

What is a cover letter?

The cover or application letter is an important tool in the job search process. The cover letter, as the name implies, covers the resume and should be included with any resume mailed or emailed to an employer. The purpose of the cover letter and resume combination is to gain the interest of an employer and be invited to an interview. To write an effective cover letter you need to take time to research and write an original letter. The letter should be tailored to each employer and reflect your knowledge of the employer's needs. Researching the organization and position before you write will make this task much easier.

Are there different types of cover letters?

Yes. In general, cover letters come in one of two forms: application letters and prospecting letters.

Application letters are written in response to a specific job opening or vacancy notice. This letter is used to formally apply for the position and show the employer how your qualifications match what the position requires. Use the position description and your research about the organization to compose your letter.

Prospecting letters are written to inquire about possible job openings. This letter is often used for long distance searches or when you have targeted an organization that is not currently advertising an opening. The prospecting letter is similar to the application letter, but the focus is on matching your qualifications to the broader occupational area and the organization rather than to a specific position.

How are cover letters structured?

There is more than one way to write a cover letter. You should use the cover letter to try to communicate something interesting, unique, or distinctive about you.

Consider the following framework as you begin to write your cover letter:

Introduction

Immediately come to the point. Reveal your purpose in writing. Identify the position for which you are applying and how you found out about the opening. Often people include a statement about why they are interested in the organization.

Body or middle paragraph(s)

Tell them what "sets you apart." Outline your strongest qualifications that match the position requirements. Mention aspects of your work experiences, extracurricular activities, course work, or personal achievements that are relevant to the position. Share examples of how your experiences have helped to develop skills needed for the position. Demonstrate why your skills and your background make you a perfect match for the position you seek. Convince

BASIC GUIDELINES

- ❖ Address your letter to a specific person by name and title. If you do not have this information, call the organization and ask for the name and correct spelling of the appropriate person. If a name is not available, use a gender-neutral title such as Employment Representative or Director of Human Resources.
- ❖ Each letter should be an original. Duplicated, generic letters are not appropriate.
- ❖ A good cover letter will communicate your potential contribution rather than your current needs. Design your letters to be work centered and employer centered, not self-centered.
- ❖ Use quality bond paper 8 1/2 x 11 inches, either white or a conservative color to match your resume.
- ❖ Standard business letter format should be used. (See page 2.) The letter should be centered on the page with equal margins on all sides. (Never hand-write a cover letter.)
- ❖ Keep the letter to one page, eliminating all extraneous words. Your letter should be an introduction to your resume, not a review of it.
- ❖ Your letter should be free of typing or grammatical errors. Proofread.
- ❖ It is a good practice to keep a copy of all correspondence for future reference.

the employer that you have the qualities and motivation to perform well in the position. Sell yourself!

Closing

Show appreciation to your readers for their time and consideration. Suggest an action plan. Express your interest in obtaining a personal interview and indicate that you will be calling to check on the status of your application. Some take a less direct approach by including their telephone number and the hours they can be reached with a statement like, "I look forward to hearing from you soon."

What other types of correspondence are used in the job search?

Job search correspondence varies, but the most common letters beyond the application and prospecting cover letters are the thank-you letter, the letter of acceptance, the letter declining an offer, and the follow-up to a rejection letter. We have included samples for your convenience and encourage you to adapt and change them to reflect your own writing style.

How do I format my cover letter?

Formatting your cover letter will be easy if you keep in mind standard business formatting. We have included a sample with specific structure and spacing instructions.

A Luther College, SPO 555
700 College Drive
Decorah, IA 52101

B April 1, 2016
¶
¶
¶

C Ms. Jane Smith
Manager of Human Resources
500 Coast Drive
San Diego, CA 99006
¶

D Dear Ms. Smith:
¶

E Immediately come to the point. Reveal your purpose and interest (why you are writing). Identify the position (title of position) you are applying for and your source of information (how you found out about the opening). Outline your goals or learning objectives and describe your interest in the corporation.
¶
Tell them “what sets you apart.” Outline your strongest qualifications that match the position requirements. As much as possible, provide evidence of your related experiences and accomplishments. Convince the employer that you have the qualities and motivation to perform well in the position. Sell yourself! (This may take one to two paragraphs.)
¶
Show appreciation to the reader for their time and consideration. Indicate your phone number and the hours when you can be reached.
¶

