

# CAMPUS EXCLUSIVE

Cover Letter Tips and Strategy



## Writing cover letters that will get you interviews

Cover letters are where you make your first impression. You have about 30 seconds to convey compelling information that will catch and keep the reader's attention. Strong cover letters are persuasive and concise.

A cover letter is a business letter that should accompany each resume you send to a prospective employer. The cover letter serves as an introduction; it tells an employer who you are and why you are sending him/her a resume. The cover letter is also referred to as a letter of inquiry or letter of application. If written well, the cover letter enhances your resume because it allows you to provide a more detailed account of particular skills/experience in your background that relate directly to the organization or position for which you are applying. It also serves to demonstrate to the prospective employer that you know something about the organization and are genuinely interested in working there. This guide will help you write more effective cover letters and other business correspondence, like thank you notes. There are several formats for cover letters with slight differences. All are good ways to write a cover letter, but whichever format you choose, the cover letter should not exceed one page in length.

A cover letter will have more impact if it is individually written in response to the particular needs and/or values of the organization to whom you are applying. Most employers do not look favorably upon mass-produced cover letters, and applicants who use this method usually do not achieve positive results. Use your cover letter to tailor your resume to individual jobs and organizations. When possible, address your letter to a specific individual within an organization who has the responsibility for the hiring decision. The organization's web site is an excellent place to begin your search for an appropriate person to contact. You can also call organizations directly and ask a receptionist for the name of the appropriate contact.

In your cover letter, be direct and concise about your interest in the organization and what you can offer. The tone of the letter should emphasize ways in which you can fulfill their needs. Pay particular attention to grammar, typing and spelling; avoid trite language and the temptation to turn your cover letter into an extensive autobiography. While you want to be upbeat and positive, avoid exaggerated statements. As in a resume, be prepared to back up any information you include in the letter. If you make claims, support them with evidence. Attempt to customize each letter. In many cases this can be accomplished by doing some research on the organization before you write your cover letter. Review a copy of the company's annual report and other information such as recent news on their web site, use a Dun & Bradstreet Report for historical information, research recent financial activities or recent articles in Fortune, The Wall Street Journal or Business Week to learn about current trends and changes.

When requesting an interview, take the initiative to schedule a meeting. Indicate when you will be in the area (over spring break, etc.). Offer to follow up your letter with a telephone call to request a date at a mutually convenient time. If you do not receive a response to your application within a couple of weeks, you may want to follow up with the employer by email or telephone.