

Cover Letters

When to use a cover letter

Many employers will require a cover letter as part of your application. There may be other times when a cover letter is also appropriate. Include a cover letter with your resume when you cannot present it in person. (i.e. U.S. Postal Service or email). Remember whatever you write in your email IS your cover letter. A cover letter is not necessary when you deliver your resume to a potential employer at a career fair.

The purpose of cover letters

The purpose of the cover letter and resume package is to motivate the employer to take action and invite you for an interview. When delivered together, the two documents should be complementary and work together to accomplish your purpose. The appearance of your resume/cover letter package will be enhanced if both documents are printed on the same high-quality bond paper.

A cover letter should work like advertising copy. It should:

- catch the reader's attention (opening paragraph)
- communicate skills and experience (middle paragraph)
- support your statements with specifics (middle paragraph)
- compel the reader to act (final paragraph)

Employers report that an impressive cover letter is often more important than the resume when making a decision whether to interview a candidate, so it can be a mistake to focus too much attention on the resume and ignore the potential value of a well-written letter. Like the resume, the cover letter is not intended to get you the job—it is intended to get you an interview (when you can convince the employer face-to-face that you are the right one for the job).



The most important aspect of a cover letter is employer focus. Present the employer with indications of your personality and style along with your skills and abilities. Highlight your qualifications for the specific position you seek, clearly stating your interests and qualifications relative to the employer's needs.

Always customize your cover letter! Sending out a general cover letter and resume to hundreds of employers is rarely successful. It can create a perception on the employer's part that you are not a serious and thoughtful person, that you are desperate for a job, or that you don't really care enough about their organization to learn about them.

Your letter should be just a few paragraphs and only one page in length. While there is no "perfect formula" regarding length and what to include, keep it relevant and relatively brief.

THINGS TO AVOID IN COVER LETTERS

- Starting every sentence with "I" or "my"
- Extraneous words and wordy phrases; e.g. "in order to" and "for the purpose of"
- Confusing and complex language and sentence structure (HINT: Read your letter aloud to identify awkwardness, then correct it)
- Long sentences and paragraphs
- Weak or overused words
- Font sizes smaller than 10 point and larger than 12 point
- Nondescript phrases such as "I was a computer lab assistant." Instead, say: "I provided technical assistance." "I conducted research activities using observation and data analysis skills while..." instead of "I worked as a research assistant."

Sample Cover Letter

1234 Main Avenue
Lawrence, KS 66046
September 20, 2013

Ms. Betty Smith
Human Resources Director
Big Time Software
678 Madison Avenue
Overland Park, KS 66212

Dear Ms. Smith:

I am applying for the position of sales representative for the Midwest territory. I learned about this position at the recent University of Kansas career fair through Joe Job, Chicago sales representative for Big Time Software. I have extensive sales and leadership experience and bring strengths that include a committed work ethic, strong motivation to succeed and a demonstrated record of exceeding goals. This May I will complete a Bachelor of Science in Communication Studies with a minor in Business from the University of Kansas. I look forward to bringing my excellent academic background, skills and experience to increase sales at Big Time Software.

After speaking with Mr. Job and researching Big Time Software, I am impressed with the innovative software your company is developing for the health care industry. Your recent release of Super Special Software version 5.0 represents a significant advance in technology and should be well received in the home health field. This rapidly growing segment of the industry is creating unique opportunities to acquire new clients. I have a consistent record of achievement in building customer relationships that generate sales while working on a team and meeting deadlines. During my summer internship at Union Sales, I exceeded the monthly sales quota by 30 percent – the majority of those sales were to new clients. At The University Daily Kansan, I consistently surpassed the sales goal of \$500 in advertising per week.

As chief membership officer of Pi Alpha Pi, an academic honors organization, I pioneered a recruitment program that brought in over 20 new members, increasing our membership base by 52 percent. At the Chicago Grill Restaurant, I was selected to train all new hires on proper serving techniques and was entrusted with closing the restaurant after only three months of employment. These experience demonstrate that I am a highly motivated and goal-driven leader who strives for excellence in everything I do.

I look forward to the opportunity to interview with you and have attached my resume as requested. I will contact you next week to schedule a time when we can further discuss my qualifications. If you have any questions, I can be reached at (785) 555-1234 or by email at javhk@ku.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jay Hawk

Your Address

Date

First and Last Name of contact person or "Human Resources Manager" if name is unknown
Title of Contact Person
Employer Contact Information

If employer name is not available, use Human Resources Manager, Director or Hiring Manager

First Paragraph:

- Why you are writing
- What position you are applying for
- How you learned about the position
- Who referred you (if applicable)

Body:

- Why you are interested in the position
- What you can contribute
- How your qualifications would benefit the organization
- How your skills and experience match their needs

Last Paragraph:

- Refer to documents enclosed or available such as list of references
- Give the phone number and time that you can be reached or when you will contact them
- Thank them for their time and consideration of your application

Or, "Respectfully"

Type your first and last name
Leave four spaces so you can sign your name in ink after it is printed
Leave only one blank line and type your name for emailed letters