F Sincerely,
¶
¶ *Your Signature* ¶
¶

G Your full name (typed)
¶

H Enclosure (optional)

- A Return Address: A return address is used in a personal business letter when an individual writes on blank stationery.
- B Date Line: The date (month, day, and year) on which the letter is typed. Leave three blank lines between the date and inside address.
- C Inside Address: The name and address of the person to whom you are writing. Leave one blank line between the inside address and salutation.
- D Salutation: An opening greeting like “Dear Ms. Morales,” Leave one blank line between the salutation and message.
- E Message: The text of the letter. All paragraphs are typed single-spaced with no indentions. Leave one blank line between paragraphs and between the final paragraph and complimentary closing.
- F Complimentary Closing: A parting phrase such as “Sincerely” or “Sincerely yours.” Leave three blank lines between the closing and writer’s identification.
- G Writer’s Identification: Your typed name. Leave one blank line between writer’s identification and enclosure notation if used.
- H Enclosure Notation: A reminder that the letter is accompanied by an enclosure. This is not a required element for a cover letter, but can be used if you are sending a writing sample or application in addition to your resume.

Block Format

Luther College, SPO 123
Decorah, IA 52101
(563) 555-9876
February 29, 2016

Ms. Debra Jones, Director
Tate Helping Services
299 Union Street
Des Moines, IA 55789

Dear Ms. Jones:

Please consider my application for the caseworker position with Tate Helping Services advertised in the *Des Moines Register* on Monday, February 28. I am very interested in the work your agency is doing with at-risk youth in Des Moines.

I will complete my bachelor of arts in social work in May of this year. I have had experience with children through my positions as a youth counselor at Camp Turning Point and my internship with Sandy Acres Treatment Center. As a youth counselor, I conducted group counseling sessions with middle school aged children. I also provided one-on-one assistance to youth who were working to make changes in their lifestyles. During my internship at Sandy Acres Treatment Center I worked primarily with teens who were placed into treatment after serious incidents with drug or alcohol abuse. These positions have given me excellent hands-on experience and insight into the realities of working within the system to assist troubled youth.

My interest in youth is far-reaching. Throughout my high school years I volunteered at the Cedar Rapids Shelter and served as a tutor for children living there. I also volunteered at the local schools as part of the America Reads Program while attending college. In addition, I am very involved in the Social Work Club and have organized several fundraising events for local United Way agencies. If hired as a caseworker for Tate Helping Services, you can be assured that I will be a hardworking and enthusiastic member of your team.

I have enclosed my resume for your review and would be happy to answer any questions you may have regarding my qualifications for the caseworker position. Please feel free to contact me at the following number, (563) 555-9876. If you are unable to reach me, please leave a message and I will return your call as soon as possible. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Denise Fox

Denise Fox

Enclosure (optional)

What is the block format?

The entire letter is left justified and single spaced with a double space between paragraphs.

What is the modified block format?

The return address, date, complimentary closing, and signature line are slightly to the right of the center of the paper.

Modified Block Format

Luther College, SPO 1234
Decorah, IA 52101
(563) 555-6094
May 12, 2016

Mr. William Smith
Superintendent
Spring Creek Schools
128 Main Street
Spring Creek, WI 55155

Dear Mr. Smith:

I am writing to formally apply for the first grade teaching position in the Spring Creek School District. I learned of the position through the Luther College Career Center.

I am particularly interested in teaching first grade because it is an exciting time for new learners. My student teaching experience in the lower elementary grades has given me a good base of experience and I feel confident in my ability to teach the first grade. Teaching at John Mathis Elementary School in Buffalo, Iowa, was a great learning experience. Under the guidance of my cooperating teacher, I developed lesson plans and created a unit for emerging writers.

In addition to student teaching, I bring a variety of related work experiences to the position. I have worked as a camp counselor and a daycare provider throughout my college years. I also served as a volunteer with the local Girl Scouts and assisted with a park and recreation soccer program. Each experience with children confirmed my desire to be a teacher. I am dedicated to teaching children and believe I would be a productive member of the elementary faculty in your school.

