

Crafting a Cover Letter or Letter of Introduction

A potential employer's first impression of you is your cover letter, also known as a letter of introduction or letter of interest. Your letter introduces you and your résumé. The stark reality is that your résumé may never be read without its being accompanied by a professional cover letter. If the administrator does not feel you are a good fit after reading your cover letter, your résumé likely will not get a first look. Without a stellar cover letter (letter of introduction), you might never receive a call or email. Just remember:

- The purpose of a cover letter is to get your résumé read.
- The purpose of a résumé is to get an interview.
- The purpose of an interview is to sell yourself and your qualifications and show that you are a good fit for their a job.

Sell Yourself

Your résumé cover letter is a sales letter. It sells your résumé; therefore, it sells you. It sets you apart from the many others applying for this same position. Common mistakes made by job hunters are neglecting to submit a cover letter with their résumé or writing a poor cover letter.

Since your résumé gives your work history and qualifications in some detail, your cover letter needs to succinctly describe you and the specific expertise you bring to the position.

- In your cover letter, briefly mention only the qualifications that are most impressive and pertain exactly to the job opening.
- Indented bullets or numbered lists of three or five items of fairly equal length are easy to read and show your qualifications at a glance.
- Studies have shown that serif fonts such as Georgia or Times New Roman are easier to read in hard copy than a sans serif font such as Arial. The serif font uses small horizontal lines and flourishes that carry the eye along and make the text easier to read than the rigid vertical lines of a sans serif font. Use the same font and size font that you used on your resume—they go together.

Cover Letter Tips

Here are some basic things to know about and include in your cover letter:

- Write your cover letter on white bond paper.
- A résumé cover letter should be only one page in length.

- Your cover letter heading should be identical to your resume heading. Headings should include your name and contact information.
- Use a business format for dating and addressing your cover letter to the appropriate person. List his/her correct position. "Mr. Ronald Jones, Director of Personnel."
- Your cover letter salutation should be "Dear Mr. Jones:" or "Dear Mrs. Smith:". If you do not know the marital status of a female interviewer, the safe salutation is "Dear Ms. Smith:". Use a colon after the name and not a comma. If a job post lists the title without a name, do a little research on the district website to find a name. If a name is not available, use the title in the greeting line.
- A résumé cover letter is a business letter. Use formal block (not indented) paragraphs with a blank line between paragraphs.
- Write optimistically and to the point.
- Be sure to respond to each item included in the job posting.
- Double-check your spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Have someone who is good at English proofread your letter.
- Be sure to include complete and current contact information. If your contact information is different now than it will be after graduation, give your “permanent” address, email, and phone numbers as well.

Outline for Cover Letter or Letter of Introduction

Your cover letter should consist of exactly three paragraphs:

1. *Introductory paragraph*

State which position you want and how you heard about it. A large district may be hiring several teachers at once. In your cover letter, briefly state which position you are interested in and how you found out about it.

If you can, drop a name. (Be sure you have permission.) Do a little research and say something positive about the school.

Let the person reading the letter know immediately why you are the best candidate for this position. You need that person to read past the first paragraph—and to look at your résumé.

Example: I have always admired teachers like those who teach in XYZ School because they successfully teach diverse classrooms. Since I got a TESOL certificate along with my elementary education certificate so that I could teach in a school such as XYZ, I was delighted when my friend Mrs. Smith told me that XYZ had an opening for a third grade teacher—the very grade I had student taught.

2. Job-matching paragraph

Now briefly expand on your qualifications, education, experience and interests, especially those that match the employer's needs. You want to appear as the perfect applicant. Additionally, cover letters should call out other key parts of your résumé that you want the employer to notice. Say that you are a strong candidate because of your qualifications, education, experience, interests, etc.

Do your homework; research the school and learn all you can about it, the mission statement, the students, the demographic, and the people who work there. Relate your abilities, skills, and background to the ways you can help them or their students. Praise the school or system for recent public recognition or accomplishments.

If you use bulleted or numbered points, the lines should be about the same length.

Example:

I am the ideal candidate for this position because I have:

1. Two years experience as a camp counselor and Spanish instructor for elementary students,
2. A bachelor's degree in both elementary and Spanish education along with a TESOL certificate, and
3. Two years experience teaching English as a Second Language to first through third graders.

Alternate Method: You can accomplish the same purpose in your cover letter with a well-worded sentence and not be restricted to making each item in your list a similar length.

Example:

I am the ideal candidate for this position because I not only have two years of experience as a camp counselor and Spanish instructor for elementary students, but I also have two years of experience teaching English as a second language to first through third graders while I was working on a bachelor's degree in both elementary education and Spanish along with a TESOL certificate.

3. Closing paragraph

Close your résumé cover letter with a bold statement that you are a strong match for the job position. State that you are looking forward to meeting with him/her. Make sure you mention that you have completed the required application and submitted it appropriately and that anything else that was requested is either complete or in progress.

Take the aggressive: Ask for an interview—politely. Say that if you don't hear from him/her in 7-10 days, you will follow up. This is a great way to make sure the résumé was received and to open a dialogue. However, if you really don't intend to follow up, don't say you will.

End your letter with:

Sincerely,

[four returns—tap the "enter" key four times—this is where you will sign your name in black ink after printing the letter]

[your name typed]

If you are submitting online, simply type your name, phone number, and current email

Remember, no cute emails—a professional email like first.lastname@ either gmail or yahoo—and check that email at least once a day after you send the first item referencing it

Don't forget your contact information!

End with your phone number and email address so that the reader can choose the method that is most convenient. Mail your cover letter, using both a typed and hand-written signature. Enclose your résumé. Do NOT staple them together.

Sincerely,

Janice Morton

Janice Morton
(555) 555-6954
Janice.Morton@xxx.com

Enclosures

The Perfect Cover Letter

Make sure both your spelling and grammar construction are letter perfect! Don't ignore error signals from your word processing program such as green or red underlining. Right click and find out what the problem is. If you send your resume by email attachment, make sure you send it in the predominant *Microsoft® Word* format to avoid conversion problems on the receiving end.

Although you are selling yourself, try to use “I” and “my” sparingly—no more than six times in the whole letter. (That is why bullets may be helpful.) Focus on how you can help them attain their goals.

Never copy and paste information from your résumé directly on your cover letter. If you use the same information, re-phrase it and focus it to answer the job description or what you have learned in your research.

Afterwards: Don't forget to follow up!

Call in three days (or however many days you said) and ask if your letter and résumé were received. If so, ask when you could schedule an interview. If the person you talk to does not want to schedule an interview yet, ask when you can call back!

Letters for Internet Job Applications

Can you use this same procedure and format when you are applying for a position over the Internet? Yes! Whether you are applying in person or virtually, you need to demonstrate that you have sterling qualifications and that your communication skills are excellent.

You will usually be able to upload at least one Word document. If there is no place to upload both the cover letter (letter of introduction) and résumé, make them a single Word document so that both will upload together.

To mail or not to mail, that is the question!

Be the exception, not the rule! Most employers get bombarded with a ton of email cover letters with attached résumés. If you really want to stand out, mail your prospective boss a cover letter and résumé by snail mail—on the pile on his desk will be better than in a forgotten folder in his hard drive! And it won't hurt to have done both methods.