Put your personality in the cover letter... give the reader a glimpse of who you are!**

There is ongoing discussion as to whether cover letters are relevant in today's job market. Some HR people claim they do not have time to read them and, therefore, disregard them. Others have a very different approach and believe they are important.

This discussion boils down to different styles for different people. For strictly online applications (those with built-in Applicant Tracking Systems and other fill-in templates), cover letters may not be applicable. However, they still have merit and should be considered worth the time spent in writing them.

## What types of information are in a cover letter?

- When at all possible, the letter should be addressed to a specific person... HR Director, head of a particular department, contact person as posted in a job lead, etc. To Whom It May Concern is often viewed as a lack of effort and causes many hiring managers to question the job seeker's motives and initiative. This is part of the expected research that should be done in preparation of sending a resume.
- Your **personal information**: Name, address, telephone number, and professional e-mail address. **In a written letter**, this may appear first on the page; **in an e-mailed cover letter**, this information is usually placed after your signature line. **Remember: keep your information professional avoid including bizarre e-mail addresses!**

- The **date** you write the letter.
- The **name and title** of the intended recipient. If the person is the Human Resources Director, include that as well.
- The **business address of the intended recipient**.
- The **highlighted name of the position** to which you are inquiring or applying.
- The salutation or greeting. Dear Ms. Johnson, Dear Reverend Potter, Dear Dr. Smith, etc. Again, do your homework and get a specific person's name. If you are absolutely stuck, then use greetings such as: Dear Human Resources Director, Dear Hiring Manager, etc.
- The first paragraph should name the position and explain where or how you discovered the opening. If you found it on an online job site, give the website (eg., [www.indeed.com](http://www.indeed.com)). Was it in a newspaper? Name the newspaper and include the date of the edition (eg., the November 20, 2013 edition of The Star Ledger). Was it through word-of-mouth? Give the person's name and your relationship with that person (eg., I learned of this position through a recent conversation with Melissa Franklin, a Research Associate at your firm.).
- The first paragraph may also express that you are very interested or give a lead-in to the next paragraph about how wonderful a fit you are for the business, the position, etc.
- The second paragraph clearly mentions two to four important points that directly illustrate how your specific experience, education, or individual talents make you a great candidate. This may be done with short sentences or in bulleted form. Some job seekers take direct pertinent keyword phrases from job descriptions, include them in their cover letters, then add quick comparisons of their own experience meeting or exceeding the requirements.
- The third paragraph includes a brief thank you and an action item explaining how the job seeker plans to follow up (eg., I will e-mail you by December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013 to confirm that you have received my materials, to answer additional questions, and to schedule an interview with you or your staff.).
- Include a closing such as Yours truly, Regards, Sincerely, Sincerely yours, etc. just before your signature.

### Other Tips

- **Proofread, proofread, proofread!** Whenever possible, ask a friend (or even two) to read your cover letter and resume before sending them. Ask them to carefully check your work for misspellings, punctuation, grammar and any other errors.
- **Be sure to include keywords in your cover letter**... primarily in the second paragraph.
- **In e-mailed cover letters, be sure to follow the employer's instructions!** If you are told to include a cover letter in the body of the e-mail, do so. The same is true for resumes. Some job postings are very specific as to whether attachments are allowed. This is generally done for security reasons... attachments can carry computer viruses.

- **When e-mailing cover letters and resumes, type out the subject line with the name of the intended position followed by your name. For instance:**  
**Assistant Location Manager – Harriet Mortimer**
- Again, **when including cover letters directly in an e-mail text** (rather than as an e-mail attachment), **type your personal information after your signature** rather than at the top of the message. For instance:  
Yours truly,  
John Smith  
41 South 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Somewhere, NY 133XX  
[johnsmith@gmail.com](mailto:johnsmith@gmail.com)  
Your LinkedIn address here
- **Yes, you can also include your LinkedIn profile address here, too!** Your LinkedIn profile should have additional information besides what is shown on your resume or included in your cover letter.