I have enclosed my resume for your review and would welcome the opportunity to speak with you in person about my qualifications for the first grade position. Please feel free to contact me at (563) 555-6094 if you have any questions regarding my qualifications. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Cameron Stiller

Cameron Stiller

Enclosure (optional)

Need help getting started?

Try these writing exercises:

- Write several (4–5) opening sentences and then select your favorite.
- List three skills that the job you are applying for will require. Then list examples of accomplishments that demonstrate your ability to meet each skill. Turn this list of examples into sentence format.
- Outline why this organization would want to hire you. What do you have to offer the organization that would make you the best candidate?
- Describe what you know about an organization: background, size, products and services, community involvement, growth, etc. Use bits and pieces of this information to personalize your cover letter.

Adapted from the following sources:
Beatty, R. H. (2004). *The Perfect Cover Letter*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
Hoefflin, N. M. (Ed.). *Choices & Challenges*. Indiana: Indiana University Career Development Center.
Lamarre, H. M. (2005). *Career Focus: A Personal Job Search Guide*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Luther College, SPO 1953
Decorah, IA 52101
(563) 555-6094
rootjim@luther.edu
March 3, 2016

Darrin Vader
Alton, Inc.
2222 Earl Road
Cedar Rapids, IA 52499

Dear Mr. Vader:

After speaking with Nancy Sims, the Internship Coordinator at the Luther College Career Center, I was encouraged to contact you about my interest in your new management trainee program at Alton, Inc. While researching area organizations, I was attracted by your emphasis on customer service along with your organization's international financial strength. I was also very impressed with your mission statement and its focus on enthusiasm and hard work. I believe this fosters strong teamwork and helps to shape an enjoyable and professional environment.

A position with an organization such as yours fits very well with my education, experiences, and career interests. As a psychology major and communication minor at a liberal arts college, my education has provided me with an expanded way of thinking and learning. With my study abroad experiences throughout Europe, my world view has broadened and I have acquired the ability to understand and communicate more effectively with diverse cultures.

As a Human Resource Intern for the past two summers, I have gained exposure to a variety of work roles and environments which have prepared me for success. At Arrow, Inc., managing the new application system roll-out, as well as training twenty-five executive and team leaders regarding the system, was a most rewarding experience. I engaged in teamwork on a daily basis by covering for those on the floor and participating in weekly executive meetings. In addition, my internship with Sherman Companies provided me with the opportunity to expand my detail-oriented skills by inspecting the quality of shipments and establishing the daily and monthly shipping reports.

I have gained many transferable skills as a Career Assistant at the Luther College Career Center as well. I utilized written and verbal communication skills through presentations, peer counseling, and promoting various career development events. I have also demonstrated my ability to organize and my attention to details by successfully planning and arranging luncheons and workshops.

I would appreciate the opportunity to further discuss how my skills and knowledge would benefit Alton, Inc. My resume is enclosed for your review. You may contact me at (563) 555-6094. Please feel free to leave a message if I am not available. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Jim Root

Jim Root

Enclosure (optional)

Prospecting cover letter

Prospecting letters are written to inquire about possible job openings. This letter is often used for long distance searches or when you have targeted an organization that is not currently advertising an opening. The prospecting letter is similar to the application letter, but the focus is on matching your qualifications to the broader occupational area and the organization rather than to a specific position.

Luther College, SPO 557
 Decorah, IA 52101
 (563) 555-4609
 May 1, 2016

Edward Kamm
 Director of Marketing
 Smith & Co.
 923 Main Street
 Moorhead, MN 55111

Dear Mr. Kamm:

Your recent advertisement for a pharmaceutical salesperson caught my attention. I am very interested in this position because it offers the opportunity to combine my communication skills and my knowledge of the sciences.

At Luther, my studies required a broad range of biology courses as well as classes in mathematics, chemistry, and physics. Such study gives me the groundwork I need to understand and promote pharmaceuticals. My courses in English, philosophy, economics, and other liberal arts studies provide me with ways of thinking, learning, and communicating that can help me become an effective salesperson. My semester of study in Spain opened my world view. It showed that I could adapt to a new environment and communicate effectively in Spanish. I also developed excellent persuasion and promotion skills as a tour guide for the Admissions Office.

My involvement with the basketball team and intramural sports gave me the opportunity to work on a team and perform in a competitive environment. My demonstrated ability to act under pressure, set personal goals, and learn how to win and lose will help me succeed as a salesperson. In addition, work on our family farm requires initiative and self-motivation, skills also needed in the demanding field of pharmaceutical sales.

I welcome an opportunity to speak with you about the position and my qualifications. My resume is enclosed for your information. I will contact you the week of May 15 to further discuss my candidacy for a pharmaceutical sales position with Smith and Co. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jack Frost

Jack Frost

Enclosure (optional)

THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT ALL LETTERS:

- ❖ Identify the position for which you are applying, how you learned of the organization, and why you are applying.
- ❖ Indicate your potential contributions to the organization.
- ❖ Describe your primary qualifications.
- ❖ Refer the reader to your enclosed resume.
- ❖ Request the next step in the process (interview, response to letter).
- ❖ Sign your letter.
- ❖ **IMPORTANT:** Resist the temptation to copy sample cover letters word for word. Your cover letter must be yours! It must express your writing style and personality. Remember to proof read your letter for grammar and punctuation and run it through spell-check.

Application cover letter

Application letters are written in response to a specific job opening or vacancy notice. This letter is used to formally apply for the position and show the employer how your qualifications match what the position requires. Use the position description and your research about the organization to compose your letter.

Traditional Cover Letter

Luther College, SPO 344
Decorah, IA 52101
(563) 379-0000
martinluther@luther.edu
March 5, 2016

Karen Smith
Hiring Manager
Blue Bird Publishing
123 Lane
Anywhere, IA 55555

Dear Karen Smith:

I would like to express my interest in a position as an editorial assistant for your publishing company. As a recent graduate with writing, editing and administrative experience, I believe I am a strong candidate for a position at Blue Bird Publishing Company.

The job listing on your website indicates that you are looking for someone with strong writing skills. As an English major, writing tutor and editor for the Luther College student newspaper, I have become a skilled writer with varied experience.

Working as an office assistant in the Diversity Center has given me the skills needed to complete the various administrative tasks required of an editorial assistant. My position helped me gain experience making phone calls, managing the office appointment schedule and using Microsoft Access and Excel.

Although I am a recent college graduate, I believe my practical experience, strong work ethic and interest in the publishing business would serve me well as an editorial assistant. I have researched your organization and am excited about the opportunity to begin my career with Blue Bird Publishing Company.

I would welcome the opportunity to speak with you about my skills and experience. I have enclosed my resume for your review and can be reached by cell phone at (563) 379-0000 or by email at martinluther@luther.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Martin Luther

Martin Luther

What is the difference between a traditional cover letter and an email cover letter?

The main difference is length. An email cover letter is brief. You will condense your traditional cover letter into two or three short paragraphs. Make good use of the subject line when sending an email cover letter and include a signature block at the bottom of the email after your name with your contact information included. You can set this up automatically in your email program.

Email Cover Letter

To: karensmith@bbpublishing.org

Subject: Editorial Assistant Position-Martin Luther

Dear Karen Smith:

I would like to express my interest in a position as an editorial assistant for your publishing company.

As a recent graduate with writing, editing and administrative experience I believe I am a strong candidate for a position at Blue Bird Publishing Company. As an English major, writing tutor and editor for the Luther College student newspaper, I have become a skilled writer with varied experience.

I would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about my experience and how I could contribute to the Blue Bird Publishing Company. I have attached my resume and look forward to hearing from you soon.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Martin Luther

Martin Luther
SPO 344—Luther College
Decorah, Iowa 52101
(563) 379-0000
martinluther@luther.edu

Thank-you letter

A thank-you letter sent after an interview can distinguish you from the crowd since so few people send them. It is used to establish goodwill, to express appreciation, and to strengthen your candidacy. If someone is undecided about hiring you after the interview, a thank-you letter might weigh as a positive factor in the decision.

- Convey gratitude for time spent on the interview.
- Letter should be sent within 1–2 days.
- Restate your qualifications and interest.
- Indicate interest in hearing from them.
- Use standard business formatting (see page 2).

Luther College, SPO 4321
Decorah, IA 52101
(563) 555-2624
January 15, 2016

Mr. Seth Franklin
Sales Manager
Top Notch Clothes
4270 Park Avenue
Edina, MN 55435

Dear Mr. Franklin:

Thank you for taking time to share details with me about the assistant buyer's position at Top Notch Clothes in yesterday's interview.

After talking with your staff and further investigating your well-established organization, I am eager to reaffirm my interest in the position. My familiarity with your product line and my considerable retail experience would make me a strong member of the Top Notch Clothes sales team.

I hope to hear from you soon regarding your final decision.

Sincerely,

Chris Smith

Chris Smith

Luther College, SPO 4000
Decorah, IA 52101
June 21, 2016

Ms. Sandra Mitchell
Director of Social Services
Park Medical Center
5000 West 39th Street
St. Louis Park, MN 55416

Dear Ms. Mitchell:

It is with pleasure that I accept the position of Medical Social Worker with Park Medical Center at an annual salary of \$20,000 with benefits. As we discussed last Friday, I will be reporting for work on Monday, July 23, in the Social Services Department.

As stated in your offer, I understand that after my initial orientation I will be assigned temporary office space. I also understand that the Center is currently undergoing renovations and that I can expect to have a more permanent office by the first of the year.

I greatly appreciate your consideration and efforts on my behalf. Thank you again for your assistance during the interview process. I look forward to working with you and your staff and continue to be excited about my new responsibilities with Park Medical Center.

Sincerely,

Dan Diaz

Dan Diaz

Letter of acceptance

This letter is perhaps the most exciting letter of all to write. To begin with, you should refer to the letter or telephone call you received from your new employer that outlined the position offered and terms of your employment. Your letter of acceptance should confirm your date for reporting to work, as well as salary and benefits information. Express your appreciation and excitement at joining the organization.

- Accept the offer.
- Outline what you understand to be the parameters of your employment (salary, days of vacation, benefits package, compensation for moving, if provided, include details of any negotiated items).
- Confirm your start date.
- Express your appreciation and your pleasure at joining the organization.
- Use standard business formatting (see page 2).

Letter declining an offer

This type of letter is written when you definitely decide to decline an offer from an employer. It is a matter of common courtesy, as well as good business practice, to notify an employer once you have made a decision to reject an offer of employment. Express your appreciation for the interest and confidence the employer showed in making you an offer.

- Decline the offer.
- Convey your appreciation for the offer and the organization's interest in you.
- Use standard business formatting (see page 2).

107 Grove Street
Spillville, IA 52168
April 21, 2016

Ms. Jessica Cole
Vice President
Graphics Design Incorporated
3820 Carter Avenue South
St. Paul, MN 55117

Dear Ms. Cole:

Thank you for your recent offer of employment as Graphics Assistant with your firm. Although it was a difficult decision, I have decided to decline your offer at this time. As you know, my primary interest has been printmaking. The position I accepted will allow me to further develop my skills, specifically in this area.

I greatly appreciate your consideration, time and effort throughout the selection process.

Sincerely,

Carmen Foster

Carmen Foster

326 Gourman Street
Shakopee, MN 55379
May 15, 2016

Mr. Roland Sand, President
Engineering Concepts
7035 Wayzata Boulevard
Eagan, MN 55416

Dear Mr. Sand:

I recently received notification of your decision to hire another candidate for the position of Assistant Engineer. I want to thank you for considering me through the final interviewing process. At your convenience, I would appreciate receiving any feedback you would be willing to give regarding my credentials, experience, or the interview.

I learned a great deal about Engineering Concepts through the interview process. I have high regard for your organization and would welcome any future employment opportunities.

I hope we have the opportunity to meet again. Thank you for your efforts on my behalf.

Sincerely,

Tyson Stanley

Tyson Stanley

Follow-up to a rejection

This is probably the most difficult of all job hunt correspondence to write. In your letter, acknowledge the decision of the employer. Express your thanks for their consideration and be sure to keep the door open to future prospects. While organizations have varying practices in sharing feedback with candidates, it is always good to request it. At the very least, this important information will help you prepare for future interviews.

- Acknowledge the employer's decision.
- Keep future prospects open.
- Request feedback.
- Use standard business formatting (see page 2).